TEACHERS ATTITUDE TOWARDS POVERTY & ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education At Morehead State University

By

William T. Harbert
Lexington, South Carolina

Committee Chair: Shane Shope, Assistant Professor
Morehead, Kentucky
March 3, 2017

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ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

William T. Harbert

The Graduate School
Morehead State University
March 3, 2017
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This book has two major portions. The majority of the book is my perspective of the life that I have lived as a child raised in poverty. The other portion of this book provides educators and others who work with children some research-based practices that are linked to particular behaviors or actions. These are provided from a dual perspective, the author as researcher and the author as a youngster who survived to tell his story. In the original research, the Attitudes Toward Poverty Scale (ATP) was given to teachers employed at schools in the Piedmont area of South Carolina. The average score for each schools' teachers on the ATP was compared to their students' (who were living in poverty) performance on statewide testing in language arts and mathematics. In contradiction to this researcher's original hypothesis, the results revealed that teachers with a more negative attitude towards poverty had students with greater academic performance on statewide assessments.

KEYWORDS: (Poverty, Attitude, Students, ATP, Teachers)
TEACHERS ATTITUDE TOWARDS POVERTY & ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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CAPSTONE

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Capstone

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DEDICATION

This capstone is dedicated to students living in poverty and the teachers who advocate for them. Personally and professionally, I have encountered very depressing situations facing students raised in poverty. While some may not have great expectations for students living in poverty, there are teachers who are very effective with these students by empathizing with their situation without compromising their expectations. Ms. Nancy Swanson was my middle school social studies teacher, but more importantly she changed the lives of at-risk students, like me, by simply caring. Caring to Ms. Swanson did not mean providing excuses or pity. Instead, her recipe was providing unconditional love while demanding excellence. Over my twelve years of serving students and families through public education, I have encountered several teachers like Ms. Swanson and all of them have been great teachers, especially effective at improving outcomes for students raised in poverty. This book is dedicated to expressing gratitude to each teacher who goes above and beyond for a student in need. Your work matters and it could alter the course of a student’s life!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I greatly appreciate the Western Piedmont Education Consortium superintendents who allowed their teachers to participate in this research. Similarly, I am thankful for the teachers who took time out of their busy schedules to complete a survey for a person they never met. Additionally, I am very grateful for each administrator in Lexington County School District Three who took time to answer my questions and participate in interviews as a part of completing my doctoral work.

It would have been impossible for me to complete this capstone without the support of my beautiful wife, Johnna, and our four wonderful children, Presley, Emmerson, Billie, and Bayla. All of them were very understanding of the time that dad had to designate for completing his “school work”. Given that my wife and I have always shared all household responsibilities, I am greatly appreciative for her picking up my slack, so that I could accomplish this goal.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support that I received from the Morehead State University (MSU) faculty throughout this journey. Although I acknowledge the support I received from many different people while completing my capstone project, no one has supported me more than Dr. David Barnett. While a professor at MSU, Dr. Barnett challenged me to think outside of the box and pushed me towards excellence. Dr. Barnett has mastered the art of challenging students while inspiring them. Since leaving MSU, Dr. Barnett has continued to provide me guidance and support. Dr. Barnett’s prompt response to questions, encouragement, constructive criticism, and care for my success are the only reason I have been able to complete my capstone project. I am eternally grateful for his support.
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Executive Summary

What is the core of the capstone?

How can a student engage with instruction when they are tired, hungry, scared, dirty, paranoid, or worried? How can a teacher effectively educate a student when they have little or no understanding about the barriers preventing learning? What is the cause of poverty: individual characteristics or societal factors? The answers to these questions could provide the guidance for significant academic improvement of America’s most at-risk students, students raised in poverty. Students who are raised in poverty score significantly lower on statewide assessments of academic skills (Marzano, 2003; Rothstein, 2008; Simons & Friedman, 2008; The State of South Carolina 2014 Annual District Report Card, n.d.), are at greater risk of dropping out of high school (Barr & Parret, 2007; O’Doan, 2012; Payne, 2005), earn less money as adults (Barr & Parret, 2007; Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010), and are more likely to be incarcerated (Barr & Parret, 2007; Edelman, 2014; Payne, Devol, & Dreussi Smith, 2006).

Many programs have been developed and implemented to support students raised in poverty, but few have improved performance on a large scale. For the most part, these programs have targeted specific needs that arise from being raised in poverty such as hunger. Tough (2012) notes that a lot of discussion and efforts to address poverty are intertwined with education reform. Interestingly, these reform strategies revolve around making sure teachers have adequate teaching skills. With
that said, Tough described the development of character traits, not teaching skills, as the foundation to building a successful future for children raised in poverty.

Research shows that some people’s understanding of the challenges confronting students raised in poverty can be attributed to their attitude towards poverty (Rehner, Ishee, Salloum, & Velasues, 1997). Given the weaker academic performance by students raised in poverty (Anderson & Leventhal, 2014; Benner & Mistry, 2007; The State of South Carolina 2014 Annual District Report Card, n.d.) and the negative life outcomes associated with poor academic performance (Tough, 2012), it is critical for educators to understand the variables that impact the academic performance of students raised in poverty. The focus of this research is to examine one variable that is potentially impacting the academic performance of students raised in poverty – teachers’ attitude towards poverty.

Children spend a significant amount of time under the supervision of teachers. In many cases, other than parents, teachers are the adult mostly responsible for the care and guidance of children. To effectively educate students, teachers must first meet students’ basic life needs that are not being provided at home. Teachers who lack empathy and understanding of the plight of children will be limited in their ability to improve their academic performance.

In one of my first years as a school psychologist, I was providing anger management to a first grade student who came from a very poor family. The student often refused to do class work, fought with other students, destroyed property, and used profanity. During one of our sessions, the student was very restless and
unusually irritable in a one-on-one setting. After spending a lot of time getting the
student to feel comfortable and openly communicate, he finally said, “I can’t ever
sleep at night!” I asked him what was causing him not to be able to sleep and he
replied, “I have to keep getting the rats off my bed.” With this information, I
arranged a meeting with his teacher and disclosed the environmental factors likely
impacting his behavior. The teacher sadly responded to this information with “I am
tired of these kids having excuses!” I was completely shocked by this teacher’s
comment because I naively thought that all teachers were empathetic towards
children in horrible situations and would advocate for their safety. After some
reflection and getting to know this teacher, I am certain that her lack of empathy
comes from a lack of understanding. To hear about poverty is not the same as
experiencing poverty.

My personal story of overcoming poverty has been shared with educators,
churches, and graduates. Ultimately, I overcame poverty because a teacher believed
in me. This is my personal story of overcoming poverty. I am hopeful that my story
will serve as an example to educators, students, parents, and community members
that a student raised in poverty can overcome barriers related to socioeconomic status
with the support and guidance of teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether teachers’ attitude towards
poverty impacts student learning as measured by state-mandated assessments for
students. Specifically, the research focused on identifying the attitude of teachers
towards poverty and the academic performance of their students living in poverty. My hypothesis was that a teachers’ attitudes towards poverty impacts the academic performance of their students raised in poverty.

The study was completed in the western piedmont section of South Carolina. Specifically, school districts with membership in the Western Piedmont Education Consortium (WPEC) were invited to participate. The WPEC has twelve-member school districts. WPEC’s creation dates back to the mid to late 1990’s.

During the 1996-1997 school year, ten superintendents began discussions about how to better serve their districts by effective and continuously collaborating with neighboring school districts. In the fall of 1997, those superintendents created the WPEC, which originally included ten school districts. The consortium allows the member school districts to save money, share resources, and share expertise. The 12 school districts with membership in the WPEC during the 2016-2017 school year are Newberry, Abbeville, Lexington Three, McCormick, Saluda, Edgefield, Greenwood 50, Greenwood 51, Greenwood 52, Laurens 55, Laurens 56, and Anderson 3.

In South Carolina, students raised in poverty score significantly lower on statewide standardized assessments than their peers (The State of South Carolina 2014 Annual District Report Card, n.d.). Specifically, when reviewing the performance of all students in South Carolina on the statewide achievement assessment, *South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standard (SCPASS)*, students who were eligible for a subsidized lunch were significantly more likely to score *Not Met* than students who were not eligible for subsidized meals (Table 1).
Table 1

2013 Percent of students scoring Not Met in Math and ELA on SCPASS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Math Sub</th>
<th>Math Full</th>
<th>ELA Sub Lunch</th>
<th>ELA Full Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review of Literature

Impact of attitude towards poverty. According to Moorman and Wicks-Smith (2012), more Americans perceive themselves as have-nots than they did two decades ago. At the same time, as more people perceiving themselves as have-nots, Americans’ attitudes and opinions about people living in poverty are more negative than those about people who are in the middle-class or above in socio-economic status (Moorman & Wicks-Smith; Robinson, 2007). Notably, peoples’ attitude about poverty is typically associated with their perception of the cause of poverty. Negative attitudes are ascribed to people who perceive the cause of poverty to be directly related to the person and minimize the impact of societal factors (Moorman & Wicks-Smith; Rehner et al. 1997).

The view that an individual causes poverty suggests that personal deficits are the reason that a person lives in poverty. Some of the personal deficits that have been
used to explain poverty include dependent behaviors, laziness, and lack of financial planning, (Rehner et al. 1997; Robinson, 2007). According to Rehner et al. an individualistic explanation of poverty is the dominant view in American. Inasmuch, this view has impacted the country’s policies and programs to address poverty.

Another perspective on the cause of poverty focuses on the structural and societal factors related to poverty. From this perspective, the cause of poverty is related to limited job opportunities, racism, government policies, etc. (Rehner et al.; Robinson).

A negative attitude toward poverty can impact people’s interactions with people who live in poverty. Moorman and Wicks-Smith (2012) reported that college students who had negative attitudes towards poverty were more likely to rate a presentation by a classmate raised in poverty more harshly than the presentations given by other students. Wittenauer, Ludwig, Baughman, and Fishbein (2015) found that nurses had negative attitudes toward poverty, which they suggested could be related to poorer health care for people living in poverty. Similarly, Schwartz and Robinson (1991) noted concerns about the impact that negative attitudes held by social workers will have on their job performance. Finally, parents of students raised in poverty have lower academic expectations for their children, which adversely impacts their children’s academic performance (Benner & Mistry, 2007).

There are many negative life outcomes that are associated with being raised in poverty (Butler, 2014; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015; Ziol-Guest, Duncan, & Kalil, 2009). Specifically, students raised in poverty are more likely to be overweight (Ziol-Guest et al., 2009), have a greater risk of dropping out of school (Lavrijsen &
Nicaise, 2015), and are more likely to experience depression (Butler, 2014). The developmental period of life spent in poverty and the length of time exposed to poverty are consistent factors found in the literature that study the impact of living in poverty. In general, exposure to poverty during early childhood is related to more physical and mental health concerns (Butler; Ziol-Guest et al.).

**Poverty’s impact on education.** The life outcomes for students raised in poverty are daunting (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Butler, 2014; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015; Ziol-Guest, Duncan, & Kalil, 2009). Specifically, in education, students raised in poverty are more likely to drop out of school and perform poorly on academic assessments (O’Doan, 2012). It is important for teachers and administrators to understand the unique obstacles that face students raised in poverty. An understanding of these obstacles will provide teachers opportunities to have a greater impact on the academic performance of students raised in poverty. Essential to the understanding of these obstacles is a teacher’s attitude towards poverty. “Teachers in high poverty areas do not have as much faith and hope in their students’ morality or abilities and therefore have lowered expectations of their achievement” (O’Doan, p. 32).

Similarly, Benner and Mistry (2007) reported that teachers have less academic expectations for students raised in poverty. Interestingly, parents of students raised in poverty also have lower academic expectations for their children than parents from the other social economic status groups (Benner & Mistry, 2007). Importantly, Benner and Rashmita (2007) found that the most powerful expectation on academic
outcomes for students raised in poverty is that of the teacher. Moreover, the expectations of students raised in poverty and their parents do not buffer them from negative academic outcomes associated with teacher expectations (Benner & Mistry).

“Studies find that teachers with low expectations tend to provide students less positive attention and reinforcement and few opportunities to learn” (Benner & Mistry, p. 150).

White (2010) investigated the impact of poverty in an educational setting by creating focus groups to discuss the issue. The focus groups involved 29 teachers (22 elementary school teachers, 3 middle school teachers, and 4 high school teachers). The teachers were a mixture of classroom teachers (15), specialists (8), and teachers who fulfilled both roles (6). The teachers were asked questions regarding perceptions of poverty, strengths of poor children, impact of poverty on education, academic difficulties, and the strategies that these teachers found helpful. As for educational impact, students raised in poverty can have behavior and academic difficulties that are related to being hungry and an inadequate diet (White, 2010; Tough, 2012).

The teachers in the focus groups noted that many students who have learning difficulties are raised in poverty. Another problem the focus groups discussed was low attendance by children raised in poverty. Attendance issues were attributed to a lack of resources, social barriers, and not feeling connected to school. On the other hand, the focus groups indicated that some students raised in poverty have good attendance because they embraced the scheduled meals and safety provided by the school (White, 2010).
The teachers in the focus group reported noticing increased anxiety among children raised in poverty around breaks from school. The group attributed this anxiety to fear of not having a consistent safe place to go to as well as embarrassment associated with hearing their classmates’ plans. Additionally, the focus group noted that students raised in poverty frequently did not attend field trips or participate in extracurricular activities, especially those requiring fees. Interestingly, the focus group noted that families living in poverty often did not apply for financial assistance when it was available, which the group attributed to embarrassment (White, 2010).

Students raised in poverty are more likely to drop out of high school (Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015). Additionally, this situation is magnified when you consider that many students raised in poverty, who are identified as high school completers, actually have received a GED instead of a high school diploma. When reviewing data collected from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, Prins and Kassab (2015) found significant differences between students who were entering college with a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) compared to those with a high school diploma. Most importantly for Prins & Kassab study, three-fourths of the GED students were raised in poverty.

Other negative education outcomes for students raised in poverty include referrals for special education, grade retention, and poor performance on standardized assessments (Anderson & Leventhal, 2014; Benner & Mistry, 2007; The State of South Carolina 2014 Annual District Report Card, n.d.). According to Benner & Mistry (2007), many researchers have found a link between teachers’ academic
expectations for students raised in poverty and educational outcomes. Anderson and Leventhal reported that students raised in impoverished neighborhoods are more likely to have lower test scores than students raised in affluent neighborhoods.

The focus of this research is to examine the contention that the teachers’ expectations investigated by other researchers can be attributed to their attitude towards poverty. If this assumption is valid, educators will be able to qualify teachers’ expectations for students raised in poverty as their attitude towards poverty using a reliable and valid instrument. This will allow school and district administrators to respond with preventive measures instead of post hoc explanations.

**Overcoming poverty hurdle.** White (2010) asked the focus groups to discuss strategies that were helpful in working with children raised in poverty. A connection with parents was identified as being a key element in assisting families living in poverty. The teachers noted that academic performance was aided by caring for emotional needs at the beginning of the school day, developing self-confidence, and rewarding attendance. One of the biggest obstacles in the education of students raised in poverty is negative attitudes and low expectations by members of the school community towards poor families (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Robinson, 2007; White, 2010).

Several studies have investigated teachers’ attitude towards poverty before and after professional development activities related to understanding poverty (Bennett, 2008; O’Doan, 2012). The attitude of teachers towards poverty prior to the professional development activities were reported to be related to their experience
and their values. With that said, these studies found that there was a change in teachers’ attitudes after learning about poverty (Bennett, 2008; O’Doan, 2012). Specifically, the teachers gained awareness about the obstacles for children raised in poverty. The findings suggest that teachers can change their preconceived notions about poverty, which will allow them to better serve children raised in poverty. O’Doan (2012) and Bennett (2008) concluded that a teacher’s attitude towards poverty impacts their ability to teach students raised in poverty.

Since most teachers were raised in middle class families (Bennett, 2008; Payne, 2005; Robinson, 2007), their attitude towards poverty could come from a lack of understanding. For example, Bennett (2008) reported that student teachers assigned to schools with a significant number of students raised in poverty reported being unprepared. After further investigation, the researcher concluded that the students’ reported difficulty was related to socioeconomic status.

In Tough’s (2012) book How Children Succeed, the author tells about the struggles and challenges that face children raised in poverty at different development ranges. Specifically, Barr and Parrett (2007) report that the areas most impacted by poverty are hopeless attitudes, increased stress levels, higher risk of dropping out of school, more health problems, school attendance, self-esteem, achievement, and aspirations. Another factor impacting the academic performance of students raised in poverty is the teachers who are more likely to be employed at their schools have weaker credentials than teachers at other schools (Robinson, 2007). In the past, research has focused on the relationship between social psychological issues and
teachers’ desire to work in schools with a high poverty rate, but those studies have not found any significant relationships (Robinson, 2007). In his work *Sixteen trends their profound impact on our future: Implications for students’ education, communities and the whole society* (Marx, 2006) stated, “The future of our nation and world depend on addressing the impact of poverty on education as well as the impact of education on poverty” (p. 284).

How was the Capstone Project Implemented?

**What data were collected?** For this study, the relationship between teachers’ scores on the *Attitude towards Poverty* (ATP) survey (described below) and their school’s reading and math scores on the SCPASS for students raised in poverty were examined. The reading and math scores from 2014 were used for this study because more recent statewide assessment data for students raised in poverty were not available at the time of the study. In the spring 2014, the SCPASS was used as the statewide assessment for reading and math for all students in grades three through eight in South Carolina, except those students who qualified for alternate assessment. In addition to SCPASS reading and math scores, the following information was collected for each participating school: total students, percentage of students living in poverty, number of teachers, absolute rating, and growth rating (Table 2).

The ATP survey is a 37-item Likert-type survey that assesses attitude toward poverty and impoverished people. High scores on the ATP survey indicate a belief that structural determinants are the primary cause of poverty while low scores indicate that the rater attributes poverty to individual characteristics (Rehner et al.,
1997). Per Atherton et al. (1993), the ATP has a split-half reliability of .87. To assess construct validity, Atherton et al. gave the ATP survey to a group (undergraduate social work students) reasonably believed to have more positive attitude towards poverty and compared those results to a group (undergraduate business students) not typically considered to be sympathetic towards poverty. The researchers reported a high level of statistical significance between the two groups’ responses on the ATP survey (Atherton, et al.).

Table 2

2014 WPEC School Districts’ Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>% Poverty Index</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Absolute Rating</th>
<th>Growth Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLES</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLMS</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat Rock</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iva</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCormick ES</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCormick MS</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr-Iva</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further gauge construct validity, this study gave the ATP survey to special education teachers in a rural school district, Lexington County School District Three (Lexington 3), in South Carolina. The researcher believed that special education
teachers would be a good comparison to undergraduate social workers because they were also likely to be sympathetic to people living in poverty. Specifically, this study included data from five teachers from Batesburg-Leesville Primary School, eight teachers from Batesburg-Leesville Elementary School, and 10 teachers from Batesburg-Leesville Middle School. Eighteen of the teachers completing the ATP were female and five were male teachers. The ATP survey scores of the 23 Lexington 3 teachers were compared to the 166 undergraduate social work students in Weaver and Yun (2011) study.

The teachers’ scores on the ATP survey ranged from 104 to 133. The mean score was 118.2, with a standard deviation of 8.41. Similarly, according to Weaver and Yun (2011), the mean score for undergraduate social work students in their study was 119.65, prior to having a class on poverty.

This study used the paired samples t-test as a means of determining whether the attitude towards poverty of special education teachers in Lexington 3 teachers was significantly different than the attitude towards poverty of undergraduate social work students. The data indicate that there is not a significant difference in the ATP survey scores for Lexington 3 teachers (M=118.2, SD=8.41) and undergraduate social work students (M=120.71, SD=11.81); t(187) = .98, p > .05. These results suggest there is no significant difference between the attitude towards poverty for Lexington 3 special education teachers and undergraduate social worker students.

**How were data collected?** A link to the ATP survey on surveymonkey.com was emailed to all the superintendents of school districts in South Carolina with
membership in the WPEC. Specifically, the schools participating in this study were Batesburg-Leesville Elementary School (BLES), Batesburg-Leesville Middle School (BLMS), Flat Rock Elementary School, Iva Elementary School, McCormick Elementary School, McCormick Middle School, Starr Elementary School, and Starr-Iva Middle School. The superintendents were asked to forward the email to principals and/or teachers in their respective school district. All the teachers were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and their responses are anonymous. For each school district with teachers completing the ATP survey, 2014 SCPASS reading and math scores were gathered from the South Carolina State Department of Education.

This study received Notification of Exempt Protocol Review from the Morehead State University Institution Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on February 3, 2016. Specifically, the notification indicated that regulatory requirements have been met for the waiver of documentation of consent.

**How were subjects selected?**

Each teacher in the WPEC who completed all requested information on the ATP survey was selected for participation in this study. If a teacher did not identify their school or answer each question on the ATP survey, they were not included in this study. Additionally, ATP surveys completed by high school teachers were excluded from this study because their students do not take the SCPASS.
When was the capstone implemented?

ATP surveys that were appropriately completed prior to April 15, 2016 are included in the reported results. The results of this study will be sent to the superintendents of participating school districts. The data from this study will be summarized in a book that will be completed by January 2017.

