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The Dream Deferred: The School-to-Prison Pipeline and the Destruction and Potential Resurrection of the Black Male

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THE DREAM DEFERRED: THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE AND THE

DESTRUCTION AND POTENTIAL RESURRECTION OF THE BLACK MALE

By

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ABSTRACT

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In American society, Black boys are both "at-risk" for academic failure and for having their dreams deferred. The label at-risk is a larger consequence of the commonly portrayed image of the Black male as a criminal within American society. Unfortunately, what is thought of as the great equalizer, education, and schooling, also plays a significant role in the criminalization of Black males. In schools, their intersectionality on measures of socioeconomic and special education status, race, and gender renders them susceptible to the thwarting effects of the school-to-prison pipeline. Through this paper, I argue that (1) the education- related causes of the school-to-prison pipeline are interconnected and create a downward spiral of criminalization that traps young Black men in a youth control complex (Rios, 2011). Additionally, I argue that (2) for some Black boys, schools no longer represent a safe environment where learning and developmental growth occurs, but rather represents an "anti-educational environment" that is antithetical to their success. Lastly, (3) as a recommendation for disrupting this downward trajectory, I argue that it is pivotal for teachers as resistors (Autry, 2016), to use their relationships to transcend the school environment. To illuminate these ideas, I include a case study of one student to show how relationship-building between a teacher and student can lead to positive outcomes and a reframing of the image of the "bad boy".

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Introduction

"What happens to a dream deferred?" In his poem "Harlem", Langston Hughes personifies the deferred dream; a dream postponed or withered as a result of neglect. In American society, Black boys are both "at-risk" for academic failure and for having their dreams deferred. The label at-risk is a larger consequence of the frequently portrayed image of the Black male as a criminal within American society. This image feeds the rate in which they are targeted through surveillance and policing measures. Black males, thus, represent a group that is criminalized within several aspects of society: within their families, the community, in social institutions, and through the media. Unfortunately, what is thought of as "the great equalizer", education and schooling (Sandovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 2013), also plays a significant role in the criminalization of Black males. In schools, their intersectionality on measures of socioeconomic and special education status, race, and gender renders them susceptible to the thwarting effects of the school-to-prison pipeline. Also, identified as collateral consequences by some researchers, the thwarting effects of the school-to-prison includes losing the right to vote and permanent stigma that disproportionately disenfranchise Black males. In addition, these effects extend to families and the larger African American community as the community loses potential male role models and advocates (Rios, 2011).

Contemporary prisons, juvenile detention centers, and alternative education programs are now based on the containment of Black bodies. In agreement with Foucault's theory of social control, this containment of Black male bodies within the prison industrial complex is intentionally aimed at socializing Black youth, accruing profit for private investors, and disenfranchising marginalized communities. It succeeds in keeping the African American community a subordinate group within the dominant political discourse (Dancy, 2014) as

generations of Black men are silenced or discarded along several entry points beginning in the school and terminating in prison. In her book, *The New Jim Crow* (2010), Michelle Alexander compares the practice of mass incarceration to Jim Crow policies that disenfranchised African Americans through denials of basic rights such as the right to vote. She illustrates how current mass incarceration and its feeder, the school-to-prison pipeline, are ultimately effective in silencing the African American community through the following story:

> Jarvious Cotton cannot vote… Cotton's great-great-grandfather could not vote as a slave. His great-grandfather was beaten to death by the Ku Klux Klan for attempting to vote. His grandfather was prevented from voting by Klan intimidation. His father was barred from voting by poll taxes and literacy tests. Today, Jarvious Cotton cannot vote because he, like many Black men in the United Sates has been labeled a felon and is currently on parole (Alexander, 2010, p. 1).

As a nation, starting a dialogue about the disenfranchisement and marginalization of Blacks is polemical and controversial because of the nation's roots in the chattel slavery of Black men, women, and children. According to sociologist Nancy Heitzeg, in this post-Civil Rights era marked by color-blind rhetoric, a color-blind guise is needed to maintain the myth that America is no longer a racist country, but a country that views everyone as equal. The color-blind paradigm supports the ideals of a meritocracy through an emphasis on merit, asserts equality, circumvents institutional discrimination, likens trends to natural patterns, and contests the continuing consequences of racism (Heitzeg, 2016). The disproportionality of Black students in the school-to-prison pipeline debunks this myth by mirroring the practice of de facto racism present in schools. Moreover, the school-to-prison pipeline replicates a status that pre-Civil Rights, de jure racism instituted on Blacks by segregating, surveilling, tracking, and marking

Black students as inferior (Heitzeg, 2016). Therefore, the school-to-prison pipeline is a masquerading racist practice ensconced in the nation's color-blind paradigm. As an extension of how color-blind racism bleeds into law and policy, the school-to-prison pipeline propels institutionalized racism and punitive social control, reinforcing the perspective and position of Blacks as inferior.

The school-to-prison pipeline is an issue of great import as its underlying racist nature shielded by color-blind rhetoric silences Black males by impeding their academic and social success in addition to the degree in which they can make meaningful change within their communities. Schools place Black boys on this downward trajectory through a number of practices such as push-outs, criminalizing behavior, and systemic failures. In addressing the issue of the school-to-prison pipeline, it is crucial to not only understand the multifaceted and interconnected causes that place and silence boys on this trajectory, but also practices that can lead to positive outcomes for these students. Through this paper, I argue (1) the education-related causes of the school-to-prison pipeline is interconnected and create a downward spiral of criminalization that traps young Black men in a youth control complex (Rios, 2011). Additionally, (2) for several Black boys, schools no longer represent a safe environment where learning and developmental growth occurs, but rather represents an "anti-educational environment" that is antithetical to their success. The anti-educational environment works in tandem with the causes of the school-to-prison pipeline as Black boys internalize negative labels and experience feelings of hopelessness, disengagement, or dissonance as a consequence of teachers suggesting they are academic failures or characterizing them as deviants. Lastly, (3) as a recommendation for disrupting this downward trajectory, it is pivotal for teachers as resistors (Autry, 2015) to use their relationships to transcend the school environment. To illuminate these

ideas, I include a case study of one student to show how relationship-building between a teacher and student leads to positive outcomes and a reframing of the image of the "bad boy."

The School-to-Prison Pipeline and At-Risk Youth

Within the past 30 years the relationship developed between school districts and the juvenile justice system has become increasingly entrenched in a punitive paradigm. Also, referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, this shift is indicative of a rise in the criminalization of student misconduct in schools and subsequent punishment implicated by juvenile courts. Instead of adopting a rehabilitative framework, as originally intended with the formation of the juvenile courts, juvenile courts have transformed into the disciplinarians of school referrals (Mallett, 2016). According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the school-to-prison pipeline is a trend in which students are "funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems." Policies and practices at the federal, state, and local levels are responsible for funneling students away from a quality education and into the courts (Mallett, 2016). The school-to-prison pipeline marks the degradation of a quality education to one that fails many marginalized youths academically and socially by halting their development in these respective areas and stifling their future potential (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

The victims of this downward trajectory, which often culminates in incarceration, are students who generally do not pose a safety threat to their peers, schools, or communities. On the contrary, they are the ones whose safety within schools is threatened. They are the most vulnerable because of individualized concomitant challenges such as poverty, mental health status, and developmental or cognitive delays in addition to the societal challenges of institutionalized racism ensconced in contemporary color-blind rhetoric (Heitzeg, 2016, Mallett, 2016). When the individualized concomitant challenges converge to create a number of intersections, many of the youth on this pathway are impacted in a negative way, thus, creating a

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number of at-risk groups. Five factors the literature has identified are youth in poverty, victims of abuse or neglect, students with special education disabilities, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), and young people struggling with homelessness or in foster care (Kim et al., 2010, Mallett, 2016). Black males represent a unique at-risk group whose intersectionality is disproportionately present along many entry points of the school-to-prison pipeline. The contemporary language of color-blindness downplays this covert institutionalized racism and allows society to underwrite the significance of this disproportionality and the overrepresentation of race; however, statistics on the dismal trajectory of Black males illustrate their demise.

Black men fall into several at-risk groups based on special education and socioeconomic status, gender, and race. At the intersection of socioeconomic status and race, families of color such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, are overrepresented in the low-income socioeconomic bracket (Mallett, 2016). Young people of color are also overrepresented in special education. Recent data suggest many Black and Native American children are classified under intellectual and emotional disabilities, disabilities which are associated with high rates of classroom removals (Mallett, 2016). The statistics referenced in Carla Amurao's (2013) work on the school-to-prison pipeline further sheds light on the plight of Black males in American schools. Amurao reported that Blacks are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than their white peers. In addition, Black and Latino students are 2 times more likely to not graduate from high school, which is concerning since 68% of males incarcerated in state and federal prisons do not have a high school diploma. Moreover, Blacks and Latinos are overrepresented in criminal justice institutions as they represent approximately 30% of the U.S. population, yet represent 61% of the incarcerated population. The dismal trajectory of Black males continues as

one out of every three Black males is incarcerated during their lifetime, whereas for Latinos, one out of every six males (Amurao, 2013). Overrepresented along several points of the pipeline, Black men are endangered within American schools as they are highly susceptible towards being placed on this downward trajectory.

