

THE EDUCATION GAP: WHERE WE'VE BEEN, WHERE WE ARE, AND WHERE
WE'RE GOING

By

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ABSTRACT

The United States is experiencing an education crisis. Minority and low-income students have less resources and opportunities than their Anglo, upper-class peers. This is creating an education gap, that is not providing the same quality education across all schools. Students and parents are often blamed for their poor academic performance, and the public fails to neglect the challenges that they face in and out of the classroom. However, educational inequalities are not a new problem. As a country, we have been struggling with educational inequalities, rooted in race and socioeconomic diversity, for decades. The power relations between teachers and students directly affect these inequalities, and they are shaping how students see school, and the goals they set for their futures. I propose to do a study in Tucson, Arizona, comparing students and teachers' opinions in low-income and high-income high schools, to analyze the power relations that this changing demographic is experiencing, and what their implications are. Only through this awareness, will we be able to open a conversation between teachers and students and make school more effective, so students can feel empowered and capable to achieve their goals.

The Education Gap: Where we've Been, Where we Are, and Where we're Going.

It has been proposed by some contemporary political theorists that power extends beyond those who “make rules” and those who obey them. Like Clarissa Rile Hayward declares, “power is a complex network of social boundaries- norms, identities, institutions- which define the field of action and the individual’s freedom within it, for the “powerful” and “powerless” alike” (Hayward 2000). Power relations extend to an environment that, when exposed to it for an extended period of time, shapes your expectations, your opinions, and even your desires. A person strives for as much as she thinks she can get and works to find where she fits in society, whether that goal may be very ambitious or not ambitious at all.

Race and socio-economic status have shaped power relations in the United States for a long time, and this has created an education gap. In the past, minority students, mainly poor African Americans and Mexican Americans, had been the focus of school improvement initiatives, due to their poor academic achievement in relation to their Anglo counterparts. Academic achievement, as it will be seen, is measured in different ways: the main one is whether students are earning good grades, and whether they are performing at grade level in relation to students their grade across the country. Extending further, academic achievement can also be assessed by looking at a student’s test scores and whether they graduate from high school, or what is more, whether they go into college.

These classroom dynamics vary from school to school. However, the ever-increasing cultural and socioeconomic diversity that is shaping American schools has created a new level of complexity in teacher/student power dynamics, strongly determined by the undertones of

diversity. For decades, race and socioeconomic status¹ have been considered markers to determine intelligence and intellectual capabilities, and this has shaped how many teachers see and treat their students. Allan Bloom once said that “Students entering the university are ‘uncivilized’ and the faculty have the responsibility to ‘civilize’ them. [He] claims he knows what their ‘hungers’ are and ‘what they can digest.’ Noting the ‘large black presence’ in major universities, he laments the ‘one failure in race relations- black students have proven to be indigestible.’ They do not ‘melt as have all other groups’”. (Pieterse & Parekh, 170). Opinions like Bloom’s are dangerous because not only does he argue that race is an indicator of a person’s ability to succeed in higher education, but it also reflects how many other instructors see minority students and consequently, how they treat them and teach them without expecting them to ever succeed.

In the American Southwest, similar opinions on minorities have affected the student body for decades. However, the American Southwest has a unique set of challenges when analyzing student/teacher power relations that are not only influenced by race, but are also impacted by language barriers, immigration status, and other cultural differences. The Mexican American community has suffered from discrimination and has been noticeably affected by classroom power relations. Yet, aside from culture, the difference in socio-economic status also dramatically changes teacher’s opinions on their students’ potential and, as a consequence, the goals students have and the opinions they have of themselves. For instance, the Arizona Board of Regents tracked 53,392 students who graduated in 2006. Only 57% of them went to college, and only 19% graduated from a 4-year university within six years. Out of those students who earned

¹ Race and socioeconomic status are closely related; they intertwine and directly shape American society. I mention race in my introduction for the sake of clarity, however, I will not talk about race relations in depth in this paper. I will focus mainly on socioeconomic status, keeping in mind the role that race relations play to affect these demographics.

college degrees, 62% came from only 40 of the 460 public schools in Arizona- demographically wealthy, Anglo schools (Ryman).

Classroom power relations in the contemporary American Southwest are a relatively unexplored topic in the social sciences and humanities, and it is imperative to understand these dynamics well in order to improve the quality of education and provide students with the tools and skills to make them succeed.

Power Relations

In order to better understand student/ teacher power dynamics, it is important to understand the nuances in power relations and the implications these have in a society. As previously mentioned, power can be understood as social boundaries in an interaction between people, and according to John Gaventa, there are three major dimensions of power that shape society at large, and also each individual who is part of that society.