Impact of the Capstone

Results and findings. The ATP surveys were collected from teachers in the WPEC who teach grades three through eight. In total, 71 teachers completed the ATP survey. For the specific number of teachers completing the ATP survey from each school, please see Table 3.

The scores on the ATP survey can range from 37 to 185. The higher the score on the ATP survey, the more favorable the respondent’s attitude towards poverty. The mean ATP survey score from each school represented the school’s attitude towards poverty. The mean ATP scores ranged from 111.9 (SD=8.46) for Starr to 119.0 (SD=12.26) for McCormick Middle (Table 3).
Table 3
2014 Relationship ATP Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>ATP Average</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLES</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>118.13</td>
<td>10.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLMS</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>116.38</td>
<td>7.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat Rock</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>112.86</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iva</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>115.33</td>
<td>9.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCormick Elementary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>117.75</td>
<td>14.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCormick Middle</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>119.00</td>
<td>12.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>111.90</td>
<td>8.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr-Iva</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>115.22</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine whether there is a significant relationship between the schools’ ATP survey scores and reading and math scores on the SCPASS, the Pearson correlation was calculated. There was a moderate negative correlation between WPEC ATP scores and SCPASS reading scores, $r(8) = -0.545, p = 0.136$. Also, there was a strong negative correlation between the WPEC ATP scores and SCPASS math scores, $r(8) = -0.699, p = 0.054$. These results were not significant at the .05 significance level.

The relationship between ATP survey scores and SCPASS reading and math scores were opposite of the stated hypothesis. The developers of the ATP survey indicate that the higher the score the more positive a person’s attitude towards poverty. A positive attitude is reported as a belief that structural determinants are the
primary cause of poverty while negative attitudes are defined as attributing poverty to individual characteristics (Rehner et al., 1997). In summary, based on the results of this study, teachers who attribute poverty to individual characteristics were more likely to have higher achievement scores on the SCPASS. This finding could indicate that teachers who attribute poverty to individual characteristics, rather than societal factors, view themselves as having greater influence on the outcomes for students raised in poverty thus increasing hope and expectation.

Limitations of the Study

The outcomes of this study could be impacted by the wording of the survey’s questions. In addition, since the ATP survey was sent to teachers by an administrator, there is a possibility that participants answered questions in a manner that they deemed socially appropriate. Although participants were not required to include their names on the survey, it is possible that the participants worried about surveys being tracked to computer IP addresses. Finally, this study could also be limited by the false consensus effect, which is when participants overestimate the extent to which others share similar beliefs to themselves.

Reflections

Implications on future research. The data from this study could lead to better performance on standardized achievement tests for students raised in poverty. The findings from this study suggest that researchers might need to reevaluate what is defined as a positive or negative attitude towards poverty. The results from this study indicate that teachers who believe that poverty is a result of individual characteristics
better prepared children who were raised in poverty for reading and math assessments. Future research needs to answer the following question: Does attributing poverty to individual characteristics allow teachers to perceive poverty as a less formidable obstacle? Conversely, does the belief that poverty is a result of structural determinants (e.g., limited job opportunities, racism, government policies, etc.) create a feeling of hopelessness for teachers?

**What is the plan for the findings?** The findings of this study will be shared with participating administrators in the WPEC. Suggestions will be provided about how to effectively use the data to have a positive impact on the academic performance of students raised in poverty. For example, using the data when hiring teachers, providing professional development, and assigning students raised in poverty to teachers each year are possible areas of focus.

**What is the anticipated impact of the capstone?** This study has the potential to impact students who are raised in poverty and those who teach them. Teachers of students who are raised in poverty must recognize the barriers to educational success that are unique to their socioeconomic status. On the other hand, as indicated by the outcomes of this study, teachers need to make certain that empathy for students in poverty leads to compassion and understanding not to pity or holding lower expectations. Specifically, higher scores on the ATP survey indicate that a teacher attributes the reason for poverty to social factors rather than individual characteristics. This perspective on poverty could indicate empathy for students in poverty, but decrease the expectation that these students can overcome social hurdles.
On the other hand, a belief that poverty is a result of individual characteristics and choices could create a feeling of empathy that fuels compassion to enable a person to escape the conditions of poverty.
Capstone Project

Preface

After several suggestions from a variety of people to write a book about my life experiences, I have decided to attempt this daunting task. In my opinion there is not anything miraculous about my life. Honestly, there are thousands, if not millions, of children with similar experiences or worse throughout the world. The one thing that most likely separates me from them is my ability to reflect on those experiences through the lenses of my education and training as an educator and school psychologist.

This book has two major portions. The majority of the book is my perspective of the life that I have lived. My perception is my reality. The same events could have been perceived differently from another person’s perspective. I have made every attempt to distinguish between actual events and my opinion of those events. The names of some people, except family members, in this book have been changed to protect their identity. My intention is not to harm anybody, but rather to inspire or give hope to a person in need. The other portion of this book provides educators and others who work with children some research-based practices that are linked to particular behaviors or actions. These are provided from a dual perspective, the author as researcher and the author as a youngsters who survived to tell his story.

In 2008, I was contacted via email by a childhood friend, Steven Medina. Steven is currently serving his twentieth year in the United States Marine Corps. The
following email reminded me of where we came from and confirmed my belief that our personal behavior can positively impact others:

Yeah, going home to visit this summer was the reminder I needed to remind myself of how far we've come. We are one of the few who made it out of there and we should be very proud of what we were able to accomplish. I tell Dishon that all of the time, he doesn't ever go to McKeesport even though he lives in the area. I know exactly what you mean by saying you couldn't be paid to return there, but at the same time it is something you will carry with you forever. I am a stronger man because I grew up that way. To tell you the truth sometimes I am jealous of my kids. They have no idea what it means to struggle. I am able to give them the security and lifestyle I never had.

However, I learned a lot more by crawling out of there myself than I could of if it was handed to me. These stinking brats take things for granted, having a place to sleep safely, food on the table, clean clothes, no drugs or guns in their face all the time, etc. I will email you Dishon’s email address from the house tonight. You say you are proud of me, something you don't know for sure, you and Phil the man who ran the rec hall were a huge inspiration on my decision to join the Marine Corps. I was proud of you back then, and I am proud and happy for you now. Thank You. You are right, nothing was given to us, we fought for everything we had. LOL. If I recall correctly, we were not always on the same side of those fights! Speaking of where we came from, you were a white boy growing up in the projects! Kudos to you man really. A
success story from the village. You still play b-ball?

P.S. the family looks great (S. Medina, personal communication, February 9, 2008).

To my daughters, I hope this book will give you a better understanding of your father and an appreciation of the life your mother and I have provided for you.

To Ms. Swanson, my middle school social studies teacher, all of my accomplishments are a result of your unconditional love.
CHAPTER 1

I was born poor white trash in the summer of 1976. My mother got pregnant by an older man who worked with my grandfather. Of course, as typical in many of these situations, he did not support her through the pregnancy. In fact, his response was to distance himself from her and the situation. Supposedly, he made many attempts to reach me, but was warned by my grandfather and uncles to stay away from my mother and me. As a father of four beautiful girls, I cannot imagine anything keeping me away from them.

A few years ago, in the comment section of a friend’s Facebook post, a man wrote a statement that identified a person by the same name as my alleged father. I was hopeful to finally get some closure on this thirty-eight-year-old mystery. The man identified my father as the stepfather who raised him since he was a toddler. He is only two years older than I am. After a few email exchanges, he agreed to discuss the issue with my father and get back to me. My father agreed to either talk with me on the phone or communicate through text messages. I decided to text him and asked if he would be willing to take a paternity test, if I paid for it. I assured him that I only wanted this information to make certain that he was my father, so that I could obtain medical information to identify health risk for my daughters. He would not agree to the test or meeting to discuss the issue. I decided that this text communication would be the final chapter on my curiosity about the man who fathered me. Although I have never met my father, my mother has always been in my life. She had no idea how to raise a child other than to provide for the basic life needs, but she always fed us and
kept us as safe as possible given our environment. Her primal instincts would be sufficient to allow me to escape the grip of poverty, but, unfortunately, it would not be enough for my three brothers and two sisters.

During my birth, my grandparents were there with my mother at the hospital. My grandfather nicknamed me T-Bird after the mythical creature on top of the Indian totem pole. To this day, my family still refers to me by some version of my nickname.

My earliest memories revolve around my time spent living with my grandparents. My grandfather was a truck driver and my grandmother was a housewife. My mother had three children by the time she was twenty-one, so I am certain that it gave her relief that I was with my grandparents. The time I lived with my grandparents was very happy. My grandfather worked a lot and my grandmother and aunt Sharon spoiled me. I remember laying on my aunt’s lap at night and having her rub my head or scratch my back. I would lay my head on these huge red and black pillows. My grandmother would comb my hair with VO5 in the morning, pack my lunch, and fill my thermos. One very cold day, I drank my hot chocolate and burned my tongue pretty bad...it hurt forever! My grandmother bragged about my school performance and made me feel like a normal kid. I lived with them for kindergarten and first grade.

Although I lived with my grandparents, my mother lived close by, so I frequently visited her or she would come by their house. These visits did not always go normally. On one occasion, my mother decided to have a party with her friends,
many of whom did not belong around children. My mother did not find a babysitter for her children. At this party, some of the guys decided that it would be funny to give the kid a little “orange juice”. I drank the screwdrivers really fast, which of course did not sit well on my tiny stomach. After a few big gulps, I went to my mother’s room. She came to the room after I called out for her multiple times. When she walked into the spinning room, I could not hold back the alcohol anymore. Vomit. I threw up all over the bed and floor. She cleaned up the mess and me as she fussed at me for drinking so much alcohol. I was “supposed to just try it”. 

Around the same time as the party, my mother had to rush my two-year-old sister to the hospital because she poured hot liquid on her neck and chest. As usual, she left us with a babysitter that was not suitable to supervise children. This guy decided to work on a car instead of watching my brother Mark and me. For whatever reason, he decided to put gasoline in a soda can until he needed it. Being a thirsty five-year-old boy, the soda looked really appealing to me. While the babysitter was under the car, I took a huge, but quick, drink of the gasoline. Luckily, this happened as my mother was arriving back from the hospital. She immediately called the ambulance to take me to the hospital, but she was yelling at me for not knowing what I was drinking. I think part of her irritation was me disrupting her day.

On one of my visits to see my mother, she gave herself a tattoo using “Indian Ink” and a needle as I watched. I asked her to let me please have a tattoo. At first, she resisted and told me how much it would hurt. After begging for a few minutes, my mom gave me my first tattoo! Recently, I was telling my wife this story while my
mom was visiting our house. My mom said, "he wanted one so I gave it to him"! Of course, I wanted one! I was five! I got a tattoo of a cross on my thumb during my kindergarten year. Nothing screams white trash to teachers and administrators like a five-year-old with a tattoo.

At the end of first grade, my world completely changed. My "normal house" moved to South Carolina. This news was devastating to me. During a delivery, my grandfather found some land in a very rural part of South Carolina and bought it. My grandmother, aunt, and several other relatives, were moving with him and I was going to live with my mother, permanently.

When my grandparents moved to South Carolina, we stayed in their old house for a while. This arrangement did not last long because my grandparents sold the house to help pay for starting their new life 600 miles away. Although my irregular visits with my mother were remarkable, my permanent stay would be unforgettable. One of the first nights living in my grandparents’ old house with my mother was very scary. Her boyfriend at the time was beating her up while my siblings and I watched. When he left the room, my mother gave me a piece of paper with a phone number on it and said, “Go to the neighbor’s house and call this number and tell your uncle what is happening.” Her boyfriend caught me on the steps and started pushing me around and trying to get the paper out of my hand. I held on to that paper very tightly and refused to let him have it. My mother recognized what was happening and attacked her boyfriend on the steps. Freed, I ran to the neighbor’s house and called my uncle. The boyfriend fled the scene before my uncles could get him. At that time, I
remember being extremely disappointed because I wanted to watch my uncles hurt this man who was hurting my mother. About a year later, my wish would come true. One night while very drunk, the man showed up in the parking lot of our apartment building yelling for my mother to come down and talk to him. Little did he know, my uncle Dan was staying with us at the time. My uncle Dan went down the stairwell from our fifth floor apartment and surprised the man in the parking lot. After a few brutal punches to the head, the man crawled back in his car and drove away. I never saw him again.

Once we left my grandparent’s house, we bounced around from place to place. Initially, we stayed with relatives and friends before finally settling in the projects. One of our first stops was in a small steel mill town in western Pennsylvania. If I remember correctly, the apartment was ours, but so many people moved in and out that it seemed like we were the visitors. My great aunt, the wife of my mother’s uncle, was one of our roommates. I do not remember exactly why she was staying with us; however, I have been told that my uncle was abusive to her. My memories of her are very vague, except for one. One night, I woke to a terrible scream. The kind that makes you wish you were having a nightmare. After focusing my attention, I realized that my mother was the source of the scream. I found her in the bathroom, next to the toilet, holding onto my aunt. My aunt had an aneurism in her brain that burst. This was very troubling image in my mind for a long time. It led to a lot of sleepless nights and terrible nightmares.
My great aunt was followed by several boarders that played the role of babysitter from time to time. My grandmother told me one time my mother left me with a babysitter and went to a bar. When she came to our house to visit, she found me alone. She searched the area and asked everybody she ran into where my mother went. She found her at a local bar. My mother tried to explain her position to my grandmother to no avail. My grandmother physically assaulted her and told her to never leave me alone again. Honestly, I think we would have been better off alone than with some of the people my mother left us with.

Two of my uncles lived with us repeatedly throughout my child. They were stoners who moved between us and other enabling environments. When they would watch us for my mother, they did not like us to be up during their recreational marijuana use. Because Mark, my brother, and I refused to go to bed one evening, they decided to give us a chemical intervention. They thought it was hilarious to smoke marijuana and blow it in our face. I remember the room being full of smoke and everybody laughing as Mark and I consumed the smoke. We did not fight the puff-puff pass experience...we were just two little boys. We were not the only victims of their childish behavior. On other occasions, they did the same thing to animals. Over the years, I have seen them hold a dog’s snout and blow smoke in their nostrils and put beer in a dog’s bowl.

At this apartment, I did meet some very nice people. One guy either worked at or potentially owned a nearby bar. He would often give us chips, candy, and soda along with attention. I cannot see a bag of Schneider’s original chips without
thinking about the guy. As with many things in my early life, this positive “thing” would be interrupted with tragedy. I remember a gathering outside of the bar of emergency vehicles and personnel as well as neighbors looking for the latest gossip. I caught a glimpse of the old man on a stretcher with an oxygen mask on his face. He died on the way to the hospital.

A man named George worked at local auto repair business. The guy was always nice to my family and me. He would smile when he saw us coming. One night when I was telling my uncles about Mr. George, they said, “Do you mean, Nigger George?” Having no clue about the pain words could cause others, especially this particular word, the next time I saw this kind man, I called him Nigger George. The look of sadness on his face has remained with me my entire life. I have never used that word as an informed person. I cannot imagine the hurt that Mr. George felt the day I called him that name. I am sure that he has long left this earth and I recognize that I was a misled six-year-old, but I still feel a tremendous amount of guilt and sorrow because I did this to somebody.

The final place we lived before settling into the projects was with my mother’s cousin, my godmother, Denise. There was a lot of arguing between my mother and my cousin. My mother appeared very stressed during this time. She wanted to get out of the situation and start our own life. She was very excited when we were given our own apartment in Crawford Village, which is large government housing projects in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. This news was not well received by Denise.
Chapter 1: Comments

According to Harper and McLanahan (2004), children living in poverty are more likely to be raised in single-parent households. The number of children being raised in single-parent households increased by twenty-four percent between 1970 and 2013 (Krueger, Jutte, Fanzini, Elo, & Hayward, 2015). Aika and Edosa (2012) found that students from single-parent homes performed weaker academically than students from two-parent households. In their study, the impact of being raised in a single-parent household on academic performance was reduced when they controlled for parent education. Single parents with more education had children that performed better academically than single parents with less education (Aika and Edosa, 2012).

My mother quit high school in ninth grade. During graduate school, I was required to administer many assessments of cognitive ability and academic achievement. My mother was one of the many people I evaluated during this time to become proficient at conducting psychoeducation evaluations. Her scores indicate that she would have tremendous difficulty participating in the general education curriculum without the support of special education services. Unfortunately for my mother, the federal government did not require school districts to provide these services until a year before I was born.

Given her school experiences, my mother is not comfortable in academic settings and she has little understanding of the value of education. Inasmuch, she was not engaged in the education of any of her children. She did not communicate with teachers, attend school meetings, participate in parent teacher conferences, or even
review her children’s report cards. From a very early age, I remember her telling me, “Just sign my name, I don’t need to see it.” I have witnessed this same pattern of behavior with other single mothers who are raising their children in poverty.

Teachers and administrators need to recognize the lack of educational support that students who live with uneducated single-mothers are likely to have. It is important that schools have systems in place to recognize student achievement and avoid direct or indirect punishment for parent behavior. For example, students should not be punished for not returning a signed report card.

Alika and Edosa (2012) found that the academic impact of being raised in a single-parent household was greater for males than females. According to Alika and Edosa (2012), this finding is in contrast to the findings of Fausto-Sterling (1995) and Friedson (1985). Alika and Edosa (2012) hypothesized that females from single-parent households performed better academically because of anxiety about success in schools. I contend that the difference is likely the result of a missing same-sexed positive role model in the home for male students. From my experience, male and female students raised in single-parent households do not differ in their drive to be successful academically. With that said, I have noticed a difference in the overt behavior between males and females from single-parent households, especially when compounded with low socioeconomic status. As a school psychologist, I noticed males raised in this environment tended to exhibit more aggressive and defiant behavior. In my opinion, these behaviors are the variable that accounts for the difference in academic performance.
In the past, research has found a link between father-absent households and delinquent behavior. If an adolescent is incarcerated, it is likely they will be unable to successfully transition into adulthood. The likelihood of incarceration for adolescents growing up in a father-absent household is greater for males (Harper and McLanahan, 2004). Harper and McLanahan (2004) report that children growing up in a father-absent household are more likely to be hindered by other factors (e.g., race, teenage pregnancy, education) that have been shown to impact life outcomes. Interestingly, the stage of development that the father left the family was related to incarceration. While, Harper and McLanahan (2004) assumed that an absent father would be more impactful during adolescence, their research found the greatest impact for children born into a father-absent household. Personally, I had each of the factors Harper and McLanahan (2004) stacked against me with the exception of race. Although I avoided being incarcerated as adolescent, I did things that certainly could have made me part of this statistic. Unfortunately, as I will discuss later, incarceration would eventually catch up to me as it does many people living in poverty. Teachers and administrators have to recognize the risk factors of adolescent incarceration and create programs with the purpose of preventing this life altering situation. As reported by Harper and McLanahan (2004), programs to prevent incarceration need to happen when children enter school, thus we should not wait until at-risk students are in middle and high school.

Additionally, Harper and McLanahan (2004) found that contact with a father, who did not live in the home, had little impact on outcomes. In comparison to
households that included a stepmother or stepfather, children from father-absent households were less likely to be incarcerated. Although this finding was compelling, the number of households in the study identified as having a stepmother or stepfather was only 1.6% of the sample (Harper and McLanahan, 2004). My mother married two men during my childhood. Her first marriage to Anthony did not last very long, but it negatively impacted our family by introducing domestic violence and teaching us that violence was an acceptable problem solving strategy. Her second marriage was to Ronnie who previously was incarcerated for child molestation. They got married when I was in eighth grade. Quickly after marrying Ronnie, she had three children. Like her first marriage this created more chaos in our house than when my mother was single. Given that our home was always unstable, the addition of other adults who were unstable too created complete chaos. Although Harper and McLanahan’s (2004) study’s data were limited in regards to stepparents, teachers and administrators should be aware that changes to single-parent households could be accompanied by greater behavior and academic difficult by the students living in these homes.

Children raised in single-parent households have more negative life outcomes than children raised in two-parent households (Seabrook and Avison, 2015; Krueger, et al., 2015; Alika and Edosa, 2012; Kingston, et al., 2013; Harper and McLanahan, 2004; Stanley et al., 1986). Notably, children raised by single fathers have better academic, behavior, and health outcomes than children raised by single mothers (Krueger et al., 2015). Krueger et al. (2015) suggested that this finding was likely the
difference in common characteristics ascribed to each group (e.g., single fathers are more likely to be older, single fathers more likely to have higher education and be employed, etc.). To address the impact that single-parent households has on students, Alika and Edosa (2012) and Stanley et al. (1986) recommend that schools make counseling available to these students. Additionally, they discuss the importance of group counseling for all of the family members. Counseling, training of interpersonal skills, and problem-solving groups need to happen in preschool and kindergarten to maximize impact (Stanley et al., 1986). Alika and Edosa (2012) also stress the need to make parents accountable for their children’s education including providing learning materials required for classwork.

I remember only going to one counseling session with my mother as a child, which made her very uncomfortable. Several times in my life, my mother has mentioned that she does not need counseling because she is not crazy. In my opinion, she associated counseling with being crazy because the services were provided at a mental health facility, which had the stigma of working with crazy people. I believe that family counseling provided by a guidance counselor in the school setting would have been much more impactful because my mother would have been much more receptive. Additionally, any guidance counselor who is going to work with low socioeconomic status families need to have specialized training in working with this group of people. Over the years, I have watched very intelligent guidance counselors and school psychologist be extremely limited when working with poor families. On
the other hand, I have watched others with specialized training or similar personal experiences be very impactful.