This invisible yet visible trend serves many ideological functions that help to perpetuate the underpinnings and perceived necessity of social control. According to Heitzeg (2016), "it serves to reify old racial archetypes that erroneously conflate crime and welfare receipt with Blackness, fuel white fears of racialized danger, and retain white supremacist practices without question or consequence" (p. 30). This implores one to question the extent to which Black males are not only victims, but also intentional targets within a larger system of social order and control. According to Rios (2008), the answer to this question is best understood through the lens of the youth control complex. Rios suggests that Black and Latino youth are constantly in a struggle to redefine their identities within a social ecology that aims to manage and control them. More specifically, Black and Latino males' actions must be viewed from the lens of them "wanting to be acknowledged, to feel accepted, to feel human, instead of the typical assessment that they are power hungry, preemptive-respect seeking individuals" (p. 42). The greatest obstacle to redefining this image is their locked position within the youth control complex. Rios (2008) defines the youth control complex as:

> A ubiquitous system of criminalization molded by synchronized, systematic punishment meted out by socializing and social control institutions. This complex is the unique whole derived from the sum of the punitive parts that young people encounter… The complex is the combined effect of the web of institutions, schools, families, businesses, residents, media, community centers, and the criminal justice system, that collectively punish,

stigmatize, monitor, and criminalize young people to control them (p. 42). The school-to-prison pipeline is a practice that is imbedded within a larger system that works to control and manage certain groups. It is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather one that is synchronized with society and its intentions. In disrupting this downward trajectory, it is important to first understand the role of the school environment and the causes that are school and education-related since schools represent a microcosm of society's ideals. Furthermore, it is important to understand the school and education-related causes of the school-to-prison pipeline because schools are increasingly influenced by the confluence of many elements of the youth control complex and therefore may no longer represent the safest place for our Black males. In schools, the influences of the media, stereotypes, criminal justice system, or business converge to punish and stigmatize Black boys, which end in negative views of school and educational attainment in addition to placement on the school to prison pipeline.

Causes of the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The literature on Black boys in the classroom depicts a classroom and school environment where segregation by race and class provides students with an inferior education (Heitzeg, 2016). In American society, Black children, who are also overrepresented as low-income children, often receive an education that is inequitable in comparison to their white and more affluent peers. The inequalities present in the American school system mirrors the privileges and pitfalls that socioeconomic status contributes to the gap between those who can achieve their dreams and those who do not (Kozol, 1991, 2005), thus creating an opportunity gap. This opportunity gap is not a recent phenomenon, but one that is interwoven into the historical fabric of American public education. Throughout history, public education is used directly and indirectly as a means of social control. For instance, it is a tool for instilling

hegemonic cultural values, assimilating immigrants, and preparing a workforce for certain jobs within a capitalist and merit-based job market (Heitzeg, 2016). Moreover, public education is used to replicate and preserve social stratification in America so individuals comprising certain race, class, or gender demographics are intentionally locked into a specific stratum (Heitzeg, 2016). The school-to-prison pipeline is yet another practice that falls under the socializing purpose of education. Beginning in the schools, this pathway is effective in socializing students of color and other subgroups into inferior roles that limit social movement and their participation in the American "democracy."

I will refer to all the factors in the school environment that work against the success of Black boys, perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline, render schools' unsafe environments, and create disengagement and dissonance within schools, as the "anti-educational environment." Such factors include many of the interconnected and cyclical educated-related causes of the school-to-prison pipeline: the disparate effects of high states testing and educational policy, systemic barriers, subpar education in alternative programs and juvenile justice institutions, and the criminalization of student misconduct. Black boys attending schools are hyper-visible in the eyes of meritocratic policies and are disadvantaged by the anti-educational environment as it relegates them to a curriculum that is based on outputs as measured by continual testing. At the same time, it exposes them to a punishable hidden curriculum predicated upon a stereotypic duality for Black boys. Black boys are often portrayed within two roles: the student athlete that excels in sports or the academically inferior student. Both roles in schools create a contentious space for Black boys to navigate as the messages they receive through their location in compensatory classes or as they wait for a meted-out punishment by a school official suggest a limited number of possibilities for success. Instead of participation in academically-rich

extracurricular activities such as the debate club or school newspaper, Black boys are told they are "good at playing basketball or rapping" (Noguera, 2008). As it becomes difficult to navigate a space that is a part of the youth control complex and carve a niche for what success should look like in the presence of limited successful archetypes and punitive control measures, this anti-educational environment creates a dissonance between Black boys/young men and academic success, which in turn feeds the school-to-prison pipeline.

Disparate Effects of the Accountability Era

The recent emphasis on school accountability in conjunction with the privatization of education has turned the school environment into one that is antithetical to the success of Black boys. This corporate-type take-over is not only apparent in the overemphasis on data as indicative of student success, but also present in the notion of teachers, students, and administrators as removable and at times interchangeable parts, to achieve the greatest outputs, i.e. test results. With a goal of achieving the greatest outputs, schools push out low-performing students and push them onto the school-to-prison pipeline. Too often, these low-performing students are Black males.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is responsible for this data-driven and accountability ethos present in educational discourse (Autry, 2015) and a major contributor to the school-to-prison pipeline. A goal of NCLB is to ensure that students are achieving academic goals in a school environment that is deemed safe and staffed with high-quality teachers. Standardized testing is used as a measure of accountability as schools, school districts, and states are required to disaggregate the results based on subgroups of students: economically disadvantaged, special education status, racial and ethnic background, and students with limited English proficiency (Autry, 2015). NCLB is especially pertinent to Title 1 schools whose student

populations are representative of some, all, or a comorbid mixture of at-risk subgroups and are condemned as failing these groups of students. Under the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title 1 funding was an initiative to ensure that resource inequities in education were addressed through the allocation of supplemental federal grant money to local and state funds for poorer school districts (Heitzeg, 2016). Contrary to NCLB's goal of ensuring safety and academic progress in Title 1 schools, NCLB creates unsafe schools, or the anti-educational environment, as it ignites pressures for stakeholders to prove academic success with these subgroups or face the wrath of punitive sanctions.

If a school receiving Title 1 funding does not meet accountability measures, or adequate yearly progress (AYP), for two consecutive years, then the school would receive assistance and the students provided the option of choosing another public school to attend. If the school continues to fail for five consecutive years, then the school must "reopen as a charter school, replace all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress, or turn over the operations either to the state or to a private company with a demonstrated record of effectiveness" (Autry, 2015, pg. 2). The repercussions of low performance are dire as it creates internal pressures for students to perform well and can externally result in communities losing schools that are pillars because of their relationships with its residents over generations.

Intended in theory to improve the education that disadvantaged students receive and to close current achievement gaps between various subgroups of students such as English Language Learners, students with disabilities, racial minorities, or low-income students and their more advantaged peers, NCLB ushered in an emphasis on "accountability," manifested through educational standards and assessments, and parental involvement (Autry, 2015, Klein, 2015).

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The accountability aspect of NCLB—the part of NCLB that theoretically was meant to close the achievement gap among subgroups--has had a disparate and opposite effect on these subgroups (Kim et al., 2010; Autry, 2015; Mallett, 2016). For instance, schools in urban districts have experienced changes to their curriculum that have led to more rote memorization and a curriculum inundated with the accruement of testing skills and strategies. From my observation as a teaching candidate and teacher, many elementary public and charter schools operate in this model, when testing season (January – April) approaches. Students may begin a form of in-house tutoring that addresses testing strategies or instruction strays away from learning new content and resembles drills where students get repeated exposure to answering multiple choice and short answer questions.

The advent of meritocratic policies such as No Child Left Behind and the more contemporary reauthorization, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) play a major role in the shift from learning that is content driven to one that emphasizes acquiring skill sets to pass standardized tests (Heitzeg, 2016). In response to the question, what and how should students learn, Ravitch (2010) in *The Death and Life of The Great American School System* embraces a more constructivist approach to learning by suggesting that students should engage in activities and projects that make learning appealing to them. The curriculum, grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, serves the purpose of preparing students for participation in the politics of the democratic society in which they reside in (Ravitch, 2010). This type of curriculum removes students from the passive role of depositors within a banking system to active learners who co-construct meaningful knowledge (Freire, 2002). In addition, a content rich curriculum allows students to participate in an education that is engaging and culturally relevant to their culture, lived experiences, and interests (Autry, 2015).

When students receive a culturally-relevant and content-rich education, they are empowered to make decisions and advocate for their community and values. They can do so because they are equipped with an education that teaches them how to contextualize education within their communities, to make connections between what they know and what they are learning, to love learning through an inquiry and project-based framework, and to think critically in novel situations. Their education extends to their advocacy and civic engagement because the curriculum that is provided allows them to share their narratives and partake in dialogue, and is directly related to the issues that affect them. It emphasizes the catalytic power of voice as opposed to the invisibility of silence. Young people of privilege often already receive this type of education, and experience empowerment in part because they are prepared with the underlying social and cultural capital, necessary for political and civic participation. But within the context of American schools, every child does not receive this type of meaningful instruction and low-income students of color are less likely than others to receive civically empowering pedagogy.

Although NCLB has been lauded for its success in surfacing academic gaps within certain subgroups of students as well as gaps in teacher quality, the extent of its effectiveness is only superficial (Autry, 2015). Schools now go through great lengths to ensure they are producing high achieving students, but the steps they are taking to achieve this goal has disparate and negative effects on the students. Specifically, the link between Title 1 schools and the desire for high test scores means that low-income students and students of color often receive monotonous, disengaging, and rote skills-based instruction that creates a negative cycle of worsened academic performance and behavior problems in urban schools (Autry, 2015). Furthermore, schools have started to reshape the data pool by pushing students out to keep them out of schools through lengthy suspensions during testing days (Autry, 2015). Schools mask the

practice of pushing low performing students out through other practices such as "selective discipline" where specific groups of students are suspended through zero-tolerance policies (zero tolerance policies are covered at length in a later section). Students who are disproportionately affected by these practices include students with disabilities, minority students, English language learners, undocumented students, and students who are homeless or in foster care (Kim et al., 2010, pg. 34). As a result of the disparate effects that it has had, namely pushing out low-performing students, NCLB displaces groups of students from the school environment as schools embrace measures to optimize their test results, but jeopardize the students' futures.

Criminalization of Student Misconduct

At the crux of schools' ability to push low performing students out, is the overarching practice of criminalizing student misconduct through the hidden curriculum and disciplinary policies. The hidden curriculum teaches students methods of socialization in relation to their position in the larger society. During the impressionable process of youth social and identity development, the hidden curriculum conveys messages of social value that may be communicated through interactions and the language of the school environment (Kayama, Haight, Gibson, and Wilson, 2015). The hidden curriculum emphasizes discipline for students of color, which opens the door to teacher subjectivity and bias, based on young people's roles in society (Kayama et al., 2015). How does one define discipline? How does culture impact this definition of discipline? As teachers answer these culturally dependent questions, they are creating a school environment that is either socially congruent with the student's culture, or incongruous with it. Most often, for Black boys the school environment is incongruous with their culture, as they are disproportionately criminalized through the hidden curriculum's duality of their roles in school and society, the athlete versus the at-risk student. Their criminalization is

then primarily conducted through zero-tolerance policies which are being increasingly misused to result in other discipline related phenomenon such as selective discipline practices, exclusionary discipline policies, and the discipline gap.

Zero-tolerance policies are the product of the 1994 federal Gun Free Schools Act aimed at minimizing student possession of firearms in school. The context for this act was the perceived rise in school violence as several school shootings were highly publicized through the media. The act mandates states respond to this perceived threat by enacting laws that require districts to expel students who are in possession of a firearm on school grounds for at least one year. The mandate also includes a noteworthy exception, which allows school administers to "modify expulsions on a case-by-case basis" (Kim et al., 2010). There are three inherent dangers with zero-tolerance policies that are inextricably tied to the disproportionate rates of discipline for students of color and contribute to their placement on the school-to-prison pipeline. The dangers include the expansion, application, and subjective interpretation of zero-tolerance policies.

Over the years, zero-tolerance policies have strayed away from its original intent and have expanded to include a number of other behaviors that surface in the school environment. Zero-tolerance policies now span major offenses such as weapons possession, drug use, smoking, and fighting while also including automatic suspensions for more minor offenses such as dress –code violations, truancy, or tardiness. Lastly, zero-tolerance policies can also include behaviors where the intent is ambiguous, most namely, talking back to or disrespecting teachers and engaging in disrupting or distracting behaviors (Kim et al., 2010). Unlike the requirements stated in the original law that allow for case-by-case determinations, some schools mete out suspensions without considering individual circumstances surrounding the student misconduct. Circumstances and characteristics such as a student's age, cognitive development, intent,

recidivism, or character are not considered (Kim et al., 2010). For instance, in one study, students were expelled from school under truancy rules after their alleged truancy was due to the need to recover from violent attacks. The push out experienced here is connected to the school-to-prison pipeline, as one of the students Slick, had nowhere to go so chose to stay on the corner where a friend was gunned down. This places him in danger of being disengaged with school as he may have a sense of injustice since he could not prevent the violent attacks and missed school time and was not allowed to justify his case before the final decision of expulsion (Rios, 2008).

In addition, the total hours of missed instructional time can result in Slick or someone in a similar position falling further behind his peers, which decreases the chances of him earning a high school diploma or choosing to invest in higher education This application of zero-tolerance policies also fails students because it increases their exposure to victimization if students do not have a safe place to go during school hours. By electing to hang out on the corner after his expulsion, Slick risked further victimization from the police in his neighborhood, which also increases his chances of becoming court involved (Rios, 2008). Slick's example illustrates how zero-tolerance policies create an unsafe school environment for students, as misbehaviors can arbitrarily lead to a suspension without an explanation or investigation into mitigating factors, such as intent. In tandem with the pressures of NCLB, if school administrators want to remove students from the school environment, then they can couch their suspensions in arbitrary and punishable behaviors under zero-tolerance policies. Black boys who misbehave or perform poorly academically easily become targets of subjective punishments and pushouts.

Another danger in zero-tolerance policies is its application to schools that predominately educate students of color. Zero-tolerance policies started in response to school violence incidents that primarily occurred in suburban white schools. These policies are now overwhelming applied

in schools that serve students of color (Mallett, 2016). This is dangerous as students of color are subjected to their teacher's interpretations of misconduct, which may be culturally-dependent since many schools are staffed by white, middle class women who do not share the students' backgrounds. This application of zero-tolerance policies becomes embedded in cultural mismatch because of the lack of distinction between severe and minor offenses (Monroe, 2005) and speaks to the last danger in the use of zero-tolerance policies, subjective interpretation. The gray area created between a teacher's interpretations of student behavior and a student's intent is often based on hegemonic white, middle-class cultural values that transform teachers into social agents who can either affirm a student's culture or disempower it by silencing students' ways of interacting. For example, in Ferguson's (2000) research on boys, she notes the differences between the ways Black boys express themselves using "emotional expressions and a rich, complex, nonstandard vocabulary" contrasted with the Standard English and still body demanded in school.

The enactment of zero-tolerance policies in schools are often coupled with the use of over policing, which is another layer to zero-tolerance policies that has its own ties to how students are placed on the school-to-prison pipeline. Under zero-tolerance policies, disciplinary infractions frequently necessitate police referrals that result in opportunities for school officials and police to share and exchange information about students (Kim et al., 2010). Currently deployed in many K-12 schools are armed police offers. Referred to as School Resource Officers or SRO's, these agents patrol the halls of the schools engaging in random sweeps, searching students, administering drug tests, interrogating students, or responding to referrals by arresting students (Kim et al., 2010). In some schools, there is a "three strikes" program in which students are referred to the police or SRO's after their third disciplinary infraction (Rios, 2008). Policies,

like such blur the divide between the juvenile justice system and the adult justice system, as states like California have a "three strikes" law that requires a mandatory sentence of twenty years to life for felons convicted of their third felony (Rios, 2008). Like the other causes of the school-to-prison pipeline, students who are disproportionately affected by this practice include students of color and students with disabilities. Given that Black boys are often overrepresented in both groups, their intersecting identities makes them highly susceptible to these interactions with SRO's, the juvenile courts, and ultimately a justice system that increasingly mirrors practices meant for adults.

For example, one study reported in Kim et al.'s work shows African Americans and Hispanic students in one jurisdiction represent 24% of the student population, but 63% of the school-based arrests by SRO's. The study also found discrepancies between arrest rates, as students of color were more likely to be arrested that a white student for the same infraction (Kim et al., 2010). The results from this study indicate that Black students are increasingly pushed into a system that prepares them for adult crimes and punishments.

The presence and use of SRO's in schools are a detriment to a student's psyche (Kim et al., 2010). To begin, it increases the amount of negative exposure a student has with the police. Students observing these arrests may also develop a negative perspective on the police, rooted in distrust. Arrests in schools also increase the criminalization of students of color as arrests lead to referrals to the juvenile courts that could have been prevented through school-based procedures for addressing student misconduct. Kim et al., (2010) also note some of the long-term effects of school-based arrests by SRO for children and the community, "It nearly doubles the odds of dropping out of school and, if coupled with a court appearance, nearly quadruples the odds of

dropout; lowers standardized test scores; reduces future employment prospects; and increases the likelihood of future interaction the criminal justice system" (p. 113).

The presence of SRO's in schools is another layer to zero-tolerance policies that effectually decrease a student's engagement in the anti-educational environment. School resource officers add to the criminalization of Black males as they mirror the surveillance that occurs in some of these students' neighborhoods and brings it into the schools through their patrols of the hallways. Furthermore, referrals or having SRO's at hand, expedites the rate in which a student can get arrested and referred to juvenile justice courts. As Black males continue to have negative interactions with police officers in places that should represent a safe environment for learning, these boys become disengaged in school as they are not treated as students, but criminals.

Subpar Education in Alternative Education Programs

When students are pushed out of the school system through suspensions or are detained in juvenile justice facilities, the subpar education they receive continues to fail them academically and succeeds in placing them on the school-to-prison pipeline (Kim et al., 2010). Education is not a fundamental right. In some jurisdictions students have the right to education as long as they are present in school. In other jurisdictions, this right is considered voluntarily, waived once a student is chastised and removed from the school environment via suspension or expulsion. This allows jurisdictions to deny students access to alternative education during the duration of their punishment (Kim et al, 2010). In these jurisdictions, the denial of alternative education places students on the school-to- prison pipeline as it increases the chances of students having unsupervised time to spend on the street, academically falling behind their peers due to missed instruction, and experiencing disengagement and dissonance within the school

environment upon return (Kim et al., 2010). Given the students who are predominately pushed out of the anti-educational environment are students of color and those with disabilities, the denial of alternative education succeeds in further disenfranchising these subgroups through suspensions. As the gap widens between these students and their more advantaged peers, the opportunities for academic and economic success in adulthood are further diminished.

Students who are suspended or expelled are presented with two options in lieu of the instruction they would normally receive in school. While some are denied access to education, others are provided with alternative education with or without due process. Regardless of how a student is enrolled in an alternative education program, the provision of alternative education can also place students on the school-to-prison pipeline. Students who are pushed out of schools are not guaranteed procedural protection, which makes them susceptible to placement in an alternative education program without notice or a hearing (Kim et al., 2010). According to researchers, advocates litigating on behalf of the procedural due rights of a student challenge this by arguing that such disciplinary-based transfers implicate both a property interest in receiving an education and attending school and a liberty interest in protecting a student's reputation (Kim et al., 2010).

In the (1975) Supreme Court case, *Goss v. Lopez,* the Supreme Court detailed the due process protections for a student's property and liberty interest in education. Regarding a student's property interest in going to school, the Court claimed, "Having chosen to extend the right to an education to people… generally, [the state] may not withdraw that right-on grounds of misconduct absent fundamentally fair procedures to determine whether the misconduct has occurred" (Kim et al., 2010, p. 80). Based on this ruling, schools are not upholding a student's

property interest in education if the student does not receive a hearing that allows him to present his case. As for a liberty interest in education, the Court stated:

> Where a person's good name, reputation, honor, or integrity is at stake because of what the government is doing to him the minimal requirement of the [Due Process] Clause must be satisfied… [C[harges [of misconduct] could seriously damage the students' standing with their fellow pupils and their teachers as well as interfere with later opportunities for higher education and employment (Kim et al., 2010, p. 81).