Harper and McLanahan (2004) recommend that afterschool programs have a mentoring component that unites male students from father-absent households and positive adult male role models. In my opinion, mentoring programs can be extremely beneficial to students who come from fatherless homes. If a mentoring program is available, I recommend that teachers with students from father-absent households attempt to make a connection between them and a male mentor. Adult men considering mentoring a student should recognize that the most important thing they can do is show up and care. In other words, you do not need to be a psychologist, superhero, or have any magical skills to help a student in need. Genuine care is impactful.

Harper and McLanahan (2004) also encourage organizations working with children from father-absent households to provide them with information on community resources that might reduce common stressors. Given the variety of family arrangements that might be associated with father-absent households, it is important that programs aimed at assisting at-risk youth include other adults who might have a vested interest in the child’s wellbeing. Specifically, programs aimed at teaching parenting skills and communication between families and schools should include any adult accepting the role of caregiver (Harper and McLanahan, 2004).

The combination of low-education mothers and father-absent households might create increased education and social barriers for students. Parkes, Sweeting,
and Wight (2015) investigated the amount of stress felt by mothers with high and low education. Although they did not find a significant difference between the stress levels of high and low education mothers, when single parent versus two-parent household were controlled for, the researchers found a significant difference. Krueger et al. (2015) and Seabrook and Avison (2015) found that socioeconomic status mitigated most of the adverse behavioral, academic, and health outcomes of being raised in a single-mother household. Children from single-mother households who were identified as low socioeconomic had the greatest negative impact (Krueger et al., 2015). Parkes et al. (2015) attributed the increased stress level of low-education mothers, who were raising their children without the father living in the home, to a lack of childcare support. This finding was more significant for mothers of preschool children (Parkes et al., 2015). One can assume that increased stress among mothers of preschool children adversely impacts the socioemotional skills of their children. Inasmuch, school districts should consider providing educational services to children as early as possible. These programs would provide direct instruction to at-risk children while decreasing maternal stress by providing free childcare. In general, the earlier school districts and other public agencies provide interventions to children being raised in low socioeconomic single-mother households the better outcomes can be anticipated.

Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman (2013) echoed the findings of other researchers that children from families and neighborhoods with fewer resources are less likely to develop school readiness skills. In addition to low
socioeconomic status predicting poor school readiness, Kingston et al. (2013) reported that single-parent homes and parental education are also predictors of school readiness. Similarly, Stanley, Weikel, and Wilson (1986) reported that preschool children from father-absent households performed more poorly on assessments of interpersonal skills. The impact that father-absent households had on the development of interpersonal skills was not mitigated by the presence of other adult males such as grandfathers, uncles, or boyfriends (Stanley et al., 1986; Krueger, 2015). In Paul Tough’s (2012) book How Children Succeed, he tells about the struggles and challenges that face children raised in poverty at different development ranges. Tough (2012) notes that a lot of discussion and efforts to address poverty are intertwined with education reform. Interestingly, the reform strategies he discussed revolve around making sure teachers have adequate teaching skills. Tough (2012) described the development of character traits, not teaching skills, as the foundation to building a successful future for children raised in poverty.

Based on the research noted above, the urgency to provide services and resources as soon as students enter school should be top priority for school and district administrators. In addition to the interventions discussed previously, Kingston et al. (2013) found that increased parental involvement decreased the impact socioeconomic status had on the social-emotional and adaptive skills components of school readiness. Inasmuch, although the development of teaching skills is very important, educators should consider nontraditional factors and subsequent interventions as a means to improve the performance of students raised in poverty.
For example, programs that promote parent involvement and teach parenting skills to parents of small children could improve school readiness skills and decrease the impact of living in an environment deprived of other resources. Specifically, educators can help improve school readiness by promoting the importance of parents reading to their children and expressing the importance of communication between parents and teachers. Kingston et al. (2013) note that programs that are developed to prepare young children for school could be more effective if they supplement missing resources in addition to promoting parent involvement.

Although Kingston et al. (2013) found that social-emotional skills and adaptive skills were improved with parental involvement, parental involvement did not alter cognitive readiness skills. Similarly, Tough (2012) reported the findings from a study that was conducted to determine if early intervention provided through a daycare could increase IQ scores. The original researchers believed that their study was a failure because the initial increase in IQ scores for children receiving early intervention via daycare decreased over time (Tough, 2012). Follow up to the original study indicated that the children who were included in the daycare group had better life outcomes. Tough (2012) explained that these researchers attributed the outcomes to things provided during daycare other than academic instruction. For example, the children in the daycare were taught self-control, which is likely a contributing factor to the positive outcomes (Tough, 2012). Given the information provided by Tough (2012), it is possible that the impact of parental involvement, reported by Kingston et al. (2013), on cognitive skills takes longer to measure than
other school readiness skills. When children are provided with cognitively stimulating materials and activities the adverse impact of poverty on school readiness can be reduced (Kingston et al., 2013).

The findings reported above indicate that educators have an opportunity to change the course of a child’s life by developing character at a young age. Inasmuch, programs designed to assist very young children raised in poverty should emphasize the development of character while providing for the basic needs of development (Tough, 2012). Although I attribute my life outcomes to people who helped me in middle school and high school, the research above suggest that my fate could have been generated by the period of stability I had while living with my grandparents during kindergarten and first grade. It is possible that this nurturing environment during a critical period of life provided me the personal characteristics necessary to be successful when my home situation changed drastically. Interestingly, my five siblings were never given this same opportunity at the same period of development.

It is important for teachers and administrators who work with children to be mindful of the circumstances that they live in. Teachers need to understand these situations and use any presented incident as a teachable moment. It should not be assumed that students are learning socially appropriate behavior at home. In fact, in many cases, the behaviors being reinforced at home are contrary to socially acceptable behaviors.
Chapter 1: Questions for Discussion

1. What are your own personal prejudices and biases? How do they impact your interaction with students and other adults?

2. Are you aware of your students’ living conditions? How would this information benefit you as the teacher or administrator? How could you gather this information?

3. What resources are available in your school or district to assist children who come from single parent homes or nontraditional living arrangements?
CHAPTER 2

At the time, we thought our move was wonderful and my mother was very proud of our new place. We happily moved our few possessions into the apartment, which happened to be on the fifth floor of a high-rise building. My mother told us there would be a lot of kids to play with and a nice playground. There was a playground and there were a lot of kids, but neither was as inviting as she expressed. We were the outsiders.

Crawford Village had 64 buildings including two high rise buildings that were eight stories each. The 64 Building was for senior citizens and the 63 Building, our building, was for the desperate. In the projects, white people are the minority. To this point, we were not around many different races and my family held some strong racial views, as noted with the way they taught me to address Mr. George. We lived in Crawford Village for 10 years.

My first memory of living in Crawford Village was arriving home from school and hearing my mother screaming. When I walked into our apartment, my mother was being held against the wall by Denise and another one of her cousins, Molly. Molly was a prostitute who was also involved in other delinquent behavior. They were pulling her hair and holding her neck, but my mom was slapping, punching, and scratching them. As they were fighting, they were yelling hateful things at each other. Scared, I ran frantically down a few flights of stairs asking people to please help! I stumbled across an older lady and her son. I begged them to please help my mother. They went upstairs with me to see what was going on. When
we arrived on the fifth floor, my mother’s cousins were walking out of our apartment as the two parties screamed at each other. The lady and her son, Anthony, went to check on my mother. Anthony became my mother’s first husband.

Supposedly, Denise was mad at my mother for moving out and not paying her money. My mother said that Denise was just mad because my mother was not going to pay her bills or use her food stamps to buy her food. It would be awhile before I would see Denise again.

Our neighbor above us, Thresea, was a white woman who had three biracial children. To most of the middle class world, she would be considered white trash, but she was there for us when others were not. We moved into our apartment in between receiving our welfare checks. As a result, we did not have much money or food. Since my mother’s recent fight with family, they would not help us. Thresea gave us food and support despite her own difficulties. Thresea’s life took a major turn for the worse when she lost her mother who she was extremely close to. In fact, she died while Thresea was acting as her caretaker...she says her mother died in her arms. After that time, she had three children out of wedlock and distanced herself from her family. With all the difficulties in her life, she did not hesitate to help us. This was the first person who seemed to come in my life at a critical people to alter its course.

One night, my mother went out with her new boyfriend, Anthony, and left us with Thresea. Although I am forever grateful for the food and assistance Thresea gave us, her house was not suitable for children to be left in. It was beyond filthy and describing it without experiencing it would not be possible. After we finally got to
sleep, I was awakened by a man arguing with Thresea. The man was threatening to kill himself and Thresea was crying and begging him not to. I looked at Mark and Estella, my sister, to see if they were okay. When I looked at Mark, he had cockroaches on his neck and face. I brushed the roaches off him and began crying. I wanted to get my brother and sister out of that apartment, but I did not want to disturb the unsettled man. Fortunately, the man did not stay long; however, I did not sleep the rest of the night. I stayed awake until the morning to make sure that the cockroaches did not get on my brother’s and sister’s faces. The night seemed to last forever. When my mother came to pick us up the next morning, I was very angry and yelled at her for leaving us in that filthy house. She slapped me.

Like moving for any kid, we had to adjust to a new school, but more importantly we had to adjust to our new neighborhood. When you first move into Crawford Village, everybody wants to challenge you to a fight. I chose to fight, a lot. My brother chose not to fight. My mother sheltered my sister. I was in so many fights between second and fourth grade that retelling all of them would be pointless. In regards to fighting, it was good for me that my mother started dating Anthony almost immediately after moving into our apartment. Anthony was a sports addict. I loved professional wrestling, but he prevented me from watching it because it was fake. In fact, he would make fun of me and make me turn it off. Luckily, he made me watch boxing. I remember becoming instantly hooked. Out of curiosity, I asked Anthony when the tag team matches would come on! This made him angry and he slapped me in the face with a newspaper and told me how “fucking stupid” I was.
A boy name Alphie, who had an intellectual disability, lived in the 63 Building. Alphie was a little older, but very large for his age. He was not liked by many of the kids because of his strange and unusual behavior. For example, Alphie would catch cats and hang them on a chain behind the heavy steel doors leading to the stairwell. Because Alphie and his dad liked wrestling, I would hang out with him from time to time. On one occasion, a couple of kids and I were watching wrestling at Alphie’s apartment when he became really aggressive. Alphie tried doing wrestling moves on me, which really hurt given his abnormally large size and me being undersized. After freeing myself, I ran home. Anthony was there waiting. He did not want to hear my “damn whining”. He told me that the next time I get into a fight I better punch and not waste my time on that “fake shit”. If he found out I was wrestling, he was going to “kick my ass”.

A few days after Anthony’s lecture, a boy name Christian challenged me to a fight on my way home from school. I was nervous because to this point I was never in a “real fight”. He followed me from the bus and up the stairs pushing me and calling me names. Finally, I could not take anymore and we began to fight on a landing between staircases. As with most fights in the projects, there were a lot of spectators, who are similar to gasoline for a fire. Shortly after the fight began, I was snatched from my entanglement with Christian. It was Anthony. He pushed me against a wall, grabbed my face, and told me that I better start “punching and beat this kid’s ass”. When he let me go, I started swinging as hard and fast as I could. The
fight was over pretty quick. I felt very proud of myself as everybody cheered and Anthony smiled.

A few days later, Alphie, a few other kids, and I were doing a battle royal, everyone wrestling at once, on the catwalk outside of the fifth floor apartments. As usual, Alphie was dominating the match. When Alphie had me in a wrestling hold, I looked up and noticed that Anthony was standing there watching us. The move was hurting and I was getting angry and about to cry. I snapped, most likely to avoid punishment and/or to impress Anthony, and started punching Alphie in the face. I remember him crying, but not caring. I felt proud of myself as Anthony praised me for my efforts. That night, he told my mother, “T-Bird finally kicked that retard’s ass.”

The 63 building had a lot of events that caused memories that have lasted a lifetime. First, Thresea’s visitor was not the only suicidal or homicidal person that I witnessed as a very young boy. One day, the police warned all of the tenants to stay inside. Throughout the day, we caught glimpses of the chaos on the ground floor. A shirtless man armed with a gun was holding a baby and the bible. As the police were talking to the man through a bullhorn, he rotated between scriptures and tirades directed at the residents. Eventually, the man released the baby to officers and was taken into custody.

Another time, a boy was riding on top of the elevator when he fell between it and the wall. He was able to get himself released, then stumbled through the hallways in shock and covered with blood. The accident caused the boy cognitive
deficits as well as physical abnormalities. With that said, his situation did not change the behavior of the children living in the building. We all continued to ride the top of the elevator, stop the elevator between floors and job off, and stop the elevator between floors to look down the shaft.

Early one evening, I walked outside and heard a loud argument near the elevators. Of course, I walked over to the crowd to see about the commotion. When I got there, I saw a man and woman screaming at each other and it appeared that they had been physically fighting as well. The woman walked into an apartment and appeared with a baby. The man was yelling for her to stop and get back into the apartment. The woman continued to walk. She went to the elevator and pushed the button to go downstairs. The man got between her and the elevator. Disgusted, the woman turned to walk away. When the elevator door opened, the man grabbed the baby from the woman’s arms and through the baby in the elevator! The woman and the crowd rushed into the filthy elevator to retrieve the baby. With the craziness that ensued, I ran back to my apartment. I never saw those people again.

I absolutely hated living in the high-rise building. I was so angry with my situation that I became very disrespectful to my mother. She dealt with my behavior by using a paddle. If we cried, my mother would spank us harder. If we moved, she would spank us on any available part of our body. One time, I fell to the ground and rolled underneath the kitchen sink to avoid being spanked. My mother got on her knees and used the wooden paddle to jab me in my ribs and stomach. I missed my grandparents, so much that one day I wrote them a letter. I started the letter, “Dear,
My real mom and dad”. My mother saw me writing the letter and took it from me. I am sure the letter hurt her feelings, but I did not care. She ripped the letter up and beat me.

At school, I became a nightmare for teachers. When I lived with my grandparents, I always did well academically and behaviorally. Now, that child was foreign to my teachers. In class, instead of focusing on the teacher, I began to plan and act out wrestling matches between my fingers. I was in my own little world. This bizarre behavior and being new to the school alienated the other children. Like an animal in a corner, I responded to all perceived attacks with aggression. I got into a lot of altercations with children as well as staff members. These years were filled with terrible memories. In second grade, I was arguing with a boy in stairwell, when the teacher held my hand and told him to go get the principal because I was threatening him and using profanity. My teacher grabbed my hand tighter while trying to take me down the steps to the principal’s office. She was a small woman wearing heels. Despite being really small myself, I was able to get free by pulling the teacher down the steps. After the teacher tumbled to the ground, I chased the other boy, but he made it to the principal’s office before I could get him.

My most memorable third grade moment is not something to be proud of. My teacher could not deal with my continuous noise and disrespect. As I was wrestling with my fingers, she grabbed my hands. I pushed her hands off mine. She responded by grabbing my chin and fussing at me. I slapped her in the face. She called the
principal and I was removed from the classroom. I remember feeling very angry at her, but having no remorse.

In fourth grade, I continuously told the other students in the classroom that one boy was from Russia. In fact, several of us would push him around and rough him up in the coat closet almost daily. Because of my explosive demeanor, most kids avoided me. This one particular boy; however, thought it would be a good idea to call me Opie, a name I hate. On this particular day, we had a substitute teacher. When he did this, I got out of my seat and walked backed to his and began punching him before he could respond. The substitute ran over to me and grabbed my hands and pulled me from the other student. As a last resort, I extended my leg and kicked him in the face. The substitute gave us a choice of our punishment: go to the principal or miss the Halloween party. We both chose to miss the Halloween party the next day. The day after missing the party, our teacher returned to school. She heard about the incident and sent us to the principal’s office. He decided to paddle us. One at a time, we went into his office, were made to stand in front of his desk, look at the American flag, then he hit us with the board. The other boy went first and left the office crying very hard. This kid’s only crime was calling somebody Opie. The principal’s paddle was nothing compared to my mother’s. I think he was shocked with the lack of response he got from me.

Fourth grade was probably the most violent year of my childhood. During this same school year, a boy was making fun of my grandmother. We were taught to fight when somebody talked about our family. As soon as he stepped off the school
bus, I attacked him. The fight went back and forth for a while. Somebody notified
my mother about the fight, so she showed up on the scene screaming. She kept
telling me to stop, but I did not listen. Eventually, she pulled me from the boy while
slapping me. My mother has always said, in response to my temper, “When he starts
to cry it is like the devil comes out”. A few minutes after returning home, there was a
knock at our door. My mother went to the door and briefly talked to the visitor before
summoning me. It was the boy and his mother. The lady and my mother quickly
went from talking to arguing. They agreed that the best solution was for us to fight in
front of them. My mother told me, “get out there and fuck his ass up”. Although the
fight by the bus was pretty even, this one was one sided. I knew that a beating was
coming my way if I lost the fight. The extra incentive was enough to propel me to
giving him a pretty quick and violent beat down. His mother grabbed him and took
him home while using racial slurs against us and threatening our family with harm.
My mom just kept saying, “Whatever bitch”.

My mother’s marriage with Anthony did not last very long. Anthony liked to
drink alcohol at bars while watching sports. They got into a lot of arguments and
near the end of their relationship just as many physical fights. Several of the fights
required the police to come. On one occasion, they were fighting on the steps when
my mother attempted to punch Anthony in the groin. Anthony raised his leg to block
the blow and his knee struck my mother in the nose. Her nose was broken. After this
fight, I only saw him occasionally before he finally disappeared.
Anthony was not a good father or a good man, but he was the only person who filled this role to this point in my life. The greatest gift he gave me was teaching to play sports. This gave me an escape. Sports are very popular in the projects. Because of my interests in sports, I could make friends much easier than my brother. Mark did not take to sports, which adversely impacted his life.

Near the end of my mother’s marriage to Anthony, my feelings for him were exposed. Mark and I were attending a youth activity at a local church. We just went for the games and snacks. The phone rang and person called our adult supervisor to the phone. He had strange look on his face when he called me over. I took the phone and a woman said, “Bird, you need to come home Anthony has been in a motorcycle accident and they don’t think he is going to make it”. I started crying and asking the church staff to drive me home. When the van stopped, I ran as fast as I could to our apartment. My mother was sweeping the steps. I asked her where Anthony was. She said that he was at work and that she just talked to him. She asked, “Why? Why are you crying”? I told her about the phone call. She called Anthony, so I could hear that he was okay. He was not in an accident. I was so relieved. We never found out who made the phone call. It is unbelievable that an adult would do this to a child.

Following my mother’s marriage with Anthony, our life became even more chaotic. She had a few boyfriends between Anthony and her next husband, Ronnie, but none of them lasted very long. During this time, we also began the never-ending rotation of a family living with us. A lady and her four children lived with us on and off for six years. I absolutely hated this. The lady was very lazy. In fact, most of her
“move-ins” was a result of evictions. She was a horrible parent as well. She would hit her children for any reason. I used to hate when she combed her daughters’ hair. When the girls began to cry, she would bite her lip, I can still remember her face, and hit them with the brush in the head. Most of the time, that made them cry more. Her response would be to pull their hair. Sometimes, this was followed by picking them up off the floor and swinging them by their hair. From a young age, although I was involved in many fights, it has always bothered me to watch a person physically hurt a weaker person. I usually freaked when this happened. I would scream and use profanity at her for this behavior. This would lead to my own spanking and banishment to my room. As I got older, I just avoided all of them when they moved in with us.

My mom brought Ronnie home. Shortly after my mother introduced us to her new boyfriend Ronnie, a relative of a family we knew, she announced that she was pregnant, again. After Estella was born, my mother had her tubes tied. Apparently, she had them reversed. We were living in the projects and receiving welfare; however, she thought having another child was a good idea. Estella was now ten. When I was an adult, I was told by my best friend, Bud that he heard Ronnie was convicted of child molestation before marrying my mother. I asked my mother about this and she confirmed that he served time for molesting a girl, but assured me he was innocent. She knew this before she married him and had three children with him. About 20 years later, he was convicted of molesting another girl in South Carolina and served three years for his crime. Again, my mother and siblings believe that he is
innocent. Apparently, two girls from two different states (Pennsylvania and South Carolina) who were born 30 years apart decided to both make up the same story about this man molesting them.

Returning home from school one day, I walked into the house as my mother was having difficulties with her pregnancy. She was in a lot of pain, so we called the ambulance. I rode with her to the hospital. When we got to the hospital, we got the normal looks and attitude from everybody around us. My mother lost the baby. She cried loud as she laid on the hospital bed. I just kept rubbing her head telling her that I loved her. No child likes to see their mother cry, especially when they cannot do anything to help her.

Ronnie and my mother married and another pregnancy quickly followed. They had three children over the next three years. I did not like Ronnie. He did not like sports, he drank a lot, he was not tough, and he was old. He was 15 years older than my mother. Not liking Ronnie, coupled with becoming a teenager, led to me spending most of my time outside of the house. My best friend, at the time, and I began hanging with a group of guys who were much older than us.