Students who are unjustly placed in an alternative education program because of biased hearings or the absence of a hearing are denied their liberty interest in reputation as they are further criminalized or stigmatized for having to attend an alternative education program that holds a negative connotation. For Black boys in the anti-educational environment, placement in an alternative education program without due process is indicative of how institutionalized racism coupled with implicit biases and stereotypes contribute to degrading the image of Black boys and reinforcing the image of the "deviant", "monster", "troublemaker", or "criminal". When students do not receive due process, then their narratives about the behaviors that led them to be suspended or place in an alternative system are silenced and their suspension and subsequent transfer into an alternative education program is based on allegations rather than proof of misconduct. Thus, suspensions without due process are based solely on the interpretations and biases of others, but not on the student who is being removed. Implications resulting from initial allegations can be lifelong and irreversible. Therefore, once a student's reputation is damaged, then his relationships with peers, teachers, and other stakeholders may also suffer throughout their educational journey (Kim et al., 2010). Removing the associated negative label attached to having attended an alternative education program is an arduous task, and it can become entwined

in the student's reputation and self-image. The injurious label may dictate the way he is treated and can usher in the internalization of a criminalized self-image. The student may cascade downhill into the school-to-prison pipeline as he is treated as a criminal and eventually believes that he is a criminal.

Without or without due process to protect a student's property and liberty interests, simply attending an alternative education program can also place students on the school-to-prison pipeline. Some alternative education programs fail students through the substandard education and the environment they provide (Kim et al., 2010). Alternative education programs operate in several diverse environments, including within a charter school, school, juvenile detention center, a trailer near a public school, or in its most basic form, an in-school suspension or detention room (Kim et al., 2010). The amount of time spent in an alternative education program may also vary from one day, to a few months, to a full academic year. Differences are also found in student populations between school districts. Some districts have a disproportionate number of students with special needs and students of color enrolled in their programs (Kim et al., 2010). At the intersection of special education status and race, Black boys are victims of larger systemic problems, as institutionalized racism leads Black boys to be pushed into alternative programs.

Similarly, students of color may be inappropriately labeled as having a disability and pushed into an alternative education program as a way for schools to remove the students they deem uneducable. The connection between misclassification in special education and the road to an alternative education program starts in the anti-educational environment. Misclassification leads to placement in classes that do not provide the appropriate services or are not academically rigorous. In turn, students may misbehave and then are subject to disciplinary consequences

which result in them being pushed out of the school environment via suspension or expulsion and into an alternative education program (Kim et al, 2010).

Given the era of accountability ushered in by NCLB, there are incentives for schools to refer students to alternative programs. Although alternative education programs are accountable for their students' performance under NCLB, there are loopholes that allow alternative education programs to be exempt from standards and requirements determined by individual states. Under NCLB, states are not held accountable for the performance of students who are enrolled in school for less than an academic year (Kim et al., 2010). A loophole is created when schools refer students to alternative education programs midway through the year. Since many of the students who are referred to these schools do not attend for a full academic year, states are thus not held accountable for these students' data (Kim et al., 2010).

In many cases, the education students receive in an alternative education program simply does not compare to the education they receive in a mainstream school setting. Thus, these programs do not invest in their students' academic attainment and "provide minimal classroom instruction, offers little to no support services, offer no chance to earn a regular high school diploma, and, in some cases even lack textbooks and teachers" (Kim et al., 2010, p. 106). Furthermore, some alternative programs lack nonacademic programs such as physical education, health, art, or music, which are essential to developing the whole child. Statistics from a survey of alternative education programs also allude to the fact that some alternative education programs fail to help children change their trajectory by not providing adequate counseling or interventions. According to Kim et al., 13% of public school districts with alternative education programs do not offer academic counseling, 21% did not offer career counseling, and 21 % did

not offer crisis or behavioral intervention. The statistics show that several alternative education programs do not believe that success is possible for these students.

The inequalities between mainstream instruction and alternative instruction continue as students in alternative education programs may not have access to an adequate or accessible curriculum complete with standards. As seen in the 2006 court case *C.S.C. vs. Knox County Board of Education,* some students are relegated to a curriculum that is computer-based with teachers deemed as facilitators to assist with technical questions rather than educators to teach lessons about a subject-matter (Kim et al., 2010). Another example of how alternative education programs provide an inadequate and inaccessible curriculum is found in the failure to provide students with special needs and English Language Learners with the necessary accommodations to be successful. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, states must ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. If they are suspended, expelled, or placed in an alternative education program, states must continue to uphold this right. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. In certain school districts, students with disabilities are denied the services they need until they return to their regular school. In other districts, staff members in alternative education programs are not informed of the student's special education status, which results in the absence of services. A similar denial of accommodations occurs for English Language Learners (Kim et al., 2010).

The academic failures on the part of alternative education programs exacerbate the downward trajectory that students who are pushed out of the mainstream school environment experience as they receive an education that is deficit-based. For Black boys who are disproportionately represented in these programs, their placement in low-quality alternative

educational programs are detrimental to their educational progress. Students who encounter a curriculum without the special education or language services they need and or without rigorous expectations can be devoid of meaning if they cannot access the content without their mandated accommodations or are bored with a curriculum that does not challenge them.

The danger for Black boys does not end with the type of education they receive in alternative education programs. It continues as the environment provides exposure to negative labels and degrading homogenous treatment. Acting under a perceived need to control the at-risk criminals in their space, alternative programs may result in prison-like violations of these students' rights. For instance, alternative schools may use unlawful searches and seizure policies (Kim et al., 2010). Victor Rios' (2010) study, framed by critical criminology and urban ethnography, sheds light on how alternative education programs serve as another agent in leading boys to internalize criminality. Rios, who followed over 30 Black and Latino boys in California for a duration of three years, captures the treatment of boys deemed deviants and delinquents by the Oakland Unified School District in their alternative school setting, East Oakland Continuation School (EOCS) (Rios, 2010). He observes:

> The first person at the entrance of the school was a security guard… Her   modus
>
> operandi was to "mean mug" (stare down) every student who walked in through
>
> the gate… inside the school, another security guard checked them   with a handheld metal
>
> detector to make sure they did not bring a weapon to school… all the teachers had one
>
> practice in common: whenever any students misbehaved, the teachers would threaten
>
> either to call the police, to send them to jail, or to call a probation officer…At EOCS,
>
> stigma, labeling, detention, harassment, and humiliation were just about the only
>
> consistent experiences that young people could count on (Rios, 2010, p. 79-82).

As Rios' study illustrates, the purpose of some/many alternative education programs is reduced to becoming a holding pen for failing and minority youth cast away by schools (Kim et al., 2010, p. 97). Instead of prioritizing the provision of additional counseling or academic help students need to succeed, alternative education programs reinforce social order and control as its deficit-based approach allows groups within its boundaries to remain in an inferior status. These students receive continuous stream of messages communicating to them that they are "less than" and criminals. Prison then becomes the price that is paid by Black boys for schools that attempt to circumvent the punitive sanctions associated with low test scores.

Locked Out: **Systemic Barriers that Keep Youth Out Schools and in the Punitive Paradigm**

The anti-educational environment includes the disparate effects of NCLB and the use of zero-tolerance policies to help push students out. Some alternative education programs represent an anti-educational environment as students receive a subpar education in the interim until they go back to school. In the alternative education program, students are also exposed to criminalizing treatment, which facilitates the internalization of negative labels such as the troublemaker, the bad boy, the deviant, or the criminal. These causes of the school–to-prison pipeline are interconnected and work together to keep Black males on this punitive paradigm; however, there is one more link that also works in conjunction with these interconnected parts: systemic barriers.

I specifically refer to all system-based breakdowns or failures that present itself as an obstacle to a student's education or reentry to mainstream education as a systemic barrier. Based on this definition, I have identified three categories of systemic barriers that impede the success of Black males and create an anti-educational environment: (1) systemic barriers for students with special needs, (2) systemic barriers for students in juvenile detention centers, and (3)

systemic barriers for students trying to reenter mainstream schooling. The culmination of these systemic barriers keeps students on the school-to-prison pipeline as they remain academically behind their peers or increases their chances of recidivism.

The first systemic barrier includes systems around ensuring that students with individualized education plans (IEPs) receive the necessary accommodations and services as indicated by their IEPs. Students receive IEPs when they have special needs –children with learning disabilities or behavioral or emotional disorders (Kim et al., 2010). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, students with special needs are entitled to a free and appropriate education (FAPE). The IDEA mandates that students between the ages of 3 and 21 receive FAPE whether they are in school or in correctional facilities (Kim et al., 2010). Unfortunately, while in school students may not be adequately identified for the services they need, in turn increasing the child's chances of acting out, getting suspended and then becoming court involved (Kim et al., 2010). According to Kim et al., (2010), the lack of identification for high-quality special education services is only part of the breakdown with special education services within schools serving poor and minority students. Schools are also misusing special education where there is a conflation between identification, placement, and discipline to exclude students and push them out of the school environment.

In a longitudinal study set in Pinellas County, Florida, the results showed that students with disabilities were suspended repeatedly. When examining suspensions for low-income Black males with special needs as a subgroup, it was found that as a group they were most often suspended multiple times (Kim et al., 2010). Other systemic barriers that occur in schools regarding special education services involve a lack of knowledge about the rights of special

education students on the part of educators or parents. By this information not being properly communicated to these stakeholders, it increases the chances the child is not receiving the proper supports and services to ensure his success in the school environment. A downward spiral is created here once the child is not being effectively educated, then this may lead to misbehaviors, which then leads to the enforcement of discipline policies or suspensions to control behaviors (Kim et al., 2010).

Systemic barriers on the part of students with special needs also fail students in juvenile detention centers. There students may not receive FAPE as some juvenile detention centers do not have adequate systems to access and implement a student's IEP. This creates an anti-educational environment for students because their unique needs are not being met in the institution. Rather, some facilities will use a generic IEP to account for the needs of this population. Furthermore, some facilities may not have the proper teaching staff to provide the required services or classes as indicated by the IEP (Kim et al., 2010). The systemic barriers continue, as some facilities do not develop transition plans for students' successful exit out of the facility and reentry into the schools (Kim et al., 2010). This fails students and continues to place them on the school to prison pipeline as schools may not be informed about how to best interact with the student after his detention and therefore increase the chances of the student's recidivism.

Once a student is detained in a juvenile detention center, his chances of receiving an education are decreased because of the lack of systems within certain institutions to ensure that he receives a high-quality education. This mirrors the anti-educational environment that is created in schools as these students are not receiving an education that will empower them. To begin, juvenile detention centers act as systemic barriers when they do not have a system for education. This occurs when the juvenile detention center does not provide students with enough

learning time indicated by a certain number of hours per day, fails to employ an adequate ratio of highly qualified teachers per student, or allocates an adequate educational space for instruction (Kim et al., 2010). The next systemic barrier in juvenile detention centers occurs when the juvenile detention center only offers a GED class as the educational option (Kim et al., 2010). This limits the amount of educational success a student can achieve since they are relegated to receiving an equivalence diploma. Lastly, depending on the structure or operations of some juvenile detention centers, they may de-incentivize education by forcing their detainees to choose between participating in an educational program and engaging in other options such as "paid work, recreation, or placement in less secure facilities such as camps and shelters" (Kim et al., 2010). The last systemic barrier is the maintenance of academic records and transcripts. This is a systemic barrier as students may not receive the academic credit they earned in the institution because the transcripts are not maintained (Kim et al., 2010).

Finally, the school-to-prison pipeline is also exacerbated by the systemic barriers that lock students out of reentering schools. On some level, there is a lack of coordination between the juvenile justice system and the education system. The justice system releases students during mid semesters and the summer which poses challenges to the school enrollment process (Kim et al., 2010). Sometimes school districts will refuse to enroll court-involved youth, or have system-wide policies in place that bar court-involved youth from mainstream schools and push them into alternative education programs. Finally, some school officials use their discretionary power to completely bar students from the mainstream school environment. In sum, these systemic barriers work together to increase the likelihood of students staying on the school–to-prison pipeline as they increase the amount of academic disengagement students feel once they continue to receive a subpar education which puts them academically behind their peers resulting in a

challenging reintegration process. Furthermore, students are exposed to more criminalizing messages as they are locked out of the mainstream school and then forced to attend alternative education programs that send messages that they are a criminal.

"Bruh": Relationship-building as a Tenet to Male Students' Success

Although I have chosen to highlight causes that are school and education- related and explain the behavior of Black males from structuralist (viewing human behavior as a function of inequality and the political economy) and culturalist (viewing human behavior as a function of moral codes that become a culture within itself in certain families, communities, or groups, i.e. a "culture of poverty") perspectives, this is not to embrace a reductionist perspective that renders Black males as passive objects within a larger youth control complex (Noguera, 2008). It is important to note that humans can have agency over their life trajectory and making choices that either exacerbate or counteract their positioning (Noguera, 2008). Without the presence of the aforementioned causes, Black males have the agency to choose to engage in negative behaviors that increase their visibility with the law and increase the likelihood that they are placed on the school-to-prison pipeline.

At the same time, the inverse is also true. With the presence of the aforementioned causes, Black males have the agency to choose to counteract the anti-educational environment and hopelessness and disrupt their positioning on a downward trajectory. As Pedro Noguera explains in his book *The Trouble with Black Boys*, although the power to counteract external forces such as the environment, poverty, and a culture of poverty exists, it is naive to assume that individuals can counter them or will choose to counter them (Noguera, 2008). As a recommendation for inducing change within such individuals and countering negative behaviors

such as dropping out of school, selling drugs, or engaging in violent behavior, which simultaneously serves as behaviors that solidify the route from school to prison, Noguera implores stakeholders to increase their efforts to understand the cognitive processes that informs the logic and motivations behind the behaviors in addition to how these behaviors represent patterns of adaption, coping, and responding (Noguera, 2008, p. 26). In order to effectively engage in this process, stakeholders, most namely teachers, must begin by building a relationship with students. In her work with one student, Anne Ferguson demonstrates this understanding:

The reputation had raised my anxiety he had among school adults as a boy who was difficult and out of control. Horace's name had become the standard against which other children would be judged… Despite the bad press that he had gotten from the school adults and my anxiety about working with him, we got along well… He dragged me by the hand into his world one Saturday afternoon at the movies… As we went from theater to theater mixing up pathos, sentimentality, greed, violence, tears, screams, laughter, horror, fear, I glimpsed Horace in ways that I had not expected to (Ferguson, 2000, p. 14).

In her book, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity,* Anne Ferguson (2000) shows how teacher-student relationships with Black boys can transform stereotypic perspectives of students and in the long term, prevent placement on the school-to-prison pipeline. Ferguson decidedly establishes a relationship with the infamous Horace as she fulfills the role of his afterschool tutor. Through her work and relationship with him, Ferguson realizes that there is another side to Horace that needed to be uncovered. Her attempts to build a relationship with Horace through activities such as a Saturday outing and using him as a research assistant shifted her perspective of him as a student from one "who was characterized by school

as 'volatile,' 'insubordinate,'" to one who is "also conforming, obedient, and deeply focused in other contexts in school and out" (Ferguson, 2000, p. 15).

In the same manner, Ferguson used her established relationship with Horace to debunk some of the stereotypes and labels appended to his name, teachers working with Black males need to develop relationships with them to purge their records of stereotypic perspectives and labels such as "at-risk." Sometimes this relationship means being a resistor within the anti-education environment and working against the rooted causes of the school-to-prison pipeline. Bursztyn and Bursztyn's (2015) framework of Culturally Informed Positive Pedagogy (CIPP) provides teachers with a pedagogical platform that supports the benefits of relationship-building for this unique group.

At the intersection of culture, race, class, and gender, Black boys need an encompassing pedagogical framework that considers both academic challenges and an understanding of the effects of societal representations of class, race, gender, and Black culture. As a minority group within Western culture, I consider Black students as a culturally diverse group who attend schools where a disjuncture exists between the students' experiences and the philosophy of the school, the curricula, or the cultures of the teachers. This disjuncture is not only a result of students seeing a lack of representation of home and cultural practices in school curricula, but also a result of the challenges teachers face in navigating intercultural spaces.

One way to address this disjuncture and to enhance the experience of culturally diverse students is to create classroom spaces that are inviting and reflective of diverse populations and cultural practices (Bursztyn and Bursztyn, 2015). Bursztyn and Bursztyn further explain educators' attempts to create these environments by noting their resistance against messages implicit in schools: "educators [do] seek to move beyond dated notions of conformity and

assimilation within the general culture"; however, the problem that educators are encountering is the pedagogical *how*.

I particularly chose the CIPP framework as the framework for developing relationships because it answers this pedagogical "how." Bursztyn and Bursztyn (2015) detail CIPP as a framework that emphasizes relationship building as an integral part in creating a school environment that is deemed safe and responsive to students' needs amid "school structures [that] unwittingly act against their efforts (p. 7). When developing relationships with students, teachers have to first develop their pedagogic imagination which allows them to imagine their students lived experiences and the possibilities that arise from them. In an environment where the teachers and students' cultures may be different teachers should use their pedagogic imaginations to determine degrees of sameness and difference. (Bursztyn & Bursztyn, 2015, p.5). An example of difference between," the culture of the student and the culture of the teacher is in the formation of the image of the "troublemaker and culturally-dependent expectations of behavior. For Black boys, the label of the troublemaker may result from a teacher's lack of understanding of cultural expressions of emotion and forms of communication, rather than an intentional desire to be defiant. Ferguson (2000) elaborates:

> A defiant, challenging, oppositional body; dramatic, emotional expressions; a rich
> complex nonstandard vocabulary establishes "outer limits" in a field of comparison in
> which the desired norm is a docile body presence and the intonation and homogeneous
> syntax of Standard English. The black child exemplifies this outer limit: the closer to
> whiteness, to the norm of bodies, language, emotion, the more these children *are* self-
> disciplined and acceptable members of the institution… There is an enormous amount of

interpretation, of reading the meaning of personal, as well as cultural, forms of communication, which takes place in exchanges between adults and children (p. 66).

Interactions between children and teachers are not carried out through objective lenses. Most interactions are tied to personal and cultural beliefs. When discussing behaviors and the perception of the good student or high achieving student, a teacher's personal and cultural beliefs can heavily shape this image. This poses a conflict for Black boys whose expression and communication differ from the dominant culture the school perpetuates and whose grades fall short of what schools need to increase test scores. Subjected to the teacher's bias and interpretation, the disjuncture between home and school only widens for Black boys who like Horace are incorrigible in school in contrast to other contexts where they are compassionate and affectionate. This leads one to question to what extent is the incorrigible behavior displayed by boys intended to be defiant versus a result of a function of a disjuncture between home and school, or teachers' misinterpretations of culture.

To address the role of intercultural conflict, CIPP requires teachers to acknowledge the disjuncture that often exits for culturally diverse students and their families while concurrently urging them to discover the number of strengths culturally diverse students bring to the classroom milieu (Bursztyn & Bursztyn, 2015). Furthermore, by focusing on the strengths of a student, CIPP impacts academic success by straying away from a deficit perspective: a perspective that often results in labels such as "at-risk" and results from the dual role of the academically inferior student that is propelled by the hidden curriculum. This deficit perspective also stems from teacher's perspectives of students who enter the classroom unequipped with certain academic skills or capital as defined by the dominant culture.

In contrast to similar models that advocate for cultural relevancy in the classroom, CIPP introduces a unique understanding of positive psychology, which helps educators and professionals alike to not only focus on the transformative nature of relationship-building, but also on how to positively transform a classroom into a safe and warm space, which is absent in schools that use draconian discipline policies and school resource officers to police student misconduct. For Black boys, who are the brunt of labels such as "at-risk", there is a need for classrooms based on culturally informed relationships, while maintaining an environment that is safe, creative, intellectually stimulating, and positive.