About a year after their marriage, my mom and Ronnie got into a major fight. I was coming home with a group of my friends when some of our neighbors yelled to me that Ronnie was hitting my mother. In the projects, on warm days, everybody is outside hanging out. As I came into view of our apartment, I saw Ronnie pushing my mom against the wall trying to grab her hand. My mother had a hammer. I ran up to the apartment with my friends. When I approached the fight, I started calling Ronnie
names and threatening him. At this time, my mother starting hitting Ronnie in the leg with the claw-end of the hammer. Obviously, he was drunk because he did not fall to the ground. He released my mother and came towards me. I picked up a stick and kept swinging it at his face. I had no intention of hitting him. I just wanted him to leave my mother alone. As he kept coming towards me, my friends were tripping him and calling him names. He would stumble or fall, then continue staggering after me talking nonsense. Luckily, the cops showed up and arrested him. If he would have got a hold of me, this day would have turned into a horrific scene. Also, I am certain if I were more aggressive towards him, my group of friends would have turned into a lynch mob.

Once I reached middle school, I was not in many fights. Honestly, I did not need to fight anymore because I pretty much fought all the necessary people. When you move into the projects, you are tested by your peers. Following that trial, you are usually done with fighting unless you choose to engage in confrontations for other reasons. One time in middle school, I got into an argument with a kid in cooking class. When I lost my cool and challenged him to a fight, he backed down. He said something very interesting that I remember to this day, “I’m not fighting you because all of those black kids will jump me”. Living in the projects gave this guy some illusion of toughness and gang affiliation.

The final serious violent encounter happened when I was in eighth grade. My sister came home crying after school because a boy name Rashad was touching her butt and calling her names. My mother always made us defend our family against
verbal and physical attacks. Also, she would tell us, “If you get in a fight, you better not lose. If he beats your ass, you better get a stick or brick and get him back.”

When my mother saw Rashad walking outside of our apartment, she called for me and Mark to come to the door. She pointed out the door and said, “Get his ass!” He tried to run, but Mark and I caught him by a set of stairs. We beat him pretty badly while my mother watched. We did not stop until she told us to.

My mother’s teaching of violent behavior caused her children to do things that most people would consider extremely despicable. The day I recognized that things were completely out of control was shortly after the incident with Rashad. Two girls with mild disabilities said something to Mark about our mother. When the girls went to get on the school bus, Mark pushed one of them from behind and she fell and landed partly on the bottom step and partly on the ground. He kicked her several times before I could pull him from her. The sad thing is my brother is not naturally violent. Unlike me, he was never drawn to fighting or aggressive sports. I am absolutely certain that his behavior is the manifestation of my mother’s parenting and the environment we were raised in.

Chapter 2: Comments

Historically, research has shown that the amount of physical aggression displayed by males living in low socioeconomic households is significantly greater than females living in the same conditions and either gender living in higher socioeconomic households (Bonica, Arnold, Fisher, & Zeljo, 2003). My childhood living in poverty was engulfed in violence. I used to think this was specific to me or
where I lived. As an adult who has worked with many children, I realize now that this is a common theme for children raised in poverty. Recently, an administrator was telling me about a very aggressive student who she was trying to teach how to effectively resolve conflict. Unfortunately, the handling of conflict is completely different for many students raised in poverty. In fact, some of these students are taught that the traditional ways of handling conflict are for the weak. My recommendation to any educator working with children being raised in a culture of violence is to gain an understanding of their value system and approach to handing conflict. If a student is being raised to handle conflict with violence, you must gain the students trust before he or she will even consider your method of conflict resolution. The acceptance of your methods might be perceived as an attack on their family, so teachers and administrators wanting to have an impact should be very conscientious of their approach.

Bonica et al. (2003) found that although males from low socioeconomic households demonstrate more physically aggressive behavior, they are less likely than females of either low or high socioeconomic status to display relational aggression. Relational aggression is behavior that is intended to adversely impact the victim’s relationship with another person or group. Bonica et al. reported that relational aggression was positively related to language development even when controlling for gender and socioeconomic status. On the other hand, language development has been found to be negatively correlated with physical aggression. I used both types of aggression as an elementary aged student. In addition to being a part of many fights
in elementary school, I vividly remember using relational aggression to harm other students. Most embarrassingly, as mentioned previously, I convinced many students that another student with a speech impairment was from Russia and therefore was our enemy. I think I even convinced myself that he was from Russia. Several of the other students and I would physically and verbally attack this student throughout the day especially while in the coat closet.

Children who witness violent acts are more likely to have behavior problems than children who do not witness violent acts (Linares, Heeren, Bronfman, Zuckerman, Augustyn, & Tronick, 2001). Additionally, Linares et al. (2001) noted that a mother’s with psychological distress, family aggression, and mother’s socioeconomic status have been associated with increased behavior difficulties among children. The purpose of their study was to determine what factors were best predictors of internalizing and externalizing behaviors in children from three years old to six years old. The study found the mother’s socioeconomic status and family aggression predicted behavior difficulties regardless of the child’s exposure to community violence. Once mother’s socioeconomic status and family aggression were controlled for, the researchers found a relationship between witnessing community violence and behavior difficulties. With that said, the researchers also found that the relationship between witnessing community violence and behavior difficulties was mediated by mother’s psychological distress (Linares et al., 2001). In summary, the children’s behavior in Linares (2001) study were influenced by community violence after controlling for other variables (e.g., mother’s
socioeconomic status, family aggression, and mother’s psychological distress) known to be associated with behavior difficulties. I had all of the reported risk variables in my life.

During my childhood, violence was witnessed, molded, and encouraged. For example, when we first moved into the high rise building in Crawford Village, while washing dishes, my mother heard the sounds of a fight happening in the courtyard. She noticed it was my brother Mark being beat up by another boy. She ran down to the courtyard from the fifth floor with a dishrag in her hand. Instead of breaking up the fight, she used the dishrag to whip the other boy. Professionally, I have experienced similar attitudes towards aggression in families living in poverty. A few years ago, I was healing a boy with anger management when his father decided to “beat up” another boy who was slightly older because he beat up his son. Supposedly, he did this in front of his son. Teachers and administrators need to be aware of the culture of violence to which many students who live in poverty are exposed.

As with many interventions that aim to alter life outcomes for students living in poverty, Linares et al. (2001) recommend that interventions begin as early as possible. While they specifically noted programs should include pediatricians because of their early involvement with children, school districts who currently are legally required to provide education services to three-year-old children with disabilities, should develop programs that target children living in poverty of the same age or younger. In addition to providing direct services to children, these
programs should provide services to mothers to help them cope with the psychological distress associated with witnessing community aggression and family aggression. In their research Linares et al. suggest that helping mothers with psychological distress may indirectly reduce behavior problems of children witnessing community aggression. Programs that have been found to be impactful include teaching self-help skills, providing community support groups, and community activities that improve the overall condition of the neighborhood.

Greitemeyer and Sagioglou (2016) suggest that people’s perception of socioeconomic status can influence the level of aggressive behavior regardless of the actual socioeconomic status. In fact, delinquency including state-wide homicide rates have been negatively correlated with relative deprivation. According to relative deprivation theory, people are more likely to compare themselves to people who are doing better in life. Inasmuch, students who are living in poverty are likely to view their situation as more desperate than it might actually be. Also, children who are not living in poverty, but are less well off than their classmates, might perceive themselves as being poor. Since low socioeconomic has been reported by researchers (Linares et al., 2001; Tough, 2012; Greitemey & Sgaioglou, 2016; Bonica, 2003) to be related to aggressive behavior, one can assume that students who perceive themselves as having a lower socioeconomic status will be more likely to demonstrate aggressive behavior. Teachers and administrators should avoid making students feel inadequate to their peers. To this point, I remember in middle school and high school my homeroom teachers would biweekly call students to their desk to receive their
gold colored lunch card. The lunch card was for students who received a free lunch at school. I experienced tremendous anxiety on these days and I was terribly embarrassed to walk in front of the class knowing the other students knew my family’s financial situation.

As for responding to aggression to perceived socioeconomic status, I experienced this as a child and it still impacts me now. In my childhood, my circle of friends did not include many students perceived as being from higher socioeconomic status families. Over my school years, I have been in countless arguments and physical fights with children perceived as better off without much provoking. The same attitude followed me into adulthood, but shifted mostly to verbal altercations. The shift to mostly responding with verbal aggression has taken a tremendous amount of effort. Interestingly, I experienced feelings of self-hatred for walking away from an altercation instead of attacking the other person either verbally or physically. When the altercation or perceived altercation is with a male and I walk away from the situation, I feel extremely weak for not fighting them. This can last for days. I used to assume that these issues were personal, but Greitemeyer and Sagioglou (2016) note that studies have found that people living in poverty are more likely to perceive other’s behaviors as hostile and respond with aggression. I caution all teachers and administrators to not praise students for walking away from an altercation in front of their peers. This praise should be reserved for a private setting to avoid embarrassment and subsequent aggression. Despite my life experiences, I made this mistake as a school psychologist intern. During a behavior support group for middle
school students, I praised a student for appropriately responding to the rude remarks of a classmate and he responded by cursing and throwing materials.

“People with low SES are dehumanized by others and experience interpersonal and institutional distancing and social exclusion. This highlights the dynamics of the problem at hand: The derogating behavior toward low SES individuals fosters the subjective experience of their SES and thereby also increases the likelihood of action out aggressively” (Greitmeyer & Sagioglou, 2016, p. 190).

When considering interventions to decrease behavior concerns and improve academic performance of students living in poverty, teachers and administrators need to ensure that students are connecting to the educational environment. For example, fieldtrips should not be planned for entire grade levels that are cost prohibitive for some students. If a relative expensive fieldtrip is necessary to ensure mastery of content, arrangements should be made to provide financial support to students living in poverty. Although school districts and individual schools cannot reallocate resources in society to reduce the amount of relative deprivation experienced by all students, we can minimize the impact of subjective socioeconomic status by carefully planning events and being conscientious of the phenomenon.

In my professional experience, if we simply make our community aware of our students needs they will rise to the occasion. During the 2014-2015 school year, our district had a high school senior with cerebral palsy who was graduating in the top third of his class. Unfortunately, this student was completely dependent upon transportation provided by the school district to attend school and extracurricular
activities. Since college and universities are not required to provide transportation to
students with disabilities and this student lived in poverty, he was not going to be able
to attend college. In November of his senior year, several teachers and I started a
campaign to raise money to buy this student a van to attend college. The entire
community rallied around this student and a handicap accessible van was purchased
in April of his senior year. In fact, we had enough donations to pay for all applicable
fees and taxes associated with the purchase along with insurance for six months and
over one thousand dollars for other expenses.

Chapter 2: Questions for Discussion

1. How do you handle verbal and physical aggression in your classroom/school?
   What programs are available to teach students appropriate conflict resolution?

2. How do you ensure that students raised in poverty don’t feel institutional
   distancing? Do all students have access to all educational opportunities?

3. What programs are available to assist low socioeconomic status mothers and
   students who experience community and personal violence?
CHAPTER 3

For the most part, I was a really quiet student after getting to middle school. I realized the teacher’s left you alone if you just did the work. The work was easy for me, so I did it just to avoid confrontation. Now, at school, I was just coasting along, when a teacher came into my life and changed it forever. There are several people I credit with impacting my life, but Nancy Swanson saved my life.

Ms. Swanson was an amazing teacher. She was very enthusiastic about her job and she loved children. Most importantly, she loved me. I cannot remember a single lesson she ever taught in her class, but I do remember the way she made me feel with her kindness and sweet words. One thing that has always stood out to me is her telling me, “I just wish I could take you home with me”. I use to pray that she could. Not only did she love me, she challenged me in a way that nobody ever did before. She challenged me to become a better person. She made me realize that I am a person worthy of love and respect. Because of her, I have a wonderful life.

She made me join chorus… I cannot sing!! She pushed me to take more challenging classes… I was content just getting by!! She made me work in the school store, which led to one of the most important moments in my life. While working in the school store one day, with some boy from the other side of the tracks, a student bought things using silver dollars. After the boy left, the other boy stole the silver dollars…and I was the one from the projects. I could not believe it. He asked me if I wanted one and I said, “No”.
The next day at school, we were both called to the principal’s office. They were asking us about the silver dollars.Apparently, the kid who used them to buy stuff took them from his house without permission. When confronted by his parents, he told them that he used them at the school store. They wanted him to get them back from the school store, but of course they were not there. Now, this other kid and I had to explain why. He melted down and started crying. I just refused to talk.

After a few minutes of the principal’s interrogation, Ms. Swanson entered the room. She asked if she could talk to me. We went to the end of the hall near the steps. I told her I did not want to talk and started walking up the stairs. She grabbed my arm and told me to just talk to her. I turned around and stared at her, but I did not say a word. She began asking me about the silver dollars. After several questions, I just kept staring at her and tears filled my eyes because I thought I had disappointed her.

She took me by the hand and we walked back to the principal’s office. When we walked in, she told the principal, “I don’t know what happened, but I know he didn’t take anything”. I could not believe that somebody would stand up for me like that. The principal told me and the other kid to go back to class. Later, when I saw Ms. Swanson, she said everything was fine, but I would not be able to work in the store anymore. After this, I really started to do well in school. It made me believe in myself, but more importantly, it allowed me to trust other people.

After finishing graduate school, I sent a long email to Ms. Swanson thanking her for redirecting my life. I never got a response. She retired from the school
district before I got to thank her. When I called the district, they were not able to give me any new contact information. I was afraid that I would never have an opportunity to thank her. I was finally able to make contact as explained in Chapter 9.

Although my life at school was coasting along very nicely, my home life still was crazy. With the convicted child molester living in the house, I pretty much stayed in the streets until bedtime. My best friend, at the time, and I were hanging out with a group of guys much older than us. These times were crazy, but at least I kept it from spilling into my school work. Of course, Ms. Swanson was keeping up with me at school and I did not want to let her down. In the projects, I was still heading down a very uncertain and chaotic road.

My friends and I found different apartments to hangout in. Interestingly, the most popular spot was Thresea’s apartment. The place would be filled with teenagers and people in their early twenties. People would be “ripping”, drinking, smoking, rapping, listening to music, watching television and just hanging out. Typically, I was the only white person in our group. If another white person was present, it most likely would be a female. To me, this was a very comfortable situation. At this point, I was more likely to notice a white person than any black person. Honestly, I did not see myself as an outsider. In fact, one day this guy named Worm was talking about white people to a few of his friends when I walked up. One of the guys was using gestures to indicate that I was listening. Worm looked at me and said, “Man, that’s just Bird, he is one of us”. He was exactly right; I saw myself as a black kid. With that said, I recognize the advantages that being white has given me throughout my
life. Although I grew up in the projects, I saw myself as a black kid, and was fully accepted by my black peers, no white person, including me, can fully understand the obstacles a poor black child encounters.

During this time, skinheads were prevalent in the areas surrounding Crawford Village. To me, they were the enemy and to them, I was black. I had several encounters with this group of misguided youth and young adults. One time, a guy in our neighborhood was found in his yard bloody and beaten. He was known as tough kid: facial hair in middle school, fathered a child before the end of his freshman year, and could beat adults down in a fight. Apparently, he was passing by a playground just outside of the projects near a large cemetery when he encountered this unruly group. They attacked him! They held him up while they took turns kicking him in the stomach and ribs. During the scuffle, he was able to get a piece of glass in his hand. He used it to cut one of the skinheads and escaped their grasp. His adrenaline failed him before he could make it to his apartment and he collapsed in the yard. Upon being found, he was rushed to the hospital. He physically recovered from the incident, but became completely antisocial.

A few days following the incident that left my peer battered, I had my first personal introduction to this group. My friend Walt, who was several years older than me, asked me to walk to the store with him. It was the middle of winter, but for people in the projects going to the store is an adventure. This was certainly going to be a memorable one. One lesson I learned from growing up in the projects was to always be prepared for the worse. Walt was going to stress this point during our
“quick run” to the store. When we got close to the store, we noticed a group of white boys standing by the payphone. As we got even closer, we recognized that they were skinheads. Although they did not say anything, their stares and nonverbal behavior told us there was going to be trouble. I was scared and my heart was racing, but I was not going to let them see it.

In the store, Walt told me that our shopping list had changed. Now, we were going to buy hairspray and lighters. “If those fuckers get close, we are going to burn their asses,” Walt said. The specific plan was for us to hold the lit lighter up with the hand close to the skinheads while spraying the hairspray with the other hand, basically we would be creating a flamethrower. Honestly, the plan made me feel safe. To deter them, so the firestorm would not be necessary, Walt noted that he was going to act crazy when we went outside. Once we stepped back into the cold winter air, I did not have any idea what to expect, but I was completely prepared to burn them. I was a 110 pound, 14-year-old boy who was caught in the middle of hatred.

After stepping through the door, Walt began to shout something like, “I am glad a brought my pistol with me tonight for these fucking white boys”, as he stared at them. I was nervous, but ready for whatever. Thankfully, his plan worked. We kept walking and they stayed put. Crossing back into Crawford Village gave both of us a sense of relief. We contemplated getting some friends and going back to the store; however, we decided to chill.

After turning 15, I began working at a catering place in the next town over, White Oak. Most days, I had to walk to work because Ronnie would not give me a
ride. The place is a few miles away, which made the walk horrible in the winter.

One relatively warm Saturday morning, I began my trek to work. When I approached a gas station, I noticed two males and one female skinhead. I told myself to just keep walking, this will not be a problem because I am white and I am by myself. To be safe, I stayed on the sidewalk on the other side of the street. Unfortunately, they either recognized me or my “projectness” was apparent. They liked to emotionally screw with people as much as they did to physically attack them. They called across the street, “Hey man, where are you from”? I just kept walking. They crossed the street and started laughing and making comments. One of them said, “Do you like those niggers”? Another said, “I think he wants to be a nigger”! Sensing that they were getting closer, I stopped to talk to an older man working on his house. I was hoping this would get them to stop. The old guy said, “Look kid, I don’t want any trouble”. Wow! Now, I had to come up with another plan. They were probably 30 feet behind me when I stopped to talk to the old guy. I turned around to check their whereabouts. They said, “Come here and talk to us”. I do not know what their intentions were, but I did not want to find out. They could have been trying to recruit me or they could have been setting me up for a beating. Needless to say, I was not interested in finding out. I noticed an alley next to the old guy’s house. I responded to their request with, “Go fuck yourself!” and ran as quick as I could for the alley. After running for a minute, I turned back and saw them standing at the beginning of the alley laughing. I walked to work angry with myself for running like a coward.
Life in the projects is vastly different than it is in suburbia. Although my early years in the projects were filled with personal violence, my teenage years were full of other kinds of challenges. The most challenging was not letting the things my eyes were seeing permanently alter my consciousness.

One day when I was walking to school, I saw a few kids looking into a dumpster and making faces. As I was approaching, adults were coming closer to see what was going on. I walked quickly so that I could check it out before we were chased away. I wish I were not so curious! It was a naked woman lying face down! Later, I heard that the lady was raped, murdered, and tossed in the dumpster with the trash.

Another time, when I was a teenager, I was outside hanging out with a group of kids, when we witnessed something strangely normal... a person in complete panic. As we were talking, a woman ran full speed through a screen door ripping in off of the hinges. She was screaming hysterically. We watched as some of her acquaintance came to check on her. They went back in the house and all of them came out crying and yelling at the same time. We continued to watch as the police arrived. Later, the police removed a dead body from the apartment. This apartment was directly behind my apartment. My mother claims to have heard some ruckus the night before, but did not call the police because there was always fighting at the apartment. Honestly, I am glad that she did not interfere because there would have been repercussions for her involvement.
I found a bag of cocaine on the way to school. I saw a bag with white powder and retrieved it. I took it home for my mother to inspect. To my surprise, she called the police. They confirmed that it was cocaine and left after a few questions. When my uncle came to our house, later that day, he was upset that we turned the cocaine into the police. What about, “Good job”!

Probably the most disturbing thing I ever witnessed firsthand was a vicious and gross random attack in the middle of a field. A white man was walking past a bus stop near an open field by the rent office. A group of young black males asked him if he had a dollar. When the man responded that he did not have any money, the group of guys started following him and taunting him. The man started to walk faster, but the group surrounded him once he was in the middle of the open field. The group hit him several times before throwing him to the ground and kicking him repeatedly. Then, several people unzipped their pants and began urinating on the man as he laid helplessly on the ground. Sadly, I watched this event occur, but did not call the police or seek help to intervene. Honestly, those efforts would have been pointless and could have caused trouble for my family.

Chapter 3: Comments

As a school psychologist I remember walking into the main office of the school and saw a student I knew waiting outside of the assistant principal’s office. He was looking down with a very angry look on his face and his body appeared very tense. I asked the assistant principal if there was any way I could help. She told me that the student was refusing to work for the teacher, pushing items off of his desk,
and refusing to speak to her. As I walked out of her office to speak to the student, I noticed that he was wearing cleats. I immediately knew the problem. I asked the student to talk with me in my office and he complied. After sitting down, I said, “You are mad about the shoes, right?” Tears came to his eyes. I went to one of the special education teachers who had an older son and asked if she had a pair of shoes that this student could borrow. With permission from the assistant principal, the special education teacher went home and brought a pair of almost new tennis shoes back for the student. There were no further incidents the rest of that day and very few for the remainder of the school year. Barnett, Christian, Hughes, & Wallace (2010) note that social injustices exist in the different approaches to dealing with students from different socioeconomic statuses. I contend that one of these injustices is the misunderstanding of silence; both silent students and quiet problems.