The framework of CIPP consists of three key components that dynamically interact to provide educators with tools for creating a warm, engaging, positive, and safe space for students of diverse backgrounds. Pedagogy is specifically viewed as a "relationship and responsibility; reflective practice and community building; and student-centered curriculum for learning, growth, and creativity" (Bursztyn & Bursztyn, 2015, p. 3). Even though all aspects of CIPP are applicable to working with boys, I specifically want to draw attention to the discourse on relationship-building as defined by CIPP. This aspect of CIPP is central to the discourse on educating Black boys because of its emphasis on getting to know students to create the ideal classroom space.

CIPP bases a conceptualization of relationship-building on Donald Winnicott's notion of the holding environment. During the relationship-building process, educators are engaged in a process that allows them to identify the level of sameness and difference that exists between them and the student. By recognizing the degree of sameness, teachers can see how they relate to the student, thus creating potential pathways for bonding. Concurrently, through the recognition of differences, teachers see the extent to which their assumptions about students are false and

potentially based on stereotypes or cultural differences. Identification of difference permits the educator to see the individual needs that students have that must also be responded to in the holding environment.

Once the relationship is established the holding environment begins to form, creating "a space that re-creates the experience of being held and cared for by an engaged, responsive adult" (Burstyn & Burstyn, 2015, p. 7) This liberates the child from concerns about safety or security and allows the child "to be curious, to create, to consider, and to learn" (Burstyn & Burstyn, 2015, p. 7), in other words, creates optimal conditions for learning that are currently non-existent in the anti-educational environment. The relationship-building process ushers in the perquisites for creating a holding environment because this process shows students that you care and are engaged holistically in their welfare. Furthermore, through the identification of sameness and difference between educator and student, the educator becomes responsive to the unique needs that surface as a result of a difference.

When considering the education of Black boys, the difference can surface from more salient characteristics such as gender and culture, but also other characteristics such as home-life, neighborhood conditions, and class-based struggles. When children come to school they do not come as isolated beings. What happens at home, in the neighborhood, or as a result of a class-based struggle travels into the classroom and affects students' ability to learn and their subsequent behavior. For Black boys who are exposed to such elements, such as criminalized images in the media, their difficulties with learning and behaving in the context of school may be affected by outside contexts in addition to being exacerbated by the ethos of the anti-educational environment. This increases the need for educators to develop a relationship with students so that they are acknowledging the effect that outside and internal elements can have on the student's

need for safety and security in the classroom. Ferguson (2000) details the impact of stereotypes about neighborhoods and certain groups of children on the needs of the child:

> African American boys who are doubly displaced: as black children, they are not seen as childlike but adultified; as black males, they are denied the masculine dispensation constituting white males as being "naturally naughty" and are discerned as willfully bad   (p. 80).

> The prevailing image in our society of childhood is that it is a separate and distinct phase of adulthood when one is shielded from adult worries about survival. Children, in this ideological construction, are afraid of monsters, of the dark… Donte's mother, Mariana, lamented the fact that her son and daughter were unable to be "children" in this way. Growing up in a "bad" neighborhood means that the idealized image of childhood as a carefree stage of life is an unattainable condition (p. 118).

Monsters, creatures under the bed, dangers of the dark are all fears that flood typical childhood; however, children who live in neighborhoods that are poverty-stricken and under-resourced experience realities that include crime, drugs, and violence. These realities help to age the child as they start to see their neighborhoods as the antithesis of the holding environment. You are not free to be creative or curious. There may be a lack of responsive and engaged adults. You worry about your safety. You are blanketed under one prevailing narrative of the criminal because of your surroundings. There is constant surveillance and policing, but it is not intended to protect you. Using relationships to determine the extent to which outside contexts affect a student helps a teacher to understand the necessity of establishing a holding environment within

the classroom space. The child now develops as a child instead of being burdened by worries of security, safety, or survival.

CIPP is a framework that is ideal for working with Black boys who live in the intersection of societal conceptualizations of Black culture, bad boys, failing students, and bad neighborhoods. CIPP's framework includes the pedagogical dimension of relationship as a responsibility, which is vital to working with boys. This dimension is pivotal because it requires teachers to learn more about the students as a way of understanding a context behind their behavior. Relationship as a responsibility also transforms the teacher into a resistor because the teacher is now forced to debunk the myths and stereotypes exist in the hidden curriculum and anti-educational environment. In conjunction with the other aspects of CIPP, the relationship formed allows the teacher to use student experiences as a conduit for instruction, which starts to break the monotonous, skills-based instruction delegated by NCLB.

Furthermore, CIPP allows for the creation of classrooms that resemble a holding environment. This is essential to the classroom atmosphere because it not only permits students to feel safe and secure because of the presence of an engaged adult, but it also frees students from adult worries. The byproduct: a space to learn, create, and be curious. In teaching boys who are marked with labels such as "at-risk" or the "troublemaker", a holding environment based on knowledgeable relationships is crucial in preventing long-term effects such as disassociation with school and the school-to-prison pipeline.

In an interview with one of the men from his study on the effects of surveillance, punishment, and criminal justice practices on the lives of Black and Latino boys, Rios (2011) captures the role of a teacher as a resistor using his relationship with a student to help alter his perspective of the school and disrupt his placement on the school-to-prison pipeline:

'What were the conditions that helped you to turn your life around, from being a gang member whose house got shot at and who witnessed a few murders, and from being someone who participated in crimes that may have led to decades in prison?'

Young G replied, 'As I was getting close to being eighteen, I started to recognize I could get more heavy into it or this is my last opportunity. I met this math teacher who really turned backwards and forwards for me. He knew I had potential. He would visit my house. He wrote me letters of recommendation. Even when I cussed him out and there was a desk on the floor in his class, he gave me another chance.' Young G found a teacher who broke away from the mainstream punitive social control at his school (p. 165).

Young G's math teacher was a resister who used his relationship with Young G to send a message of love and compassion that is different from the messages sent to Black boys in the anti-educational environment. Furthermore, by choosing to give Young G a second chance as opposed to using zero-tolerance policies to exert control over, or to push out Young G illustrates this teacher's understanding of the larger effects of such policies and their role in placing students on the school-to-prison pipeline. Young G who is enrolled in college and aspires to attend medical school is an example of a successful narrative in which teachers can use their actions as resistors to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (Rios, 2011).

Given the literature on the challenges of Black boys in school and the potential long-term effects of early disassociation with school and placement on the school-to-prison pipeline, it was imperative that my goal of being an educator included affecting the lives of a "troubled" group. When the opportunity arose for me to work with Black boys, I jumped at the chance to make the change that I dreamed of. Now, as a fourth-grade teacher, I battle the challenges of being a

resistor while working with this group during a crucial period where boys experience the "fourth-grade syndrome." This is the grade in which Black boys may start to experience a decline in their academic performance potentially due to their physical appearance resembling that of young men (Noguera, 2008).

Meet the "Bad" Boy

Fredrick (Freddy, Fred) Small. Freddy's reputation consists of images commonly portrayed by the hidden curriculum. He is the "academically low performing student," "unmotivated boy," "class clown," "unkempt child" and "athlete". One teacher who has interacted with him in previous settings remarks, "Freddy just doesn't care. If he is not into it, then he is not into it." Regarding his family life, another teacher remarked, "His mother doesn't care for them, that's why he is always sick and dirty." Freddy comes from a single-parent household with three other brothers. His mother is a hard-working woman who uses the assistance of her mother and father to help raise her sons. Thus, Freddy spends many of his weeknights and weekends with his grandparents and will come to school tired because of traveling. Freddy resides in a predominantly low-income and minority neighborhood. He lives one block away from my apartment in an affordable housing unit. Freddy loves sports and possesses a great deal of universal athleticism. He primarily plays football outside of school in a junior league, but according to his physical education teacher and wrestling coach, Freddy easily picks up other sports and plays with such agility and speed that he is a coveted teammate.

The school describes Freddy as an academically low achieving student. Although he has made tremendous growth in reading this year, his challenges in reading and math stem from difficulties with reading. At the beginning of the school year, Freddy struggled with reading comprehension. Plagued with incoherent thoughts and spelling errors, Freddy's written work

testified to the extent to which reading affected his academics. In math, reading-based challenges also surfaced as Freddy excels with algorithms and straightforward equations, but struggles with multistep word problems. Over the course of the year Freddy's academic ability and confidence grew significantly. Prideful and easily embarrassed in the beginning of the school year, Freddy was hesitant to read aloud, but by the end of the year, Freddy's confidence is evident in his willingness to read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* aloud in an audible voice riddled with expression. To get to this end, it took nine months of relationship building in the anti-educational environment.

Building Relationships in the Anti-educational Environment

As a new educator, I knew forming relationships with my students was essential to their academic success. I have learned the benefits of this practice from teacher preparation programs, research, and examples like my own third grade teacher, Ms. Tulloch. However, developing successful and meaningful relationships was something that I had to learn *how* to do, especially within the anti-educational environment that exists for Black males in schools. Therefore, I encountered a problem. Without a frame of reference on how to approach relationship-building with difficult students, I felt challenged in my school: do I follow my notions of relationship-building or adopt a whole school strategy? Because of a discipline system that believes in strict parameters of what constitutes a dean referral or further disciplinary action, I felt placed in a position where I was questioning what I believe to be successful with Black boys versus what I believe perpetuates negative stereotypes of Black boys. I had to find a balance in these perspectives to create a holding environment that allowed me to achieve the goal of providing my boys with an equitable education.

First Days

At the beginning of the school year, I started the relationship-building process through parent phone calls. From Bursztyn and Bursztyn's work, I knew that relationship-building with culturally diverse students does not only include working with the student, but also extends to the family who may have had discrepant experiences with the school in the past. My co- teacher and I divided the class in half and called all our students' parents. When dividing the class, I ensured that I called all the parents with sons who had difficult reputations. At the top of my list was Freddy. These phone calls served a dual purpose as I learned more about the parents and their backgrounds as well as what they wanted me to know about their son. Information such as their son's weaknesses, strengths, hobbies, and summer activities surfaced through the conversations.

The next approach to relationship-building was the use of student surveys. On the first day of school, the students were instructed to work on a do now requiring them to answer personal questions such as what are their favorite foods, which sports do they like to play, and how do they spend their spare time? After reading the surveys, I realized that I only possessed a slight idea of what my students were like and did not possess a complete picture. To go beyond this with Freddy, I stayed in close contact with his mom via text messages and occasional phone calls when he did something well and when he was not his best. This proved beneficial in developing a relationship with Freddy because he knew I was in constant contact with his mother, but it also helped the relationship between his mother and me, as she was thankful that I called to relay both good and bad news. Through this relationship, I learned more about Freddy's love for football and received an invitation to his championship game.

When I arrived at the game, I did not immediately see Freddy, but I did see his younger brother who also plays football. His younger brother walked me over to his mother who was cheering Freddy on from the bleachers. She was more than happy to see that I came out to

support her son. Although I could not see Freddy from where I was standing, his mother proudly pointed out his jersey number, explained his position, and recapped what happened during the game. As I stood near his mom cheering, I could not help but think that everyone had the wrong idea about Freddy's family life. This was not a mother who did not care about her children. This is a mother who is proud of her sons and invested in them.

As the game began to wind down, his mother started to mention how Freddy was so excited about me coming to his game, but did not believe that I was going to fulfil my promises again so poignant. Once the game ended, I witnessed Freddy as a leader on the field. As a top player in his division, he is endowed with the responsibility of leading the team in their ceremonial victory chants, in addition to a few routine stretches after the game. When the team dispersed, Ms. Small introduced me to Freddy's coaches and then took a few pictures. Freddy was extremely shy during the photo session, as he refused to stand near me and smile. In parting, Freddy's mom thanked me many times and extended an invite to church. Of course, Freddy shook his head disapprovingly and shied away to the bleachers. I was so inspired by the interactions that I shared with Freddy's mom that I went back to school the next day and shared with Freddy's former teacher, the school dean, and the office manager how invested I believed his mother was. The response from the school dean was, "No, she's ratchet and ghetto and is invested in the wrong things when her children are struggling to read." Nonetheless, I used my experience at the game as a witness to Freddy's strength and started telling him he was a leader during our morning greetings.

Teacher commentary. I was dismayed by the responses that I received about Freddy's mom. These responses represent the negative perspectives that teachers hold within the anti-educational environment. Based on stereotypes of Black children who appear dirty or unkempt,

if teachers believe that the parents do not care and are not invested, then those sentiments are transferred to the type of instruction and help the teacher is willing to invest in the student. For Freddy, the first step in disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline had to be establishing a visible relationship with his mom so that he can see that I am invested and believe in him. Despite the responses, I continued to keep in contact with his mom and insisted she communicate the game schedule to me. She held true to her word and although I could not attend any more games for the season, we kept in constant communication about her son's behavior via text.

In the classroom, drawing on CIPP's practices of teaching through a student's strengths, I ensured that I used every opening in my instruction to teach Freddy the leader and not Freddy the academically inferior student. This meant magnifying his small decisions to help me as moments of leadership. This also meant viewing his desire to start and finish assignments first as moments of leadership rather than the deficit perspective of, "he doesn't know how to wait and be patient." The pride visible in receiving positive attention in class helped him to increase his confidence in the work he was doing in reading and math.

On the Same Team

After witnessing Freddy on the field, I noticed the stark contrast in his character. The Freddy on the field is passionate, fearless, confident, a leader. The Freddy in the classroom is shy, soft-spoken, silly, and insecure in his academic abilities. Despite's Freddy's challenges with reading, Freddy's ability to write grew tremendously within the first four months of school. His writing became creative and filled with sophisticated inferences as to what a character is thinking or feeling; writing evident of Freddy's zest for learning. Within two cycles of reading instruction, Freddy grew three levels as measured by our reading assessments. As much as possible, I always

tried to find pockets of time during instruction to put his growth on stage. I wanted him to know that he was brilliant and capable of anything if he continued to work hard.

Unfortunately, the zero-tolerance policies and no excuses model of our school problematized Freddy's growth. An eight hour plus day, starting promptly at 7:15 a.m. and filled with lots of skills-based instruction required Freddy to sustain his attention throughout the day. Freddy, a student who needs to move around when he gets bored and who becomes easily frustrated once he believes he is failing at something, will act out for attention or to release some of his anger. Behaviors such as falling out of his chair, refusing to do work, choosing to work ahead of the class, or flinging and drumming pencils on the desk, would surface around 1:45, marking Fredrick's breaking point. These were Freddy's behaviors that signaled that he needed a break, but in the eyes of school leadership, these behaviors were costly distractions that warranted a dean referral. After a point, a number of dean referrals culminate in a suspension.

To address Fred's needs, my co-teacher and I tried many different strategies to help him cope with his boredom, frustration, and activeness. We first allowed Freddy to have bathroom breaks that allowed him to get a sip of water and walk slowly down the hallway and then back to class. This strategy was short-lived because after a while he started to take advantage of it by requesting to go outside or by taking longer than necessary. Next, we designated a spot for him outside of the classroom so that if we needed to have conversations with him about his body and behavior, we could do so discretely to protect his image in the classroom. It took a while for Freddy to internalize the meaning of the spot. The first few months, he would meander his way down the hallway or bring pencils with him and break them. By late March, he became fond of the spot and started to see it as an opportunity to cool down outside of the warm classroom and to have a moment to himself.

The spot became extremely crucial in the heat of in-house tutoring for the state tests. Due to the emphasis on state tests, our school allocated an additional 75 minutes within the day to prep students on the various types of questions they may encounter on the test and strategies or skills to correctly answer those questions. This is the epitome of skills-based instruction to increase student achievement on standardized testing because of NCLB. To accommodate the additional 75 minutes the school shortens the students' arts, music, and fitness block, in addition to their end of the day choice time (when students get to play games to celebrate a good day). One day in late March, Freddy had enough of the monotonous tutoring schedule. He started to fall out the chair, disobey all directions to stay in his chair, and then started to talk back to me. I realized that he needed a break so I sent him out to his spot, however, when I peeped out at the spot, Freddy was not only standing away from the spot, but he had broken several pencils and was engaged in a conversation with another student.

Shocked, since this was the behavior I expected from him back in January, I went up to him and yelled at him. At the moment, I was just as tired and overwhelmed as he was and took this as a slap in the face, "How dare he disrespect me after all of the chances and patience that I showed him daily?" I really let him have it and told him that he was not being the leader that I thought he was. At that moment, he shrugged, and replies, "Oh well, I guess I'm not a leader then." Those words destroyed our relationship. I stripped him of the very title that he believed in and made him lesser than.

In the following days, everything changed. Freddy would nonchalantly walk up to me and greet me. He refused to respond to my directions or he would do so disrespectfully. It was clear that he was hurt and distrusted me. He was eventually sent to the dean, where as a scare

tactic the dean told him that social services would take him away because he is disrespecting his teachers.

Teacher commentary. As a teacher, I chose to teach against the grain and resist the policies of the school that required me to send Fred to the dean. The dean, a tall, Black, muscular man is the enforcer of the rules in our school. I disagree with referring students to the dean because I believe that the school perverts the absence of fathers into a scare tactic to control behavior. Many students who visit the dean are terrified of him and rightfully so because of the threatening practices that he engages in. These include telling students that they will be taken from their families, suspended, or that their mothers would have to come to the building for a meeting before they can resume classes. For the families of many of these boys, these threats are successful in controlling their behavior because if their mother has to take a day off from work, then this results in the loss of pay to financially support the family, a consequence far greater than anything that occurs in school.

The Craze of Testing

For much of the year, I resisted sending Freddy to the dean because I did not want him to internalize that he was a deviant kid. At the beginning of the year, I used the dean as my principal suggested, "It's the best intervention for him. And then you can play the good, loving teacher when he gets back." That is not what happened when Freddy went. When Freddy returned from the dean, he would walk in with a hip, "gangsta" walk and a smirk on his face. It was almost as if he was trying to send the class and me a message about his masculinity, "I am tougher than that. That doesn't faze me." In a more casual conversation one day he even went as far as to say, "I am not afraid of anyone in this building. Not Mr. Drew (the dean) or Mr. Howard (the principal)."

For students who are constantly sent to the dean, like Freddy, being sent to the dean loses its effectiveness because instead of building a relationship with the teacher, they are building relationships with the dean and the other students who are always there. For Freddy, keeping him in the room and having conversations with him about why his behavior was intolerable in my room was more effective because it communicated a more loving message that I am not giving up on him because he is not deviant. Although this strategy did not work most times and the behavior would persist, the consistency and patience suggest a stronger message than an easy removal.