In many cases, students from lower socioeconomic status households are believed to be more likely to exhibit acting out behaviors, but most of the problems they face are quiet problems (Weissbourd, 2009). Some of these problems are medical conditions (e.g., dehydration, obesity, sensory problems), psychological problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, attachment issues, sleep deprivation), or environmental (e.g., limited access to technology, uninvolved parent, poor living conditions). According to Weissbourd (2009), 30 to 60 percent of low socioeconomic status parents will suffer from depression versus 10 to 20 percent of their middle class peers. Inasmuch, the role models for socially appropriate behavior for students can be greatly different depending on their socioeconomic status. Teachers are more
likely to be aware of loud problems impacting acting out students, but less likely to recognize the quiet problems of silent students. Although there are several initiatives schools can do to assist these students, the first line of defense is to have classrooms that have great instruction. Students with the quiet problems noted above do significantly better in engaging classrooms (Weissbourd, 2009).

To assist students with quiet problems, school districts could assist parents with housing problems by employing or contracting with social workers. This could impact attendance and reduce the number of times students transfer between school districts. To address the inadequate healthcare faced by students from low socioeconomic households, school districts should consider working with local clinics and healthcare providers to provide supplemental services including health, vision, and hearing screenings. School districts could also provide campaigns or workshops to communicate the importance of issues like sleep, reading with parent, and nutrition. In general, the most important thing educators can do is build a trusting relationship with parents and effectively include them in the school environment (Weissbourd, 2009).

Schultz (2010) reports that students might be silent for a variety of reasons including power, protection, to hide academic weaknesses, different cultural norms, or safeguard secrets. Inasmuch, teachers need to investigate the reason for a student’s silence. In general, some students could be members of groups (e.g., low socioeconomic status, disabled, minority, etc.) that have been silenced by social injustices and others could be silent because of individual circumstances. Although
many teachers reward immediate responses, knowing the reason for a student’s silence will better enable teachers to meet each student’s needs. In some cases, silence could simply mean that a student is engaged and needs time to formulate a good response (Schultz). To effectively address silence, teachers could use direct instruction to teach the different meanings of silence and subsequently setup a classroom that promotes and reinforces appropriate uses of silence. An inappropriate use of silence would be using it as a way to avoid learning. Again, it is important for teachers to assess the meaning of silence. Schultz notes that the use of videotapes and movies could be effective resources while teaching about silence. Respecting and understanding silence will allow teacher to have an equitable and more engaged classroom (Schultz).

Teachers must be aware that students raised in poverty might be raised in a culture of silence. This means they might have been taught to not “snitch” on others even if a crime has been committed. Talking to authorities or people outside of the incident could be perceived as weakness or aiding the adversary. Another possibility is that the student does not provide information out of fear of retaliation. Given the culture of silence, teachers should look at the totality of information before making decisions. Also, I recommend not asking for sensitive information in the presence of other people. If the code of silence is a factor for a student, the presence of others, especially peers, could turn a refusal to talk into an aggressive response.
Chapter 3: Questions for Discussion

1. What quiet problems have you encountered? How did you address these problems?

2. How can you effectively use silence in your classroom or school?

3. What programs are available in your school/district to handle quiet problems?
CHAPTER 4

When you have a group of people who have been raised by parents with similar values, only interacting with each other, they reinforce and strengthen those values. Although I love my childhood friends, we were not going to get out of the projects unless we were provided with an alternative way of thinking. We needed a different set of values. We needed to know that there was a different way to live our lives.

As I began high school, I was still hanging out with guys much older than me. Despite this company, I always refused to drink, smoke, or do any drugs. To me, I did not want to be like the people in my life, so I did not do the things they did. I earned a reputation as the guy who “didn’t do that”. In fact, my friends would say something to people offering or talking about these substances before I did. With that said, looking back, I know that it was just a matter of time before these influences would have taken over.

Near the end of my time with the older crew, we were starting to escalate our delinquent behavior. We were spending a lot more time together instead of going home. Sometimes, we would spend days out at somebody’s apartment. I would tell my mother I was spending the night at a friend’s house and she did not ask any more questions. Many of these outings began to include girls. This was a crazy time. One day, we were at these two white girls’ (sisters) house hanging out because their dad was supposed to be out of town. They did not live in the projects and their dad did not approve of interracial dating. A neighbor must have called the guy and told him
that a gang of kids were in his house. After being there for a couple of hours, the guy came storming in, “I just called the police and all of your asses are going to be arrested”! We fled the house as quickly as possible. People were jumping from the back porch, down stairs, and knocking each other to get out of the doors. I think we were fleeing for the amusement more than out of fear. Once we regrouped outside of the house, we were laughing and ripping on each other’s responses when that guy came in. Apparently, one of the guys was about to have sex with one of his daughters. Anyway, this is just an example of the things we were doing on a daily basis.

My final party with the group could have ended in disaster. Walt’s aunt left her apartment to him, when she went to visit her relatives out of state. We were very excited about our new hangout spot. There were a lot of people staying in this one little apartment. The first night, a couple of the drunk kids dared each other to run around the circle (the street surrounding a group of row houses) in underwear. Mostly, other than drinking, it was a relatively innocent night. The next two nights seemed to include more and more people. There was a lot of drinking, smoking weed, and sex.

During the evening of the second night, we all gathered on the porch while a huge fight broke out on the street. Two families were in full fledge war. Women, men, and teenagers were involved. They were using objects to hit each other! The fight must have involved twenty people. We did not call the police and neither did anybody else. Instead, we viewed the fight as entertainment. The fight ended with a
lot of threats back and forth, people bleeding, and other’s looking for lost clothing and jewelry.

We resumed our party back in the apartment. That night, I went home to get some clothes. When I walked in my apartment, my mother was sitting at the kitchen table. She stood up and grabbed my face. She kept looking at my eyes. Then, she told me to breathe on her. After letting her check my breath, she started to cry. She said, “I don’t want you to ever do that shit”! I told her, “I won’t”. I told her I was going back to my friend’s house. She told me I was not going to hang out with “those kids”. I went to leave and she grabbed me. When I turned to face her, she slapped me across the face. Unlike my brother and sister, I did not cry anymore when she hit me. I just stared at her. This made her very angry and she attempted to slap me again. I grabbed her arm, pushed it down, and walked out of the apartment while she was crying. This was the last time she ever hit me.

I remember how people looked at us in stores, public transportation, and on the streets. In the projects, we were looked as just another group of kids. Outside of our brick walls, we were looked at with a variety of looks including, fear, disgust, and sympathy. One look that I hated and still impacts my behavior today is the response of employees at stores. Specifically, the stores at the mall got under my skin. They looked at us like a pack of thieves looking to invade their store. I must admit; I did hang out with a few thieves in my childhood. One girl used to wear baggy pants into the store, then put on several pairs underneath, after removing the security tag. With that said, for the most part, we did not steal. I have never stolen anything in my life.
Today, I still feel like the store clerks are looking at me like they did when my group rolled into the store. This is a cognitive and emotional battle I engage in before responding to their inquiries for help. On a bad day, my previous life experiences cause me to respond in a rude manner, which is very embarrassing for me and my wife.

The final incident before my life took a drastic change occurred while walking home from playing basketball. A few weeks before this memorable day, I broke up with a girl and she became really upset. She threatened to get her much older brother, a known drug dealer, to "get me". I had my friends with me, so I was not really worried. Around this same time, I started to spend some time hanging out with a boy named Bud. Bud and I were with a few other kids, when we were walking past a group of boys our age. A relatively small guy named Ced started talking nonsense to me about the girl I just broke up with. When he started to cross the street, I did the same. As we began to square off and talk trash to each other, I noticed that he had his hand behind his back. Finally, he pulled it from behind his back as I got closer. He said, "I am going to cut you up motherfucker." He was holding a surgical knife. I ran from him. He was probably faster, but the knife gave me a boost of motivation to flee. I ran into my apartment and slammed the door. I instantly began looking for something to go back out and get him with. My mother immediately called the cops. She began begging me to stop. For once, I listened to her. The cops came and asked me about the incident. My mom told me to call Bud and tell him to come over and tell the police what he saw. Bud told me that he did not want to get involved. He did
not want to get hurt and we just started hanging out. Although I understood his reasoning, I was very angry with him. When the cops came, I would not talk. They told me they could not do anything to help, if I did not give them any information. To get them to leave me alone, I just said that we were going to fight and I ran home because I was scared.

I did not want the cops involved because I wanted to get him myself. I planned on getting him in a very violently manner. He lived in the same building as I did, so I was planning to rush him outside when he was not expecting it. My plan was to use a baseball bat. That night, while I was watching television, there was a knock at the front door. My mother answered it and called me to the kitchen. It was Ced’s older brother, John. John was a little bit older than me. We were cool. John asked me what happened. After I told him everything that was going on, he told me, “It’s over with; you don’t need to worry about anything. I am going take care of him when I get home.” He asked me if I was “cool” and I said, “yes.” This brought me a sense of relief. I saw Ced many times after this incident; neither of us ever spoke a word about it. It was like it never happened.

My anger at Bud about not getting involved quickly was replaced with missing his friendship. Also, I realized that my life came very close to being drastically changed or ended. We started hanging out more and my life changed forever.

Bud and his family lived in the projects as well, but they were different than the rest of my friends and their families. Most obvious, Bud’s father lived with them.
I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the kindness and love that Bud’s parents, Bev and Steve, showed me through my high school years. They were like my parents. They opened their home and hearts to me. They showed me how a family should love and respect each other. They showed me what normal looked like. They raised a kid who changed the course of my life.

After beginning to hang out with Bud, I stopped hanging out with my old crew. I still saw them when I played basketball and around the projects, but I did not have any interest in our old activities. This change did not create any tension between us. Bud had no interests in any of the typical misbehaviors of teenagers. In fact, he made being straight kind of cool. He was really good at sports, liked the same music, playing video games, and liked to rip on people just like my old crew. We just did these things without hurting others, damaging property, or otherwise being unruly.

A few days after we started hanging out, I got angry about something while we were playing a videogame in his room. I pushed him and began to scream at him to fight me. He would not, but he did not seem scared either. In fact, he was smiling, which made me even angrier. His dad came into the room and told me to go home. I left their house pissed. I felt stupid. I wanted to fight the most positive person in my life. I thought he would not speak to me again or that his parents would not let him. To my surprise, he showed up the next day and asked me to play ball. I was so happy to see him.

At dinner, I ate a lot of meals at Bud’s house, his parents told me they were not going to allow any fighting in their house. I knew that I disappointed them and
that hurt me. We never came close to fighting again. Shortly after our friendship began, Bud’s family bought a house and moved out of the projects. Luckily, they did not move far.

I spent so much time at Bud’s house that it felt like I moved. I probably spent two or three nights a week at his house and nearly every day. His house was calm, which I loved. One of my favorite things about his home was that they all ate dinner together and appeared to enjoy each other’s company. When Bud’s dad asked us to help in the yard and other jobs, Bud would become frustrated. On the other hand, I loved it. I never had a father, so I loved the attention. Also, I loved learning how to do new things.

My tenth and eleventh grade years were pretty much unremarkable. I did well in my classes at school. Out of school, I spent most of my time at Bud’s house or at work. I started working in ninth grade and I have not been unemployed since. Bud worked at the same catering place as I did. The distance between me and my family became great now. I could not relate to them and they could not relate to me. The nights I spent at our apartment were used for only sleeping. I think my mother realized that spending time away from the projects was the best thing for me, so she did not question my time away. On the other hand, she also did not ask questions about work or school either. In fact, she stopped checking my report cards in elementary school. She would say, “I know you did good, just sign my name.” This used to bother me because I was looking for praise and confirmation. By the time I
was in high school, I did not even mention school to her and I did not care about getting praise from her.

During these calm years, Bud and I played basketball for the recreation center in Crawford Village. Bud was good at basketball; however, he was very humble. He down played his own skills. I learned about humility from a boy the same age as me.

Although I enjoyed playing ball, I loved being a coach. The recreation director, Phil, asked me to coach and tutor at the center. I agreed. It was one of the best decisions of my young life. Since I lived in the projects so long, I did not have any problem being accepted into either role. I tutored during the week and coached games on Saturday. I loved my team. I was the only white person in the little kid league, but it did not matter. I used my money from the catering place to pay for drinks and snacks for my team. Also, I listened to their stories and gave them advice, but mostly I listened. I realized that we all had similar lives. My team lost in the championship game. It was heartbreaking and all my players cried. After the season was over, I had a party for them at my house. We ordered pizza, drank soda, and watched basketball bloopers.

My days as a basketball coach ended with one of the most touching acknowledgements of my life. We had a banquet for all the players to celebrate the success of the league. I was proud of each kid as he went up to accept his trophy. Little did I know that they all had a surprise for me! Phil started talking about a person and what they meant to the kids at the recreation center. Then, he announced
my name as the Coach of the Year! I was honored and humbled. This is still one of my most cherished accomplishments.

This accomplishment was only possible because of the stability Bud’s family provided for me as well as the opportunity Phil gave me. Kindness trickles down. The kids on my team got a much better version of me because of people taking time to invest in me. Ironically, my star player was Ced’s brother, Joey. We formed a tremendous bond. This was possible because his other brother, John, stopped the violence and hatred before it escalated out of control.

Chapter 4: Comments

The concept of mentoring is rooted in the research of Albert Bandura who discussed the importance of adults being positive role models and Urie Bronfenbrenner’s research on the impact of unconditional love (Dappen and Isernhagen, 2005; Frels, Onwuegbuzie, Bustamante, Garza, Nelson, Nichter, & Leggett, 2013). Dappen and Isernhagen also discuss research that has found having an adult who provides a child with unconditional love regardless of their behavior and academic performance have a positive impact. Overall, mentoring programs have been found to be an effective intervention strategy to improve the academic and behavior of at-risk students (Coller & Kuo, 2013). Students who participated in mentoring programs have improvements in internalizing behaviors (trust, confidence, etc.) and externalizing behaviors (less days absent, better grades, less aggression, etc.) (Dappen & Isernhagen). According to Coller and Kuo, “Several factors are associated with successful relationships, including setting clear visit expectations,
focusing on building trust and friendship, recruiting mentors with experience working with children, providing adequate mentor orientation and ongoing training, and facilitating mentors’ feelings of effectiveness” (p. 316). Additionally, they reported that the length of time the relationship remains between the mentor and mentee is an important predictor of successful outcomes. When mentoring programs fail it typically is a result of poor planning, lack of training, or a weak commitment by mentors (Frels et al.). Although males have the most significant positive outcomes when provided with a male mentor, male mentors are very difficult to recruit (Coller & Kuo).

Mentoring programs and involvement in community activities are very important for students raised in poverty. If students do not feel connected to a positive group, they will seek connectedness out from other sources. Mentoring programs, although very important, need to be well planned and organizers need to be aware of successful models (Frels et al., 2013). For me, once I was accepted by Bud’s family and Phil, I almost immediately stopped my daily association with my peers who were involved in more deviant behavior. Community groups and schools need to assure that students raised in poverty are aware of opportunities, make opportunities accessible, and actively encourage participation. Although Phil fulfilled this need for me, nobody from my high school ever even acknowledged my potential. In fact, despite having good grades and behaving well in high school, I was never approached by a teacher, guidance counselor, or administrator to talk about
postsecondary plans. I thought college was impossible for kids like me and nobody ever told me differently.

It is important that mentoring programs foster relationships between mentors and mentees that go beyond the scope of school (Frels et al., 2013). Like Dappen and Isernhagen (2005), Frels et al. report that mentors can be impactful if they take time to listen to students and learn about their unique needs. In contrast, if mentors begin a relationship with students and do not honor their commitment or are very inconsistent in their relationship, there could be negative outcomes for the student (Frels et al.). In addition to showing up on a consistent basis and listening to students, Frels et al. report that it is beneficial for mentors to have self-disclosure and generally be open with students. Overall, the building of a relationship between mentor and mentee was the single most powerful predictor of the success of a mentoring program.

I have been mentoring two brothers, Skyler who is six years old and Ta’Maj who is eight for two years. Being their mentor has been one of the most rewarding endeavors of my life. Skyler and Ta’Maj live at home with the parents. Their mom works inconsistently and their dad is chronically unemployed. The boys have five siblings who live in the small dilapidated house with them. When I met Skyler, he was having both behavior and academic difficulties at school. Ta’Maj had a few behavior issues, but was a grade behind academically. Given my personal life and my training as a school psychologist, I knew that I needed to build a relationship with Skyler and Ta’Maj before introducing any specific academic interventions. Actually, I was hopeful that developing a genuine relationship would be enough to take care of
their needs at school. I meet with them separately during my lunch hour every week. If I have to miss a day, I reschedule for another day that week or have my wife meet with them during our regularly scheduled visit.

Their teachers communicate all of their needs with me at school including behavior, academic performance, fieldtrip cost, etc. I bring these needs to their parents’ attention. If their parents cannot or will not take care of the presenting issue, I take care of it. During our weekly visit, I bring them lunch, talk, listen, and play games. Last year, we played a variety of games and sports, but this year we are playing checkers and chess to disguise the teaching of specific skills. Skyler and Ta’Maj have spent the night at my house on several occasions as well as holidays. In summary, the most important things I do for Skyler and Ta’Maj is show them that I care. As of now, both boys’ behavior is great at school and academics have improved significantly. Ta’Maj made the principal’s list this semester.

We all have influence over each other’s lives. Our behavior can either be a positive influence or a negative influence and the magnitude may vary, but we are influential. From my perspective, teachers must teach students not only academic skills, but directly teach social skills as well as role model appropriate behavior. Our job is teaching, not teaching reading, math, writing, it is to teach, period.

Teachers can have an impact on the education outcomes for children raised in poverty by acting as mentors (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Knoell & Crow, 2013). Specifically, when students have a positive relationship with a teacher they are more likely to behave well at school and perform better academically. Despite this reality,
while as likely as their middle class peers to perceive teachers as caring about their school performance, students raised in poverty are significantly less likely to perceive their teachers as being influential in activities outside of school (Knoell & Crow). Knoell and Crow report that this perception is likely rooted in the poor development of interpersonal skills and lack of trust among children raised in poverty. Teachers and administrators can have a more holistic impact on students raised in poverty if they take on the role of mentor and get to know the children and families they serve on a personal level.

It is extremely important that all children have adults who care about them. Adults should not assume that children have this need met by the parents. As I have stated many times, I am completely convinced that Ms. Nancy Swanson is the only reason I graduated high school, college, and graduate school. As advocates for students, teachers might put huge emotional investments into students and never see the fruits of their labor. Additionally, many of their efforts might not lead to positive outcomes. To me, if each educator reaches just one student, our communities, states, and country will be a better place for all of us.

Chapter 4: Questions for Discussion


2. What mentoring programs are available at your school and/or community?

3. How have you been impacted by a mentor?
CHAPTER 5

More organized gangs started moving into the projects during my last couple of years of high school. Our town in general, and Crawford Village in particular, were claiming to be Bloods. Although I was never approached about being in a gang, many of my childhood friends were beginning to live that life. To me, they were just the guys I grew up with and they did not treat me any differently. Unfortunately for my family, we lived across from two families that recently moved into Crawford Village. Thresea’s family also lived in that building. Her oldest son, David, and I still were friends and he cut my hair. The “new” families were claiming to be Crips, which is the rival gang of the Bloods. Their friends from their previous neighborhood, would come and hangout with them. These guys liked trouble.

One day, one of my friends was at my house hanging out. To my knowledge, he was not in the Bloods; however, he spent a lot of time hanging out with guys who were involved with the gang. Anyway, this group of Crips saw him enter my apartment. They were outside throwing up gang signs when we would look out the window. He stayed in my apartment for hours. Later that evening, we did not see any of them outside, so he made a run for it. Luckily, he was not caught! We did not call the police for things like this because we perceived it as pointless.

The next day, I got a crazy call from Bud! He was very upset about something. He told me some guys tried to jump him while he was walking home from my house. He told me that the guys were trying to take his Starter jacket. He got away from the guys and ran to his house. Honestly, hearing the panic in his voice
made me want to do something drastic. I immediately went to his house. Bud had no
interest in retaliating. Plus, he did not even know who the guys were, supposedly.
Again, he made the right decision and kept me from doing something stupid.

After returning home one day from work, as I was getting out of my car, I
noticed a mob of kids chasing two kids down the street in front of my house. I did
not recognize the two white boys being chased, but some of the other guys were
friends with the Crips who moved into Crawford Village. They caught the guys near
a path in the woods by my apartment. The apartment I lived in now was the last one
before a group of houses. I immediately, without thinking, ran over to the fight.
When I came up on the beat down, one of the boys freed himself and ran down the
hill, leaving his buddy to fend for himself. I walked up closely to the guys beating on
the boy on the ground. I did not have a plan. I just cannot watch someone being hurt.
They stopped and looked at me. One of them said, “What are you going to do,
bitch?!” Before I could say anything, the boy on the ground fled down the path and
out of the projects. As this group turned its focus to me, I could hear my mother
screaming for me to come back to the apartment. Of course, they started to talk trash
about her. Just when I thought things were going to turn really ugly, David came up
behind me. He said, “Bird go home!” I heard them fussing with him after I left. He
was apparently apart of this group. I was totally shocked. When he came over to cut
my hair a few weeks later, I could not wait to ask him what the hell was happening.
He told me that those white kids had been coming by and making racial remarks. On
that day, they were caught off guard while walking on the street behind the projects,
where I lived. At that moment, I felt terrible because I risked my neck for these racist kids. Now, I am proud that I stopped violence for at least one day for one group of kids.