By February, I thought I finally broke through to Freddy. He became more invested in his academics and he was more docile in the classroom while still maintaining much of his character during appropriate times of the day. One day while I was checking his work, I noticed that he had a number of scribbles and doodles on his folder. As a teacher, Figure 1 was evidence of Freddy's investment in his reading growth. He took the initiative to categorize his work into "Work I need" and "Work I don't need." He maintained this system by ripping off the most recently corrected writing assessment and placing it in the "Work I don't need section" in addition to other resources such as readings and a rewrite packet. Pleased with the impact that I was having on, Freddy I was surprised to see the doodle on the back (Figure 2). In this doodle, Freddy drew a caricature of me. I would describe myself as an African American woman with short hair and a long face. The picture Freddy drew matches my description of my features, but
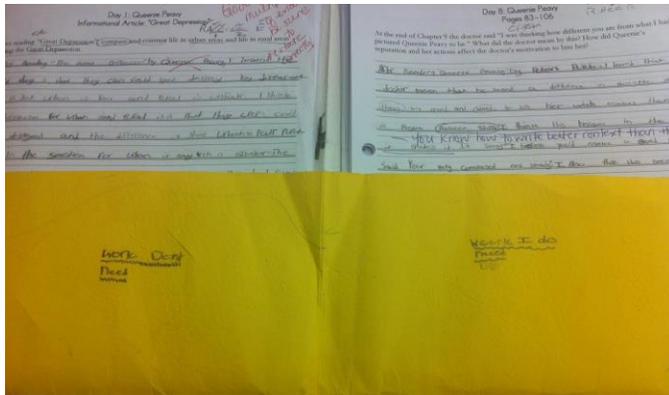
Figure 1: Pictured left, "Work don't need." Pictured right, "Work I do need."

Figure 2: A picture of me with my first initial and my last name, the initials of the school, and my last name in my hair.

other markers like my name on the shirt and in my hair, makes this a drawing that undoubtedly resembles me. Laughing hysterically, I decided to take a picture of this drawing to show my other colleagues. When I showed my colleagues the picture, three of them laughed, but seven of them concluded with statements such as, "So what did you do about it?", "Did you send him to the dean?", "Have you told his mother?", and "He should be suspended." When I probed further, one teacher explained further, "You look like Bert (reference to the character from the kids' show *Sesame Street*). And besides, he should have been doing his work. This shows that he was off-task."

Teacher commentary. The responses and reactions that this picture solicited shocked me. I assumed that everyone would find Figure 2 hilarious because of the detail that went into the shape of my face and illustrating my hair cut; however, the negative reactions towards this picture were not based on an interpretation of the illustration, but rather an interpretation of the reputation and intent of the illustrator. Many teachers know Freddy based on his reputation as a "troublemaker" and therefore as constantly in the dean's office.

Using this lens, the interpretation of this illustration makes sense- the illustrator had a malicious intent. This instance, shows how the school-to-prison pipeline is perpetuated in school through the magnification of little behaviors. Grounded in criminalizing language based on a culture of no excuses, many teachers easily said this was grounds for suspension and a parent conference because it shows off-task behaviors. As his teacher, my decision to not send him to the dean or address this with the dean is based on an interpretation of what I know about Fred. Criminalizing him over something as harmless as a doodle, would only destroy our relationship and damper both the academic and social success that he was experiencing at that moment.

Year-Round Relationship Building

As mentioned earlier, Fredrick lives one block away from my apartment. After I found this out, I openly joked with Freddy and told him that one day I would visit him. He would insist against it and lied about both his address and his bell number several times. Of course, I already possessed this information because of access to school records and communications with his mother. By March, Freddy was on an upward streak. The investment continued and he increasingly wanted to help around the classroom, anticipating my needs. He was also enjoying a new system that I devised for him where instead of receiving one color (green, yellow, orange, or red) that summarized his day on a spectrum from excellent too bad, he was now receiving three

colors in the areas of reading, math, and behavior. Additionally, he was also on the wrestling team after I nominated him as a good fit. The coach, impressed by his skill, was always sure to update me on his progress and how proud he was of Freddy's athletic prowess. With such great improvement, I figured it was time to visit him at home. Once I cleared it with his mom, I visited one Thursday evening.

When I stepped inside the apartment, Freddy was extremely shy. He was hiding in the kitchen and would constantly walk back and forth between the kitchen and his bedroom being sure to avoid my gaze. His mom and three other brothers all welcomed me. While his mother led me through a gallery walk of all the photos of her children and family, his brother brought me a bottle of juice to drink. His younger brothers chimed in here and there about the pictures, trophies, and the events of their day. After a while, Ms. Small called Freddy out of his bedroom and told him to show me his MVP trophy and his bedroom. A guide with few words, his bedroom included two beds for him and his brother, a closet that they share, a small toy bin, and a small bookshelf with a row of books. I carefully looked at the books and tried to start a conversation by asking, "Which one is your favorite?" He pulls out a few sports books about basketball and football and explains that he likes them because they talk about sports. At the end of the tour, he walked me back to the living room in which I started to tell his mom about how proud of him I am because of the progress he is making. She responds by telling me more about how her family values education and respect. She explains that she relies on them heavily-- especially her older brother who is a pastor like her father--to help raise the boys and give them the discipline they need. She remarks, "Freddy knows we don't play that."

On the subject of family, she then starts to tell me more about how her sons are completely different from one another. She mentions more about Freddy's birthday, which is

May 12th and how his sign may explain why he acts the way he does. I laugh and remark, "That's probably why I like him so much because I am the same sign. My birthday is May16." Excited to hear that, she calls out to him and tells him that we share a birthday month. Freddy smirks and then shakes his head a bit before shying away to his bedroom. We eventually exchanged goodbyes. The next day, Freddy brings the sports' books to school and asks if he can read them for independent work.

Teacher commentary. According to Bursztyn and Bursztyn's work, it was important that I visited Fredrick at home. This was not only beneficial for our relationship, but also in creating levels of sameness. The first level of sameness was based on geographic location. Although he never attended the local public school that I attended, during the conversation with mom, we could describe many of the well-known features of the neighborhood in addition to sharing sentiments about the safety and future of the neighborhood. The next level of sameness was based on our birthdays. Within earshot, Fredrick listened as we described his personality, character traits, likes, and dislikes and how there was a great likeness to how my friends and family would describe me. The last level of sameness was ethnicity. Ms. Smalls and I both identify as Jamaican American women. For Freddy and me, this opened the door to attempts at Jamaican accents and discussions about traditional dishes that he enjoys.

The color system I reinvented for Freddy represented a choice to deviate away from the school's strict discipline policy that forces educators to view children from a homogenous perspective and the bad student is the one who deviates from the norm. Freddy is a student who needed an individualized system. Not only did it communicate to him that he was special, but it also allowed him to have many opportunities to do the right thing and get praised for it. Before the system, Freddy would go home on orange or red if he had one difficult moment throughout

the day that required him to go to the dean or if he had a hard time in class and started to fall out of his chair and engage in other behaviors that are deemed off-task and distracting. Now Freddy, could have a moment and it would not be indicative of his entire day because he would receive a distinct color and note about his behavior. In the anti-educational environment, it is necessary that teachers go by their instincts and find ways to work with their students to ensure their students succeed. The easy solution is to adopt the philosophy of school even if it pathologizes and problematizes behavior because of fear of reproach from the principal or other members of leadership. Therefore, disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline is symbolic of the teacher's resistance against the dominant, meritocratic, and hegemonic culture of the school.

Growth and Resurrection

By the end of the year, Freddy is confident in his leadership skills, his academic abilities, and his athleticism. His team won their first wrestling match and he gained lots of recognition because he started the game strong with a victorious pin. He was also chosen to drum on stage during Community Meeting and Morning Circle. This was something that he coveted since the beginning of the year, but could not do because he was not consistently on green. Last, he earned many awards at the 4th grade award ceremony, including the Scholar Strides Award for the student who grew academically and socially over the year. We hope to stay in contact fifth grade so that he can continue the growth he made in his 4th grade year. Unfortunately, although he will attend middle school in the same building, I will not be his teacher.

The beauty of Freddy's narrative is the success that he was able to build on in his fifth-grade year. By staying in contact with his fifth-grade teachers and mother, I learned that Freddy is heading in the right direction. Below is an excerpt from his fifth-grade teacher, explaining his progress so far:

Freddy entered 5th grade incredibly eager and excited for the new year. I was lucky enough to get great "best practices" for working with Freddy from Ms. Timoll, which really helped set his year up for success. Mainly, recognizing Freddy's academic strengths and holding him to high expectations, as well as strategic seating and relationship building advice with mom…

In Middle Academy, we measure and track behavior through a Paycheck system. Freddy exceeded the 5th grade paycheck average by $60 in September. Freddy excels at showing our creed value of "Sankofa" (learning from your past), meaning he frequently strives to correct behavior or not repeat errors/mistakes made. Freddy is also strong at exemplifying our creed value of "Ganas" (showing determination), as seen in the amount of times he perseveres through tough challenges both in and outside of the class. Also notable is his immense pride and eagerness to share out in class.

Recently, Freddy earned a 90% during a Socratic Seminar in History as he not only participated frequently but also backed his ideas with evidence and even posed new questions to the group (K. Simon, personal communication, November 28, 2016).

Freddy's story is one of inspiration. As mentioned earlier, in the beginning of his fourth-grade year, Freddy was shy and spoke in a barely audible tone. As reported by his fifth-grade teacher, Freddy is now a confident student who is proudly sharing his ideas. He is also receiving a lot of positive attention as he is excelling in the school's behavior management system and was voted by his peers as Blue Hen (Figure 3). To date, our relationship continues as he occasionally stops by my classroom and tells me how he is doing. Freddy's story also demonstrates how the small changes a teacher as a resistor can make can have a lasting effect in a child's and a teacher's life. In my third year of teaching, I continually reflect back to the lessons on the power

of relationship-building that Freddy has thought me and strategically work to build relationships with some of my more difficult students.

Figure 3: Freddy as Blue Hen.

Conclusion

The statistics against the success of Black boys in today's school system is a matter of concern. Boys of color especially are faced with a number of academic and societal challenges that can easily dictate their future outcomes. It is time for educators to fight against these factors by understanding the importance of establishing meaningful relationships with the boys they teach. In order to do so, more teacher preparation programs and professional development workshops need to expose pre-service or practicing educators to not only the unique challenges of working with boys of color, but also to pedagogies, literature, and strategies that support culturally informed and relationship-building practices. These teachers need to be fearless in the act of resisting the culture of power that is often perpetuated in schools that cause the criminalization of black boys in addition to building dissonance between their dreams and their

ability to succeed. In the words of Freddy Small, every child should "remember the advice of their teacher that [they] are a leader."

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