This group wanted to make my life hell. Bud stopped coming to my house unless he had a ride. Most troubling, he used to meet me at my house to walk to school, but stopped because of these guys. Now, I met him a few streets from my house.

Things reached a boiling point the winter of my senior year of high school. I was coming home from coaching basketball, when I saw a group of them on the sidewalk getting into a car. I looked straight ahead and kept walking. As I was passing them, they grabbed me and asked if I was a slob (the derogatory name for a Blood). As in most of these situations, I did not say anything. They told me take off my slob colors! I was wearing red sweatpants. Before I knew it, one of them was trying to pull my pants down. As I pulled away, one of them threw a punch that mostly slipped, but grazed my chin. We stumbled off the curb and into the street. I quickly got my bearings back and knew that I needed to get to safe ground, which would be anywhere in Crawford Village except the last two row houses! To my amazement, they did not even chase me. Of course, they did not want to wander too far away from their base. I ran down into the circle (the middle of Crawford Village), but I did not talk to anybody. I took another route to my house while looking out for those guys. Vengeance was on my mind, but I could not fight all of them at once. As soon as I got home, I called my friend and told him what happened. I told him we
need to get these “bastards”. I was tired of being scared. I asked him if he know where to get a gun. While I was talking to him, somebody asked who he was talking to. He told them and then we resumed our conversation. A few minutes later, there was a frantic knock on our front door. My Marine Corps recruiter came in took the phone and told me to sit my ass on the couch! Six months earlier, I joined the Marine Corps poolee program. He told me that I needed to call him and not some boy down the street! Sgt. Wells told me, “The Marine Corps is your family now!” He said, “You need to be focused on getting the hell out of this place.” He was at my friend’s apartment to talk to him about joining the Marine Corps when I called to ask about a gun. Once he knew it was me on the phone, he immediately came to my apartment. My friend was focused on our conversation and forgot to tell me that he stormed out of his apartment.

At school, all my Crawford Village friends were asking me about my run in with the Crips. I acted like I did not care about it, but deep down inside I wanted something bad to happen to these guys. They were terrorizing my family and preventing my friends from coming to my house. With that said, I was not prepared for what was about to happen.

A short time after my run-in with this group of Crips, some rival Blood members decided to try and chase them from our neighborhood. My grandmother was visiting us from South Carolina and she was not prepared for the project lifestyle. On this unforgettable evening, I went to bed relatively early. Around midnight, my grandmother woke me up by shaking me and screaming. She was crying hysterically.
I jumped up and tried to figure out what was going on. When I got downstairs of our apartment, my mother was sitting in the doorway holding a bloody teenaged girl. I later found out that my mother ran from our apartment and dragged the girl in after she was shot near the next building outside of Thresea’s apartment. Unfortunately, the girl was standing in the wrong place, when some teenagers drove up to the end of our row house and began shooting at a crowd of Crips. My grandmother said there were so many shots that when she looked out the window the night sky appeared to turn to daylight. The sad thing is I stayed a sleep until my grandmother woke me up most likely because it was not that uncommon to hear these types of things. My grandmother told my mother that she had to move to South Carolina or she would never speak to her again. My mother moved, but I moved in with a relative to finish my senior year.

I graduated high school that spring. My mother and grandparents drove from South Carolina to attend the ceremony. I was only the third person in three generations (possibly more) to graduate from high school. For over a year, I knew that graduation would be followed by time in the military. I wanted to serve my country, but I also wanted to get as far from Crawford Village as possible. I left for basic training a few days after I graduated from high school. While most of my friends were preparing for a wild summer, I was going to learn how to become disciplined and respectable young man.
Chapter 5: Comments

For students being raised in poverty, direct and indirect gang influence is a reality that educators need to be aware of. When working with students raised in poverty, educators should be aware of gang cultures. Additionally, students who witness violent acts and come from low socioeconomic households are more likely to become gang members (Lenzi, Sharkey, Vieno, Mayworm, Dougherty, & Nylund-Gibson, 2014). If a student has both risk factors, low socioeconomic and witnessing violent activity, one can deduct that they are at greater risk for joining a gang.

Personally, I had both of these risk factors, but never joined a gang whereas many of my peers did join. Lenzi et al. (2014) report that there are preventive factors that explain why a student would choose not to become a gang member. Students who attend schools perceived as safe by the majority of students, students who have empathy, students who have friends that do not participate in delinquent behavior, and students who have parents who are supportive are less likely to join a gang. Interestingly, the student body and individual perceptions of an unsafe school was a predictor of gang affiliation after controlling for empathy, parental support, and delinquent peers (Lenzi et al.).

Lenzi et al. (2014) note that the physical presence of safety measures like security guards and metal detectors negatively impacts students’ perception of the school’s overall safety. Inasmuch, to reduce the likelihood of joining a gang, administrators and teachers are handcuffed with the trying to create the perception of a safe school while minimizing the number of physical deterrents that could signal an
unsafe school. During my junior and senior years of high school, students had to pass through a metal detector each day before entering school and the hallways were patrolled by security guards. I concur with these findings. My personal experience was that this level of security immediately signaled that our school was very dangerous despite not noticing a change in the daily behavior of students. Coincidently, perhaps, these are the years when I first recognized the presence of gangs in our community.

The association with delinquent peers increases the likelihood that students will join a gang (Lenzi et al., 2014). In my opinion, the most valuable social lesson educators can teach students is the importance of friend selection. I once heard that if you look at a person’s three close friends, you can make a lot of accurate conclusions about their character and behavior. I find this to be very true based on my own personal experiences and my professional work as an educator and advocate for children over the past fifteen years. Until I started hanging with Bud on regular basis, I was involved in delinquent behavior in the community and so were my peers. Almost instantaneously, my delinquent behavior stopped after developing a close friendship with Bud, a non-delinquent peer.

In addition to creating a campaign to communicate the safety of their schools, administrators should consider using mentoring programs to combat gang membership as well as overall positive outcomes for students. Mentoring programs have been found to reduce delinquent behavior including gang membership (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2005). Also, school districts need to make professional development
that teaches about gang cultures as well as appropriate response by educators when confronted with gang information. All gangs should be taken seriously. It bothers me each time I hear a person respond to a gang or a gang member as a wannabe. If a kid is claiming to be a gang member, the last thing the community or adults need to do is insult him or her, which could lead to desire to prove themselves. Training provided to educators should come from a person with firsthand knowledge and experience of gang culture.

During my first year as a school psychologist, a special education teacher requested a functional behavior assessment of a fourth grade student who was constantly off task (making noises, drawing constantly, and refusing to complete tasks). At the beginning of my observation, the student was tapping on his desk rapping (making noises) and drawing. When I walked by his desk to look at what he was drawing, I immediately noticed that “drawings” were gang related. The teacher was completely naïve to this student’s behavior being an indicator of gang involvement. After discussing this student with the principal and other administrators, I was informed that his older brother was a leader of small local gang. Of course, the intervention for off-task behavior and gang involvement are completely different.

Gang membership is most likely to be sought by minority males under the age of nineteen years old (Gillman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2014). Decreasing gang involvement cannot only impact students’ immediate situation (behavior and grades), but also improve overall life outcomes. Specifically, Gillman et al. (2014) found that
gang membership during adolescence was a significant predictor of poorer mental health, poorer physical health, increased likelihood of receiving income from criminal activity, higher rates of unemployment, and less formal education. Given that initial gang membership rarely happens after the teenage years and the amount of time teenagers spend in school; administrators and teachers are a valuable resource in combating gang affiliation and subsequent behaviors. Schools should consider implementing programs that have been shown to impact students at-risk for joining gangs. For example, Koffman, Ray, Berg, Covington, Albarran, and Vasquez (2009) investigated the effectiveness of The Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program (JIPP), a gang intervention and prevention program in Los Angeles, and found a decrease in the number of students reporting significant scores on a depression assessment, reduction in the number of days of suspension, and academic improvement. JIPP is an 18-week long program that uses a holistic (physical training, psychosocial, soft skills, and parent involvement) approach to assisting at-risk adolescents.

Chapter 5: Questions for Discussion

1. How familiar are you with gang culture? Would you be able to recognize a student with gang affiliation?

2. What professional development opportunities are available in your school or district to discuss gangs?

3. Are gangs an issue in your community? If so, what programs are available to prevent gang membership?
Chapter 6

The United States Marine Corps changed my life forever. When I arrived on Parris Island, I did not know what to expect! As soon as the door of the bus opened and the drill instructors started barking orders, I knew that I was going to be mentally and physically challenged. If you have been to Marine Corps boot camp, you know exactly what I am talking about. If not, there are many books that describe the challenges of this process. I recommend that you read at least one of them to gain an appreciation of the sacrifice and challenges these young men and women face.

I was extremely quiet. Typically, I am very quiet in any new situation, but I was extremely quiet throughout boot camp. I was so quiet that the drill instructors would “thrash me” (physical training/punishment) because they said they did not know my name. They said, “We are going to thrash you until we know who you are!” “What is your name?!.” This was repeated over and over. One thing I immediately liked about the Marine Corps was that everybody was treated the same. Everybody was the same.

My favorite memory from boot camp was boxing. I used to be a boxing addict. I loved the training and I could not wait to fight somebody. A lot of guys talked about fighting and what they were going to do, but they lost their enthusiasm on the day we actually got to fight another platoon. We entered the ring by weight. I was around the tenth lightest recruit. Our platoon was getting destroyed. In fact, I think we lost all the fights before mine. The drill instructors were not happy. When it was my turn to enter the tiny square, the senior drill instructor was so disappointed that he
just grabbed my headgear and said, “Do something!” They just saw an extremely skinny redheaded white kid. They had no idea about the rage boiling below the surface. Before the referee could officially start the match, the other recruit punched me in the face. Now, I was really angry. When the whistle blew, I unleashed eighteen years of pure hatred on him. To stop the beating, I had him against the wall/rope and kept him upright with punches, one of the officials grabbed me. As I started walking away, the other recruit fell on the back of legs. My senior drill instructor was so pumped and shocked at what he witnessed. He started yelling, “That’s what I’m talking about. That’s how you fight.”

Boot camp ended with the development of a sense of pride. My mother and grandparents came the night before graduation to spend time with me. My grandfather immediately pointed out that I walked a lot “straighter”. I enjoyed seeing them and showing them the “new” me. The next day, following graduation, we traveled back to the small southern town that my grandparents lived in, where my mother moved during my senior year. I chose to stay with my grandparents because I could not stand being at my mother’s trailer. In fact, since she left Crawford Village, during my senior year of high school, I have never spent another night in her home.

My first stop on my Marine Corps tour was in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I went to infantry training school and specialized in mortars. We trained hard during “work hours” and had a little fun when we were off. The towns around military bases are typically sketchy places. This one is no exception. There were a lot of fights, prostitution, and other delinquent behaviors. People in the town were either catering
to marines, taking advantage of them, or just despised them. For example, once while walking down the street with some friends, cars drove by calling us jarheads and yelling obscenities.

A marine going through training with me was beaten by local thugs. In summary, a girl invited him back to a hotel room, but unbeknownst to him, she already had friends over. When the guy made it to the room, he was attacked by the girl’s friends. They beat him up and robbed him. Although I heard some crazy stories during my time at Camp Lejeune, I mostly kept a low profile.

After finishing infantry training school, I had to go to security forces training in Virginia. I found out in boot camp that my agreed upon assignment of security forces was only going to be for up to two years. That time would be followed by time in the infantry. My time at security forces training was unremarkable. It was a lot of weapons training and learning of tactical skills. Near the end of training, I found out that I was going to be sent Bangor, Washington near Seattle. This is a naval submarine base. My time there would certainly be remarkable.

I arrived to my first duty station excited, but I had no idea what chaos was in store for me. When you first get to this duty station, you must go through more training because you need to obtain top security clearance. Based on what I remember, I am sure I cannot tell anything about my job.

Although I cannot tell much about the work or the duty station, I can tell about the social parts of my time in Bangor. These are the more memorable events. All marines new to the base must go through an orientation process before they begin to
work. Most of them were also going through another type of orientation. Around this time, there was a lot of press about hazing in the military. This duty station was no exception. They had one particular kind of hazing ritual that is disturbing. It is called “tea bagging.” This is when several marines hold down a guy and another guy puts his testicles on the trapped marines face or head. A few of the guys in my orientation group talked about the things that were being done to them including “tea bagging.”

One night, I heard the marines doing the hazing a few doors down from my room. I was on my top bunk watching television when I heard laughter and some tussling going on the catwalk. I noticed that they were getting closer, so I knew they were getting the rest of the new guys. After a brief silence, I heard a very loud knock on our door. One of my roommates was home, so he went to open the door. As the door opened, I jumped from my bunk and grabbed a thick stick from my wall locker and got in a baseball stance. The guys stopped. They were laughing and threatening to do things to me, but I would not budge. With groups like this, they all want to participate, but nobody wants to lead the way. They could have hurt me; however, the first guy would have felt some pain. After this night, I was never approached by any group attempting to haze me.

A couple of nights after the attempted hazing, I was invited several rooms down to watch marine’s box each other in one of the small barrack rooms. The room was filled with marines drinking and cheering on two guys fighting between the sink and wall lockers. Once the first fight was over, a very annoying noncommissioned
officer (NCO) was calling me names and challenging me to a fight. Although I was very small at this time, this guy was not much bigger. He must have thought it was his lucky night. He thought wrong.

One guy in the room named Reno threw me some boxing gloves. I immediately stood up and put them on. Most of the new guys have to be forced to fight. I walked over to the designated fighting area to meet this annoying guy. He continued to taunt me. As soon as somebody yelled fight, we started to swing away. After only a few seconds of some violent exchanges, he turned his back and walked away. He went to the mirror to look at his face. He had blood coming from his nose and mouth. He spat the blood into the sink and rinsed his mouth out. Everybody was telling him to keep fighting, but he walked out of the room. I fought several more times that night and loved every minute of it. I was hooked!

That night led to a very strange relationship. I began training with a skinhead! Reno, the apparent organizer of the fights, asked me to come to his room to watch classic boxing matches. After talking for a while, we decided to start working out and training together. At first, I did not realize that he was a skinhead because all marines have short hair and we all wear the same clothes. Reno was a very interesting guy. Although he proclaimed not to like minorities, he followed black and Hispanic fighters very closely. He did not drink, smoke, and rarely used profanity. Also, he hated when people spoke with incorrect grammar. The rest of his crew were not like him.
The other skinheads at Bangor acted tough and said they liked to fight, but their actions were to the contrary. Reno and I started meeting in his room on the weekends to train while everybody else was out drinking and chasing girls. If we were not training in his room or at the gym, we were sparring at somebody’s apartment in town. It seemed like everything revolved around boxing.

I started to notice that Reno liked conflict in general whereas I mostly like to keep to myself. He did some crazy things! While we were hanging out one day on the catwalk, we saw this marine walking towards us. Reno asked, “Do you think I will punch him in the face?” I laughed and just brushed it off as nonsense. As the guy was passing by, Reno punched him in the face! The guy staggered, grabbed his face, and said, “What the hell, man?” Reno threw his hands up and said, “Come on!” The guy turned and walked away.

As we were sparring in his room one night, a guy looked in the room out of curiosity. Reno asked him to come in the room and spar. The guy laughed and said, “No.” Reno told him, “Get in here!” The guy turned to walk away and Reno went after him. The guy ran down the catwalk as Reno chased him yelling out insults. Luckily, the guy was fast enough to get away.

Another time, some local guys, supposedly gang members, came to the barracks to fight with marines on the first floor. When Reno heard the commotion, he hung from the second-floor catwalk, dropped to the ground, and got in the middle of the fight. He did not know what was going on or who was involved. I guess he just wanted to fight. This incident would come back to haunt him.
Leaving the base with Reno and his guys was insane. Most of the time I spent with Reno was on base; however, we left the gates a couple of times. Each time, I was embarrassed and nervous. The first time we left, we went to a concert. It was unlike anything that I ever saw before. There was a mosh pit! At the time, I almost exclusively listened to rap music. In the pit people were being extremely rough, but not nearly like Reno and company. One guy, in his crew, grabbed a boy crowd surfing and pulled him straight to the ground. His body violently slammed against the venue’s floor. A little while later, I saw Reno use a big skinhead as a battering ram. Also, Reno was hitting people in the face when they got close to him. He was especially attacking a group of guys known as SHARPS (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice). Eventually, we were warned that we would be asked to leave if the behavior kept up. A few minutes later, I noticed that Reno was missing. I went looking for him. One of the bouncers told me, “Your friend is out of here!” As he was talking, I noticed that Reno was near a door at the end of hall being pushed by three bouncers. Before I got to that area, they pushed him out the door. As they were trying to shut the door, his hand kept coming back through hitting them in the face. I went and told the other guys what happened. They did not seem to care about their friend. Where I am from, you reacted when something happens to your friends! I went out the front door to see if he was okay. He was pacing up and down the sidewalk mumbling about fighting the bouncers. After another discussion with the other guys, they finally left the concert and we returned to the base.
During our first outing, we did not see many people other than those at the concert. The next time, we stopped by other business and I was completely embarrassed and I felt like a sellout. We were heading to a party off base with other marines. I rode with this group. Before getting to the party, we stopped at a restaurant. I noticed that everybody was staring at us and they most likely thought that I was one of these guys. Up to this point, I did not take time to think about the ramifications for being with them. To me, they were marines who liked boxing. To the world they were racist. I did not dress like them, talk like them, think like them, or have anything in common except liking boxing. That did not matter to the public.

After leaving the party, we were crossing the water on a ferry. On the boat, the skinheads had several verbal encounters with a few minority groups. Thankfully, a fight never happened. We had another close encounter on the ride home. We stopped at a red light in a mostly Hispanic community. Several of us were riding in the back of a pickup truck. Reno yelled a few racial comments to some guys standing outside of a bar. The guys started walking toward the truck. I was hoping the light would turn green! It did, but the driver did not move. Reno stood up with a chain and began swinging it. The guys kept coming. Finally, the driver came to his senses and drove away, quickly! I decided this would be the last time I would be in public with these guys. I had little fear of fights, but I had no interests in fighting alongside this group.

Despite my decision to never leave the base again with them, I continued to box with them. Honestly, I got some sick pleasure from sparring with most of them.
This was a nice bonus in addition to sharpening my skills. With Reno though, I felt a connection. I saw him as product of his environment. He was raised to be this way. I did not look at him as being a skinhead any differently than I looked at my childhood friends for being Bloods. I did not let either group influence who I was and neither group attempted to recruit me. When I first met Reno, he would ask me, “Why do you listen to that shit!” I would ask him, “Why do you listen to that shit!”

After these early exchanges, our beliefs and preferences did not come up.

My best friend at Bangor was my roommate Peter Luong, who was Vietnamese. Interesting, I know. My other good friends were Rucker, black guy, and Craig, a white guy like me. As for Peter, he invited me to go home with him to California. One of Peter’s friends and I drove to San Jose with a marine going home on vacation. In San Jose, we caught a train leaving for Los Angeles.

We stayed with Peter at his home in Cerritos. His sister and her daughter as well as his brother lived in the house. His parents were living on the east coast and left the house to them. His family was nice. I loved California. The trip was going really well. I was attracted to Peter’s sister, but I did not give it much thought because it was his sister! One night, we all went out to dinner with a group of Peter’s friends and his sister’s friends. His sister and I really connected during this outing. This was the night before we were leaving to go back to Seattle. When we got back to their house, Doug was annoying Peter’s sister with his drunk behavior and advances. When he went to the bathroom, she told me how much he was bothering
her. I convinced him to go to bed. Linda and I stayed up most of the night talking. We exchanged numbers the next morning before Peter, Doug, and I left for Bangor.

Peter was my roommate, so we shared a phone. I decided the grownup thing to do was to tell him about our relationship. I asked Peter if he minded me dating his sister. He did not have any objections. She visited Seattle a few weeks later and our relationship grew stronger. When Reno asked about the trip, I told him that I was dating Luong’s sister. He did not say anything, but I can tell by the look on his face that he did not approve of the relationship. Our sparring was a lot harder that day.

As for boxing, our trainings were going well. Around this time, we received notification that an NCO, who was previously on the Marine Corps boxing team, was being transferred to Bangor. We were very excited. When he arrived, Reno did not even hesitate to discuss a boxing team despite finding out that he was black. We immediately talked to him about creating a boxing team on base. He was interested. We started training harder and deciding who was going to fight at what weight. The good news about the creation of a boxing team was amplified by the fact that Peter’s sister was going to be able to come to Seattle for the Marine Corp Ball. Things were going well.

The first sign of trouble literally punched me in the face. We were sparring at the base gym, which was not unusual as it is mostly used for lifting weights and racquetball. I was fighting a big skinhead named Rixman on one of the racquetball courts. He was out of my weight class, but I loved it. Shortly after we started, he hit me with a punch on the side of the nose. Blood went everywhere! After slowing the
blood, a little, we started sparring again. Before we could get going, a man came into
the room. I could tell that my bloody face and the blood on the wall and floor caught
his attention. He told us that he was a navy officer. First he asked me if I was okay.
I told him, “Everything is great.” Next, he told us we needed permission to be boxing
at the gym. Also, he told us about all the requirements for conducting such training.
We promptly left the gym and returned to the barracks. This would be our last
sparring session.

The next week, I was on duty in a restricted area. Each platoon must go there
for a designated amount of time each month. Typically, we are happy to leave. My
exit this week would not to be desired. While working out on break in the restricted
area, I was approached by a sergeant from another platoon. He told me to come with
him. Next, he told me to gather all my things and to turn over my weapon
immediately. He was very serious. The sergeant and two other marines, unfamiliar
to me, went with me to my area. They seized my weapon. I followed them out of the
restricted area to a van. Reno was in the van waiting for us with two other marines. I
noticed he had handcuffs on! Before getting in the van, the sergeant placed me in
handcuffs and read me my rights. He told me that he would not answer any of my
questions and neither would the other marines. We knew this guy, but he was acting
like we were strangers.

When we arrived back at the barracks, the other platoons were watching us
with a lot of curiosity. Some of them were hooting and hollering. Reno held his
cuffed hands in the air to a loud cheer. I just kept my head down. We were given a
list and told we had fifteen minutes to pack. An armed marine escorted us to our room. Following our packing, we were lead to an officer’s office. He told us we were under arrest for something like organizing unlawful events and misconduct. I do not remember the exact charges.

We got to the brig, late at night. We were treated like trash. Immediately, we were told that we needed to keep our fingers straight and our arms by our side. If our arms moved or our fingers curled, they were going to treat it as an act of aggression. After listening to their spill and answering a lot of questions, we were escorted to a long room with a shower in it. A sailor was waiting for us. Individually, he told us to strip and go down to the end with the shower. He first checked us for scars and tattoos. Next, he told me to face the wall, bend over and grab my ankles, and cough. This was one of the most humiliating moments in my life. I wanted to attack him, but I knew that would get me in more trouble.

After they inspected us thoroughly, we were put into solitary confinement. There was a window on the door, a small window at the top of the wall, a sink, bed, and a toilet. One of the most frustrating things about this ordeal was that nobody was talking to us or telling us anything. A few hours into my prison life, a sailor came to my cell and told me I could make a phone call. I walked up to the phone with the intention of calling my grandfather. I picked up the phone, but I did not dial anything. I put the phone back down and walked over to the sailor. He seemed angry and walked me back to my cell. I did not call because I did not know what to say. Also, I did not want anybody to think I did anything wrong.
We spent the rest of the first twenty-four hours in our cell. The second morning began with two sailors coming to my door. We had to stand at attention at the door when somebody came to it. Apparently, I had a disgusted look on my face because they felt the need to threaten me with further charges. This was followed by me and Reno being allowed to eat our breakfast at the same table outside of our cell, but we were not allowed to talk to each other. He was shivering and looked miserable. I asked the guard for a blanket and he snapped back at me that we were not allowed to talk.

The morning of the third day, we saw them bring in one of Reno’s friends, Kavanaugh. Now, I was beginning to wonder that this was all really about. That afternoon we were allowed our first visitors. My first visitors were Luong and Rucker. They were shocked that I was arrested. I told them that I did not know what was going on and that was the truth. As soon as I got back to my cell from visiting with them, I was called back out to visit with somebody. In the room was the commanding officer, Lt. Colonel Anderson. He asked me, “Do you have anything to say for myself?” I told him, “I don’t know why I am here, but I am willing to stay as long as it takes for “yinz” to figure out that I did not do anything wrong.” He said, “I was coming over here to talk with the staff about you and your buddies, when I saw Luong and Rucker leaving. They noted they were visiting you. That does not make any sense.” I told him they were my friends. He said, “You are in here because you are supposed to belong to a skinhead group that is forcing people to fight and hazing marines.” What?! “Sir, I am certainly not a skinhead”, I told him. “My girlfriend is
Luong’s sister and she was supposed to be coming to the Marine Corps ball.” He told me, “We made a mistake. You will be out of here in the morning.” I left promptly in the morning, but Reno, Kavanaugh, and others remained in the brig.

That morning, I reported to another officer, who will remain nameless, and he told me that he was not fooled by me. He told me that he was going to be watching everything I did. Also, I was not allowed to hold a weapon or report back to my security forces position until further notice. I spent a lot of days on fire watch. I was miserable. Reno and the other guys were released from jail a couple of weeks later. They were free, but they had consequences. They loss rank and had other nonjudicial punishments. Once they returned to the barracks, they told me what happened. Some marines were being investigated for Satanism or something like that. When the investigators entered their room to look for contraband, they started telling them stories about us making people fight. They also told them we were a gang. Although these particular guys had been invited to fight, they never participated. Reno wanted to attack one of the marines in this group. I convinced him that that would be a terrible mistake. During this time of fire watch and standing guard, Reno and I spent a lot of time together besides boxing.

As I suspected, he was a product of his environment. His father was a martial arts instructor who encouraged aggression and gave Reno the means to carry it out. Once you stripped away the layers of hatred and anger, he was not a bad guy. I explained my life to him, which I think gave him an understanding of who I am.
One night watching television, while on fire watch, my refusal to change my perspective and at the same time of accepting him, allowed Reno to let down his guard. A video with Janet Jackson came on. Reno said, “Man, she is hot!” He told me, “You better not tell anybody I said that.”

They gave me my weapon back and told me I could resume my duty. It appeared like things were about to get back to normal. Then, I was informed that I had orders to go to another duty station in California. I was pumped because I always wanted to live in California. Lt. Colonel Anderson sent for me to come to his office. He asked me, “Do you know why I let you out of jail?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “Because you told me that you were willing to stay in there until the case was resolved. I just knew you were telling the truth and you weren’t who they said you were.” He apologized for making me leave security forces early, but he thought that was the only way I was going to have a fresh start. I have never forgotten this man’s belief in me. More importantly, I am relieved that he saw through the false accusations and did not think that I had any hatred toward him or any other black person. Interestingly, only college educated white guys (USMC officers) connected me to the group. I guess they thought all poor whites are rednecks, white trash, or skinheads. I did not like middle class whites before my stay in Bangor, but now I began to hate this group of people.

My time as a mortar man with Golf 2/7 was filled with reading, working out, hanging out with a few friends, and taking my first college class. Although I took my first college class, my heart was still desiring to make the USMC boxing team and get
paid to fight. My unit was stationed in Twenty-Nine Palms, California, but we did a six-month deployment to Okinawa, Japan. Most of my time during these last two and half years was similar to the experience of most other marines with a couple of notable exceptions.

Before deploying to Japan, I heard that Reno was stationed at Camp Pendleton, California. My unit was going to Camp Pendleton for a final training before leaving the country, so I used the opportunity to look for him. Reno revealed that his rank had been reduced to private along with a transfer and other nonjudicial punishments. Apparently, all the marines who went to the brig with me received similar sentences. The area of the base that my unit was training at had a gym with a boxing ring and equipment, so we decided to train following all the rules this time. At the gym, we saw a sign that the gym was going to be holding a smoker, boxing competition, and the winner would be on the USMC team. I was very excited at the opportunity. Interestingly, Reno was not interested in competing; however, he was willing to train me. For two weeks, I sparred for hours after work with anybody who was willing to get into the ring. I was extremely sore and tired from all the training in addition to the normal workday of being in the USMC infantry.

The day before the competition, I had my final physical and completely lied about that way that I was feeling. Since nobody signed up to compete at my weight class, they scheduled me to fight a guy in the next division up. To deal with pain and discomfort of my sparring injuries, I decided that it would be a good idea to take some prescription pain medicine that was not prescribed to me, on fight day. I
wanted to make this team more than I ever wanted anything in my life. My girlfriend came to the base to watch the fight along with all my USMC friends. The little gym was packed and my fight was third. My opponent was a short stocky marine, which is my least favorite buddy type to fight. Anyway, I watched him during warmups and knew that the fight would be difficult, but I was confident that I would win.

Although the gym was small it was very crowded for the fight. The very short walk to the ring was one of the most exciting things I have ever experienced. I can only imagine what professional fighters must experience. Reno and another marine were in my corner. Most of the first round went according to plan. I was landing some really good punches that caused him to clench repeatedly. A few times, I thought he might actually go down, but he was extremely tough. As the second round started, my arms were not cooperating with my brain. I could get them up to cover up my face, but they felt extremely heavy and my punches, the few I could throw, had no snap on them. I do not know whether my predicament was created by the pain medication, fatigue, or my opponent's punches in the first round. I just knew that I was not going to quit or go down. I used my boxing experience and will to survive the final two rounds. I lost the decision two rounds to one.

After the fight, my group of friends were planning on going out to eat. While I showered to get ready to join them, I had an extremely loud ringing in my ears and my arms were heavy and tingling like never before. My dream of boxing for USMC went down the drain with the shower water. Strangely, given the way I physically felt, I was at peace with this reality. I decided during that shower that I wanted to
leave the USMC at the end of my active service and go to college. I wanted to be an agent in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Following dinner, I invited Reno to stay with me at my girlfriend’s house in Los Angeles. This was a big deal because she was Vietnamese. Shockingly, he agreed. Internally, I felt a great sense of accomplishment. I could not believe that my unwillingness to change and genuine acceptance of another person led to this outcome. The weekend was great and Reno never seemed uncomfortable or out of place. I am not certain that my behavior was the cause of this change in Reno’s overt behavior and I honestly do not care. I only care that for this brief time, he allowed himself to put away his hate and anger and experience another culture directly.

We did many trainings in the desert that kept us in the field for long periods of time. Marines celebrate each time they return to garrison and get any break to enjoy time away from duty. One of these exciting periods was interrupted by temporary confusion for me. Upon return to the barracks from the field, I was given a message that my father came by to see me. I told the marine giving me the message that he probably had the wrong guy because I did not have a father. He said the man was going to return in an hour. I continued to unpack my equipment and took a quick shower. My mind was consumed with thoughts of who the person was going to be. I knew there was no way possible that it was my alleged father. As I walked back into the duty room, I saw Pap, my grandfather. I was excited to see him, but completely confused about his visit.
We went to get dinner and he explained that he had messed up with my grandmother. Without sleep, he drove from South Carolina to California to visit me. In reality, he knew that I was his best chance at getting another opportunity with my grandmother. He told me that he cheated on my grandmother many years earlier and fathered a child. Out of tremendous guilt, he contacted his mistress and decided to move them to South Carolina to make amends. This daughter was now an adult. As one should expect, my grandmother became very upset and made him move out. I was not aware of any of this. After a few months living with his mistress and adult child, he wanted to be back with my grandmother. She was not receptive. Even in my youthful mind, I knew that he needed me. I called my grandmother and told her that Pap was with me and he told me everything. I listened to my grandmother cry for about an hour as she told me about how much my grandfather hurt her. I asked that she please give him another chance. By the end of the phone call, she agreed that he could come home, but she could not promise anything else. My grandfather knew that this was his last opportunity and said he was going to make it right. Since we had this matter settled, we booked my grandfather a room at the base hotel and spent the weekend hanging out with my friends. I have great memories from the time I spent with my grandfather over this weekend. For the first time in my life, he let his guard down and enjoyed himself.

I told my grandfather about my college class and he told me that there were several schools close to his house and said he would check them out for me. He encouraged me to apply to these schools and live with him after my service time was
over. With only a few months left, I thought this was a great idea. I was completely committed to making college the next step in my life. When I shared this news with my platoon sergeant, he said, “You know that every marine who gets out says they are going to school and most of them dropout or return to the Corps. Promise me, you won’t be one of those fucking guys.” I made this promise to a man I had tremendous respect for, so I knew there was no turning back. Although I did well academically in high school, I perceived college as being something very difficult for poor kids like me. I was terrified.

I had two months of leave days saved up, which allowed me to exit the military early. My grandmother and aunt flew to Las Vegas to join me on my cross country travel to South Carolina. We spent the weekend taking in all of the tourist attraction in the city. A few of my friends came to Vegas with me as a going away party. The finality to my USMC service was bitter sweet, but I knew that I had to move on.

Chapter 6: Comments

Racism, anger, hatred, aggression, etc. are all learned responses that can be changed. “Race affects us, and our students, at every level – social, economic, educational, emotional, and psychological” (Davis, 2016, p. 42). Sometimes, I hear people say, “I don’t see color” or “I don’t care if you are red, blue, green”, these statements are ridiculous to me. I see color. I appreciate color. I try to understand the societal differences based on color. To me, assuming that race is not a factor in most situation hinders progress. While I am certainly not suggesting that a person or
community should be consumed by racial issues, a lack of acknowledgment of the impact of racial relationships will ultimately slow or halt progression. Barnett, Christian, Hughes, and Wallace (2010) highlight the direct impact of using the “N” word, which I believe is typically presented indirectly. My experience is that people with racist views often substitute other words/terms such as “the brothers”, “homies”, “ghetto”, “thug”, etc. for the “N” word. Although the words are different, when they are used with the same hateful and condescending tone, the impact is still significant. In addition to hurtful words, Feldman (2001) reports that teachers and administrators need to be aware of racial differences in nonverbal behavior that could adversely impact the performance of students.

It is extremely important for educators to be aware of their own feelings and behavior towards people from different backgrounds (Davis, 2016; Feldman, 2001). I have met more than a few educators who were supposedly nonracist who expressed racist thoughts and language. Given that most teachers in America are white and that black students are disproportionately represented in academically weak groups of students; I think underlying racial issues can be a tremendous contributor to these outcomes. Inasmuch, it is pertinent that educators not only receive training on how to work with minority students, but also understand their own experiences with race and how it impacts their relationships with minority students (Davis, 2016). Furthermore, Davis (2016) notes that educators should have training in our country’s history with race relations.
In my life, I have had the unique and sometimes unfortunate experience of living without my color. Please allow me to explain this highly unusual statement. Once my family settled into the projects during my second grade year of school, most of my interactions outside of school were with black people and Puerto Ricans. After a few weeks of being tested (engaging in physical altercations), I was fully accepted by my group of friends and I found little in common with white children at school and my extended family members.

Although my friends never made my color an issue, they were certainly aware of white people. As Barnett et al. (2010) suggest, privileged thinking is not only a phenomenon among middleclass white people. I have a real life examples that illustrates this point. While walking home from high school with a group of friends, one guy decided to pull a fire alarm. After he pulled the alarm, all of us ran as fast as we could to get away from the area. Apparently, one guy was caught by the police and told them that my best friend pulled the alarm. The police came to my friend’s apartment and told his mother that a person told them her son pulled the alarm, but they would not reveal the name. After taking my friend to the police department and checking his hands for the “dust” that is on the alarms, he was cleared. Unfortunately, his mother thought I was the person who told on him. For a while, she attempted to keep us from hanging out and told him that white people should not be trusted. I was the only white guy in the group, so to her I was clearly the snitch.

Davis (2016) reports that black male students are disproportionately overrepresented in special education class and disproportionately underrepresented in
gifted and talented classes. Also, teachers are more likely to perceive black males as representing behavior problems, which negatively impacts their academic expectation of black male students. Based on my experience as an educator, I do not refute Davis’ claims. On the other hand, from my experience as a child, most of the teachers at school saw all of us, poor kids, the same way. I have many examples of how teachers and administrators demonstrated privileged thinking, but the greatest personal impact was them not taking any responsibility for my success. With only one exception, in spite of doing well academically, my potential was never embraced like children from middle class families. Because of adults’ predispositions, little energy was put into discussing the future aspirations of me and my friends. Notably, not a single person in high school ever talked to me about college or any other future plans.

I have been involved with special education for more than ten years and I have encountered many situations where privileged thinking was evident. It is widely known that there is a disproportionate number of black students who receive special education (Davis, 2016). While I would like to believe that most special education laws were created without intentional discrimination, the data and trends are alarming. Other than speech language impairment, the largest group of students who receive special education in any school district are identified under the specific learning disability category. Interestingly, this is the most subjective and debatable area of eligibility. From my perspective, special education is used to address social concerns and remove difficult students. Have you ever walked by a self-contained
classroom? If so, I am sure that you have seen evidence of this national embarrassment.

I receive frequent phone calls and emails requesting that a student be moved from a resource model of services to a self-contained special education classroom. Most of the students who the teachers and administrators want moved to this very restrictive environment are poor black males. In my opinion, poor white students are not treated favorably either. On the other hand, most of the teachers I have encountered do not have any problem keeping a middle class white student with academic and behavior difficulty in their classroom.

Several years ago, the school district I was working for had a white middle class female student with Tourette Syndrome and limited cognitive ability who the general education teachers battled relentlessly to keep in their classrooms. Although I am a strong proponent of using the least restrictive environment, I would never do so at the expensive of a free appropriate education. After finally convincing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team that this student needed more intensive services, the teachers finally revealed their motives to me. The teachers told me they were just really nervous for her to be going in that room with all of "those mean black boys". Interestingly, they never had any problem requesting that a black or Hispanic female be moved to that self-contained classroom. In regards to placement in special education, Barnett et al. (2010) ask "Could it be a silent prejudice that teachers and leaders have of students of color?" To me, the answer is yes. In fact, I think the prejudice extends to other minority groups and white children from poor families too.
The first thing that teachers and administrators need to do to ensure that their classrooms and schools are socially just is to assess their own feelings and experience with people from different backgrounds. According to Jung (2014), the impact of teaching styles on the academic performance of children from low socioeconomic status families and minority students is evident beginning in kindergarten. Given that approximately eighty percent of teachers are white women who come from middle class backgrounds and the students who traditionally struggle the most at school are not, specialized training is needed to communicate the unique needs of students (Davis, 2016). Training needs to communicate that ignoring race relationships and treating everyone the same is not the solution. Differences need to be celebrated not hidden. Educators need to be aware of issues that could adversely impact race relations such as implicit bias, micro-aggression, code switching, and white privilege (Davis). Inasmuch, it would be impactful to find a curriculum that directly addresses race relations (e.g., Lawrence Blum’s book *High Schools, Race and America’s Future*) and attend training that specifically addresses working with at-risk students.

While Feldman (2001) reports that educators’ nonverbal behavior can be impactful to the learning of students from diverse backgrounds, changes should be handled with caution. Specifically, if too much emphasis is put on nonverbal behavior, teachers could become overly conscious about their behavior, which may limit their overall teaching skills. With that said, the impact of nonverbal behavior can be handled indirectly through the teaching of the more common differences in nonverbal behavior (Feldman).
Chapter 6: Questions for Discussion

1. What is privileged thinking?

2. How does race impact your classroom or school?

3. In ideal world, do you believe racial differences should be celebrated or eliminated? Explain.
Chapter 7

In July 1998, I was sitting in a college orientation and I felt like the old guy in
the room at just 22 years old. While everyone else seemed to be enjoying the social
aspect of this experience, I was holding onto every word. My fear of failure left no
room for socializing. One of the professors told my group that he guaranteed that if
we studied for at least one hour every night except Friday and Saturday we would
leave college with a 4.0. Given that I thought just graduating would be a miracle for
a Crawford Village kid, I decided that day that I was going to study for two hours
every day.

My formula worked with great success. Not only did I study for two or three
hours every night after work, I also required myself to study for two nights for each
exam. I did not consider myself finished studying until I could recite and write every
page of notes that would be covered on the exam. When grades were posted for each
class, if I did not have the highest grade, which rarely happened, I studied more. In
my mind, I was in competition with every student in the school and I wanted to prove
that a poor kid like me could outperform them. I arrived to every class fifteen
minutes early and wrote notes like a courtroom reporter. The first semester ended
with an A in every class including a 100 average in one class. To add to this
craziness, I started tracking the number of 100s that I scored on exams. I wanted at
least one in every class. I did not accomplish this goal, but I did finish my
undergraduate degree with twenty-three 100s on exams.
After my first semester, although I was a sociology major, I received a letter from the Psychology Department Chair congratulating me on my performance in the introductory class and inquiring about my interest in psychology as a major. That same semester, I had to write a paper in my Introduction to Sociology class that required us to reflect on our life and apply the information we learned over the semester in a paper. While writing this paper, many blocked memories and emotions were brought to the surface. Writing this paper is when I realized the people responsible for saving my life, Ms. Swanson, Bud, Phil, and Sgt. Wells. Based on this reflection, I knew that I would have never left Crawford Village without them being in my life at the moment that I needed them. With this in mind, I decided to double major and switched my career goal from an FBI agent to a psychologist, so that I could help people the way Ms. Swanson and the others helped me. I wanted to pay their kindness back by giving hope to hopeless children.

At the end of my first year of college, I met with my advisor about taking classes in the summer and more during each semester to complete my degree in three years. He looked at me like I was crazy and said, “I want to ask you something serious. What will happen if you don’t get an A in a class?” I said, “I would be fine, but that won’t happen.” He just smiled and shook his head. I graduated from the University of South Carolina at Aiken in three years with a double major and a 4.0. I was given the Outstanding Student in Psychology and the Outstanding Student in Sociology awards for my efforts. I also successfully completed the school’s Honor
Program. I did this while working twenty hours during the week and ten hours on the weekend.

My professors ensured me that I would be accepted into any graduate school that I applied to. Given this advice, I only applied to two doctoral programs in school psychology: University of South Carolina (USC) and North Carolina State University (NC State). I was not accepted to USC because of my scores on the Graduate Readiness Exam (GRE). I was not surprised by my low score on this standardized assessment as I scored low on the SAT as well. I was accepted to NC State! I was very excited about moving to Raleigh and getting a doctorate. When I shared this news with my twelve-year-old brother, he started crying. During undergraduate, he stayed with me more and more frequently, so the move meant he would have to stay with our mother in the trailer park all of the time. I met with my professor and told them that I would have to pass on the NC State offer to help take care of my brother. They were shocked and told me I was missing a big opportunity and told me this was not my responsibility. I disagreed. This door was closed for me, but I knew that I wanted to continue my education. I applied and was accepted to USC’s Master of Science in Psychology program.

I continued my academic success from undergraduate to graduate school, but I was certain that I wanted to work with children in the school setting. By the end of the year, I applied to Winthrop University’s School Psychology Program and was accepted. I completed my Master of Science and Specialist in School Psychology degrees and began working as a school psychologist in Lexington County School
District Three in 2005. The same month that I graduated from Winthrop University, I began teaching college classes for Limestone College and eventually Midlands Technical College.

I met my wife during my first year as a school psychologist. I knew immediately that I wanted to marry her and spend the rest of my life with her. Besides being the most beautiful woman that I had ever seen, she was the most genuine person I had ever met. She is original in thought, caring in behavior, and most importantly, loves me unconditionally. To this day, my wife is the only person who truly knows me and, strangely, still loves me. As one can imagine, being married to a person with a troubled childhood, who has served in the USMC infantry, and has a psychology degree can be very difficult. Johnna does it without judgement and with unconditional acceptance. Honestly, she keeps "the wheels on the bus." We have four beautiful and healthy daughters and we spend nearly all our time together. In my adult eyes, our life is perfect. From my childhood eyes, our life is a miracle.

In 2011, at the South Carolina Council for Exceptional Children annual conference, I was presented with the Advocate of the Year Award. I was nominated by the principal and teachers of our primary school. The following letter was submitted by the principal who nominated me:
Dear Advocate of the Year Selection Committee:

It is without hesitation that I would like to endorse and promote William “Bill” Harbert for the Advocate of the Year. “Mr. Bill”, as the students fondly call him, is an irreplaceable professional in our district. He has made such an impression on faculty members, parents, and students while he serves as the District Psychologist for Lexington District Three. He came to us several years ago and immediately showed stakeholders across our district and in the community the wisdom he possesses in solving children’s problems, the admirable patience he shows in all situations, and the knowledge he has to provide resources and interventions for our students.

Bill is exceptional in his field. Overcoming a difficult childhood, he draws upon his own experiences to look into the soul of every child with whom he counsels. I personally have seen him turn students around with his uncanny talent of offering what each child needs. He sees the good and potential in every child, while not being blind to their extreme behaviors or their at-risk academic future. Bill is the “go-to” person in all of our schools to answer the most difficult questions about how to help our challenging students, all the while making sure their rights are never in question. He handles himself with grace and dignity when working with parents and teachers under the most difficult situations, almost always getting them to accept his recommendations for helping children.

Bill is truly an advocate of children and stands out among his peers as one of the very best. Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to describe an empathetic, effective professional whom I am proud to be able to say he is a part of our school and district, as well as a friend.

Sincerely,
Tonya K. Watson, Principal
Batesburg-Leesville Primary School
Batesburg, SC

In the summer of 2013, my wife was contacted by a man, Jason Russell, who I went to high school with in McKeesport. He told her that he wanted to nominate me
for the McKeesport High School Hall of Fame. Based on his reading of post on Facebook, he could not believe my professional and life successes given my childhood. As the two of them worked to gather information to present to the selection committee, Johnna told Jason that a teacher named Nancy Swanson had a tremendous impact on my life. Ironically, Ms. Swanson attended the same church as Jason! Jason felt confident that he could arrange for Ms. Swanson and Bud to attend the formal dinner, if I was selected. I am still completely humbled that a peer would take the time to reflect on another person’s life, especially since we did not communicate in nearly twenty years. I think this nomination speaks highly of Jason’s character.

We were on vacation in Myrtle Beach when I received the call that I was chosen as the youngest person ever to be selected for the Hall of Fame. This announcement was completely surreal and humbling. The phone call was followed up with Jason giving my wife Ms. Swanson’s phone number and a message that she wanted me to call her. I was very nervous to call Ms. Swanson. What if she did not remember me? When she answered the phone my nervousness was instantly washed away. Ms. Swanson’s energy and care were exactly how I remembered it from middle school. She remembered me as a sweet and quiet child. She was proud of my selection and said she would be honored to attend the formal dinner. We talked on the phone for about an hour and I enjoyed every minute of her time. Since my grandfather died in January 2010, I have not spoken to anyone, other than my wife, for this amount of time. Next, I contacted Bud. He and his wife, Kim, would be
attending the formal dinner and other activities for the Hall of Fame weekend, which included a tour of the school, a cookout, and introduction at a high school football game. Although I did not believe that I was worthy of this accomplishment, especially after reading the accomplishments of the people previously selected, I knew that I wanted the public opportunity to thank these two amazing people.

Our trip to McKeesport for the banquet would be Johnna's first time visiting Pennsylvania, but she refused to visit the areas of my childhood. After attending the Hall of Fame activities and hearing about the current state of Crawford Village from other people, her decision was solidified. I understand her decision, but part of me wanted her to see firsthand the environment of my childhood. The Hall of Fame activities were very well organized and the banquet was very humbling. When we arrived at the dinner and I read the list of accomplishment of the other six inductees, I knew that my induction was more about the plight of my life rather than my professional accomplishments. This reality changed my embarrassment of receiving this award into a sense of pride. I looked at my selection as an accomplishment on the behalf of all my peers who survived being raised in Crawford Village and were leading successful adult lives.

When Ms. Swanson arrived to the dinner, my emotions were very hard to contain. Although I did not have any family attend the banquet, I had the three most influential people in my life by my side for this amazing evening. When it was my turn to give my speech to officially accept my induction into the McKeesport High School Hall of Fame, I felt nervous and excited all at the same time. When I talked
about Bud and Ms. Swanson, I got emotional, but I was able to compose myself and make it through the speech. My speech talked about their impact on my life and not on my accomplishments. To me, any accomplishments that I have is because of the impact they had on my life. The speech made Ms. Swanson very emotional and she kissed me on the cheek when I was finished. Afterwards, Johnna told me that another lady at our table, who was also a former teacher, said to Ms. Swanson during my speech, “I am so proud of you...this story is what we all hope for as teachers.”

Chapter 7: Comments

Marquis-Hobbs (2014) said, “Living in a poor community is not a disabling condition, but going to a school with low expectations can be” (p. 36). As noted throughout this writing, the life outcomes (increased likelihood of dropping out, gang involvement, academic disengagement, delinquency, less likely to attend college, etc.) for most students raised in poverty are grim unless there are positive outside influences. In my opinion, the best way for students to overcome poverty is education. Blackwell and Pinder (2014) found that students raised in poverty who loved to read at an early age, wanted to live a better life than their parents, and who did not identify with their siblings were more likely to go to college. The researchers concluded that teachers who acted as mentors could be impactful by providing guidance that leads to a pursuit of higher education (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Inasmuch, educators can be most helpful if they are willing to address the holistic needs of students and not solely focus on academic skills.
Alika and Edosa (2012) said, “Some children irrespective of home background or structure may work hard and become successful in life” (p. 257). While I certainly do not dispute this statement, I contend that these outcomes are the result of a lot of positive variables impacting students. The teacher’s role in the life outcome of students raised in poverty is critical.

Although I personally think the most impactful thing a teacher can do is mentor a student raised in poverty, there are other ways schools can help students overcome a lifetime impacted by poverty. Many researchers (e.g., Landsman, 2014; Marquis-Hobbs, 2014; Weissbourd, 2009; Schultz, 2010) agree that relationship between schools and parents of students living in poverty is essential for the success of at-risk students. In addition to mentoring and generally building relationships with parents, Landsman (2014) and Marquis-Hobbs (2014) discussed several ways that teachers and administrators could enable students living in poverty. First, teachers should make extra time available for students to complete class requirements that might not be able to be completed at home for a multitude of reasons (Landsman, 2014). Second, teachers need to be explicit with their expectations. Specifically, students need to know how to communicate their needs and ask for help in an appropriate manner. We should not assume that students have been taught how to behave in a structured setting. Third, teachers need to help students stay organized and provide visual reminders of deadlines. Fourth, and in my opinion most important, teachers should be made aware of the living conditions that face students living in poverty. Teachers should reflect on these situations when dealing with
issues confronting their students (Landsman, 2014). Fifth, teachers need to make time to listen to their students and, when possible, connect their instruction to the interests, needs, and strengths of their students (Landsman, 2014; Marquis-Hobbs, 2014). Sixth, teacher’s need to develop and enforce rules against teasing. Finally, teachers need to advocate for students living in poverty and seek out allies who are also willing to advocate for students (Landsman, 2014; Marquis-Hobbs, 2014).

According to Landsman (2014) there are several practices that administrators can incorporate to positively influence outcomes for students living in poverty. Administrators have to develop a trusting relationship with teachers and communicate their concern for all students, which will make it more likely that teachers will openly express their concerns and seek support. Also, administrators should spend time in classrooms getting to know students and observing interactions between students and teachers. To promote academic performance, administrators should ensure that students raised in poverty are being provided access to the most rigorous programs offered during the school day as well as after school (Landsman, 2014). Finally, administrators should provide professional development that communicates the living environment of students living in the school district, especially students living in poverty (Landsman, 2014; Marquis-Hobbs, 2014).

Chapter 7: Questions for Discussion

1. How do you advocate for your students living in poverty?

2. What could your school or district do differently to improve the outcomes of students raised in poverty?
Chapter 8

During the summer of 2014, I decided to go back to school and get my doctorate in educational leadership at Morehead State University. As part of obtaining my degree, I had to complete a capstone project. I wanted my research and subsequent writing to be focused on an area that was personally meaningful and practically relevant. Overall, I wanted my work to have some impact on students raised in poverty. After some thought and reflection, I decided that I wanted to try to figure out how teachers like Ms. Swanson are so impactful. As stated earlier, my hypothesis was that a teachers’ attitude towards poverty would directly impact their ability to effectively work with students raised in poverty. I thought that teachers who were sympathetic to the obstacles created by poverty would have greater impact on the academic performance of students raised in poverty. This led to the completion of the executive summary discussed in the previous chapter.

The results of my study were not aligned with my original hypothesis. Based on these data, my new theory is that teachers who view poverty because of internal factors are more likely to hold students raised in poverty accountable for their performance. In contrast, teachers who believe that poverty is a result of environmental factors are more likely to interpret the societal obstacles as insurmountable, thus having pity on the student and lowering expectations. Before collecting additional data or exploring this issue further, I decided to ask Ms. Swanson to do an interview with me and discuss her experiences working with students raised in poverty. Ms. Swanson did not hesitate to agree to the interview.
The interview was completed June 2016. The rest of the information in this chapter was taken from our interview.

Ms. Swanson agrees with my new hypothesis. To her, in wealthier school districts, teachers and administrators are expected to care for students, but in poor districts, the students appreciate it. “We have to appreciate what kids are going through, it’s not their fault, but I hold them accountable. We can help them get to where they should be. You should understand, but don’t hold them back! Kids didn’t put themselves in these positions,” stated Ms. Swanson. She said, “Poor is a word. Poverty is a word. We have got to explain these students’ situations in terms that others understand” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Her grandparents came from Poland. She asked her grandmother why they never moved back to Poland. Her grandmother’s reasoning was because they recognized how wonderful they had it in America. Her grandparents went from being servants in Poland to being business owners in this country. Ms. Swanson was raised in McKeesport, Pennsylvania in the 1950s. During this time period she noted that the steel workers were on strike. When the strike ended, people celebrated having smoke in the air from the mills (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

She remembers the city being divided racially between whites and blacks. “I just assumed half of the world was white and half was black.” In high school, she remembers another student saying, “I never went to school with colored kids.” On the other hand, Ms. Swanson remembers fondly dancing with a black kid named Eugene Williams in her elementary school dance. At the University of Pittsburgh as
as an undergraduate student, she sat with black students at lunch. This shocked white
and black students. She said it never crossed her mind that she was doing anything
unusual. Around the same time, in a public building in Pittsburgh, a black man was
waiting to get on an elevator that Ms. Swanson occupied. When he saw that it was a
white woman when the door opened, he just stood there. She asked him, “Are you
going on?” The man refused (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24,
2016).

She told me that growing up she never wanted to disappoint her parents. She
recognized that they made many sacrifices for her. As a child, she knew this
intellectually, but not in her heart. She did not fully grasp their sacrifice until she
finished school. She remembers buying gifts for her mother and always thought her
mother loved the gifts. In reality, her mother did not care for the gifts; however, she
made certain not to hurt her children’s feelings. Her mother never bought anything
for herself until her children were adults. I could tell from the look on her face that
Ms. Swanson had tremendous respect for her mother. As for her father, Ms.
Swanson’s most memorable moments were just spending time with him going to the
hardware store. She noted that too many parents today do not value the importance of
just spending time with their children without distraction. Ms. Swanson does not
have any children of her own, which she believes helped her be an effective teacher
because she did not bring the stress of family life to work (N. Swanson, personal
communication, June 24, 2016).
She has great respect for women who are strong and do not allow men to take advantage of them. This position was modeled for her by her mother and grandmother. She told me a story about her very handsome grandfather attempting to control her grandmother. To prove a point, her grandmother decided to leave him with the children to demonstrate her importance to the family. Her mother yelled for her grandmother not to leave, but she went to live with her sister to prove a point to her grandfather. Her grandfather quickly realized his wife’s worth and began courting her. After a period of time, her grandmother returned home to a husband who learned to appreciate her. Similarly, Ms. Swanson’s mother once became frustrated with her husband’s behavior and while he was away from home she packed his clothes and placed them on the porch. When he returned home, he brought the bags into the house and changed his behavior. The couple never talked about the bags on the porch or his behavior, but the message was clear to him (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

As a teacher, she watched professional wrestling to relate to seventh and eighth grade male students. She noted drawing a line with the Macho Man. She told the students he was “Wimpo Man” because he pushed women around. A male student responded, “Sometimes women need to be checked.” Ms. Swanson asked the girls, “Do you ever deserve to be hit?” The boys started laughing. Ms. Swanson asked the boys, “Does your mother ever deserve to be hit?” This question got all their attention (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).
Ms. Swanson’s experience working with students raised in poverty include being a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and a volunteer. As a volunteer, she has cooked for the homeless, helped with the Meals on Wheels program, and collected and delivered furniture for families in need. Ms. Swanson recalled a time she was working with a family on welfare with a drunk father and mom working two jobs. In response to her ability to work with this family and other poor families, a school board member asked her, “How are you able to work with these black kids?” Ms. Swanson replied, “I’m from McKeesport.” Although the McKeesport schools had a significant percentage of black students enrolled, the neighboring schools did not. In response to her decision to work in McKeesport, she recalled another teacher asking her, “How are you going to work with black kids?” Ms. Swanson response was “Why don’t you ask the white girls at your school? They seem to know the black students very well.” One thing I learned from this interview with Ms. Swanson is that she is tough and she is very blunt with adults who are not acting in the best interest of children. As a student, I never witnessed this side of her personality (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Ms. Swanson recalled driving students home from school when students missed the bus or a parent failed to pick them up. One of these students told her, “You are Oprah to me.” This comment touched her because it indicated how desperate of a situation students lived in. “It is sad that some students live in such poverty that they view a middle class person as rich,” commented Ms. Swanson. On these rides home, Ms. Swanson often went by her childhood home that is now
abandoned and boarded up. Often, the students were shocked to see where she came from. The students would ask how they could get out of their situation and she would discuss the importance of getting an education (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

As a principal, Ms. Swanson worked with a male high school student who was known to be a drug dealer. The boy was in his senior year of high school when she learned that he was dealing on campus. Ms. Swanson told him, “You are getting a diploma, but you are going to tell me what is going on without names.” She knew that the boy would not give names because of street ramifications, but she wanted the information to make her own stop to the dealing of drugs at school. The boy’s mother’s response to Ms. Swanson’s handling of the situation was, “I know what you are doing you think is right, but you are just getting his hopes up, he isn’t getting out of the projects.” The boy graduated with a diploma (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

One day as principal, a high school student walked into the office and said, “I’m signing out and quitting school.” “No, you are not,” was Ms. Swanson’s response. She asked him to come into her office to talk about the situation. At the beginning of their conversation, the eighteen-year-old student said, “My mom said I can.” When she empathically repeated that the student was not quitting, he told her, “You can’t stop me” and stood up from his chair. Before she could even think, Ms. Swanson pushed this large male student down and said, “I am not signing!” The student graduated from high school. A few years later, one of Ms. Swanson’s friends
who is a college professor, told her that this student wrote in a paper for her class that Ms. Swanson was the most influential person in his life (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Another time, a female student was planning on quitting and Ms. Swanson had a heart-to-heart meeting with her. The girl’s mother requested a meeting with Ms. Swanson. The woman said, “Janna said you were going to slap her if she did not graduate!” Ms. Swanson replied, “Yes, I did.” The girl graduated from high school. While reflecting on these stories, she made eye contact with me, smiled, and said, “You never know your impact” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

One thing that was very clear throughout this interview, Ms. Swanson has been an advocate for students her entire career. As a principal, she remembers one middle school teacher not releasing students when he was supposed to, which caused a girl to miss her bus. When she approached the teacher, he just shrugged it off. After school, she met with the teacher again, but he was not remorseful despite her explaining the danger of the girl walking home through a bad area. Ms. Swanson told the teacher, “You better do everything right, I am on you like sweat!” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

One time, Ms. Swanson was a guest on a radio talk show to discuss public education. Another guest on the show was boasting about his school being a Blue Ribbon school. When the moderator noted that his test scores were declining, the man said, “We have different people coming in school, now.” The man was referring
to an increase in enrollment of black students. Ms. Swanson asked, “You take credit for success, but not for losses?” When the man referred to McKeesport kids as trash, Ms. Swanson remembers becoming greatly offended and lashing out at the other person (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

One year, during state assessments, there was loud building construction going on during the testing. Ms. Swanson told the construction crew to stop. The superintendent met with her and said, “Nancy, it is going to cost money to reschedule.” She told him, “If you allow the construction to happen during testing, you will have my resignation” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

She had a student who did not care about his appearance and was extremely lazy. The student told her that he was living with a crazy mom. She asked him, “What are you going to do about it?” The student constantly blamed his mother, but Ms. Swanson did not have any pity on him. She made him accountable for his behavior and choices. She told him, “Just because you have a crazy mom doesn’t mean you can’t wash your hair. If you need shampoo, I’ll get you shampoo!” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Since retiring, Ms. Swanson has continued to advocate and help students. She mentored students with a learning disabilities at her church. One of these student’s mother decided to homeschool her child because of his academic difficulties at school. Ms. Swanson convinced mom to put the student back in school and she started attending the student’s IEP meetings with the mother. With Ms. Swanson’s
influence, the student’s classroom teacher was switched and the student’s performance improved. Another time while advocating for a kindergarten student with an IEP, things did not go according to plan. The school was recommending that the student be moved to a self-contained special education classroom. The school said that student was entitled to the services and Ms. Swanson said, “The doesn’t mean that is best for him.” The mom sabotaged Ms. Swanson and their previous discussion by stating, “He brought a knife to school and he tortures animals.” Later, it was revealed that the mother had financial incentives to make the student appear to be as disabled as possible (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Ms. Swanson gave me several tips that she would share with teachers. First, rather than punishing students for inappropriate behavior, teachers should focus their efforts on rewarding appropriate behavior. For example, she used to give prizes to students for bringing their book to class instead of punishing others for not bringing it. She also believes that treating students with respect is extremely important. One time, she yelled at student in class and felt horrible afterwards. She apologized the next day. She apologized in front of all of the students because she embarrassed him in front of the other students. She said, “He loved me after that.” Be genuine. Make things fun! She used to throw candy to students when they got the correct answer. She said, “They like things when they are having fun and not thinking about learning.” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Knowing the research on improving academic performance of high schools with later start times, she volunteered for her school to push back its start time, when
the superintendent asked the district’s principals. The other principals refused because their teachers would not like getting off later. Ms. Swanson told me, “It’s not about us! It’s about kids!” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

When asked if she would choose to be a teacher with all of the experiences she has had, she said, “I don’t know that I’d be a teacher again, but I’d work with kids. Probably a teacher, but not an administrator.” She noted that dealing with parents was the most difficult part of her job. According to Ms. Swanson, she did not enjoy being an administrator because things do not get done at once, everything depends on something else. She said, “You don’t see the bright spots, you just see the problems coming in” (N. Swanson, personal communication, June 24, 2016).

Chapter 8: Comments

The need for ongoing professional development through which teachers learn the latest-research-based methods of instruction, or the newest technologies, is important for improving teaching. However, teachers are wise to not overlook the importance of cultivating student-teacher relationships in their classrooms, especially with students of poverty. Student-teacher relationships are built through purposeful and continual effort, primarily through mentoring on the part of the teacher. It is in the relationship between teacher and student where learning can take root and begin to grow; and the degree to which a teacher invests in that relationship not only affects learning outcomes and student behavior in the classroom, but also potentially impacts each student’s future success. (Knoell et al., 2013, p. 45)
Chapter 8: Questions for Discussion

1. How has a teacher(s) impacted your life?

2. What do you want to be your legacy?
Executive Summary Reference List


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students from diverse elementary schools in a rural midwestern community.


VITA

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McKeesport HS Alumni & Friends Association
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