The first dimension of power is best described by Dahl's definition: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (Gaventa, 5). The first dimension of power is mainly expressed in decision-making arenas, such as government elections at any level. This dimension of power focuses on who wins and who loses in getting what they want. For example, in Arizona, the property taxes collected by each district help them fund their schools. This means that districts with higher property taxes, such as newly built, affluent neighborhoods, have more money to spend on education, and consequently, have more influence not only over what happens in their school district, but also what happens with city or state-wide laws. The families whose children go to these schools have more resources and control more of the resources that are given to them, such as new books and after-school

activities. When Prop. 204 failed to pass in elections in Tucson in 2012 (Prop. 204 sought to make permanent a temporary 1% sales tax increase in order to fund education), (Benson, 2012) lower-income schools were the most affected. Higher income school still had high sales taxes and private donations from members of the community that allowed the schools to maintain their resources. On the other hand, lower income and middle class schools were faced with school consolidations, increased class sizes and a reduced staff. After an 8% salary cut across the district in 2008, TUSD schools with less than 350 students had to choose between having a half-time librarian, or a half-time counselor (Multiple authors, 2008). However, the more affluent schools in the city were not affected.

Gaventa's second dimension of power is based on absenteeism. Assuming that the most effective way of expressing your interests is through having the influence to get what you want, an easy way to prevent a specific group from "winning" is to suppress their options from consideration altogether. "One of the most important aspects of power is not to prevail in a struggle but to predetermine the agenda of struggle- to determine whether certain question ever reach the competition stage." (Gaventa, 10). If the needs and wants of a group are completely excluded from the conversation, those who would potentially support those interests would most likely not participate at all, allowing the opposing interests to get what they want more easily. For instance, if a school is deciding on what after-school programs to offer, and the board who makes the decisions decides to only select programs that require a fee, the board is already excluding a certain group's preferences. Those who cannot afford to pay a fee for an after-school program would not even participate in that conversation, because it would no longer apply to them, enabling those who can pay the fee to make decisions in their place. .

Educator and activist Paulo Freire uses the term “culture of silence” to describe this kind of dynamic (30). According to Freire, the lack of participation of a group, through ignoring the decision-making process or simply being unmotivated to participate, is a direct product of them being the suppressed group in a paternalistic society. Lower-income communities, particularly African American and Mexican American communities, tend to participate less and have a more pessimistic view of their civic potential as their more affluent counterparts (Ben-Porath, 116). Many of the people in these communities rely on others to make decisions for them, people who they might regard as being “smarter” or who “know better”, and surrender their own voice completely.

The 2nd dimension of power is misleading because it enables the propagation of inaccurate public opinion. The polls, for instance, may show that the majority of people vote to cut taxes that benefit neighborhood schools, making it seem like the great majority of people agreed with that proposition. However, if the question of keeping the tax in certain neighborhoods is not even on the ballot, how would the people who live there vote against the tax cut? In addition, those who are not aware of the exclusion of competing interests become content with the status quo, and internalize it as the norm, completely unaware of the alternative interests of other members of the community.

When a group is excluded from the decision-making process, their interests are never voiced or cared about by the dominant group, perpetuating the challenges that the oppressed group is faced with. When that happens, the dominant group, whether intentionally or not, shapes the desires of the oppressed group, to deal and find solutions, within the dominant group’s interests, to their never changing challenges. This 3rd face of power is described by Gaventa as “A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do,

but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants” (12). It is “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppressed them” (Freire, 74), so, instead of meeting the oppressed group’s interests, through the 3rd dimension of power the dominant group changes the oppressed group’s perspective on the issue, in a way that they may be resigned to accept their situation, give up on their interests, and even shape their consciousness to justify or agree with the dominant group’s disregard for the minority. For instance, if a student is constantly told by her teacher that she will not make it to college, that student will begin to believe that college is not an option for her, and instead of focusing on her studies, she will begin to focus her prospects on other options, such as trade school or an unskilled job.

The Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Classroom Power Relations.

Background

Power dimensions play a strong role in schools and directly influence the relationships that students and teachers have. There seems to be a strong correlation between the students’ socio-economic status and race and how they are treated and regarded by teachers and school officials: there is a more mistrusting, authoritative approach to teaching lower-income, minority students than there is for higher-income Anglo students. However, this is not a new development. Racist and upper class ideals have shaped the school system since public schools became the norm (Haworth, 40). In addition, the segregationist environment of the United States in the early part of the 20th century supported the idea that minority students did not perform as well as their Anglo counterparts, based on the factors mentioned above, because they were inherently intellectually inferior. However, as civil rights movements gained momentum and

African American intellectuals began speaking out publicly, a new perspective on minority academic achievement began to shape teachers and politicians' minds alike.

Education reformers and advocates like Welfare (HEW)'s Lupe Anguiano, Martin Deutsch, a compensatory education theorist, educator Ruth Hayre and anthropologist Oscar Lewis believed that it was students' environments and cultural deprivation which played the most important role in their academic success, and this was directly related to social class (Spencer, 1). After World War II, the "urban crisis" pushed for the creation of suburbs and city expansion (Spencer, 3). Upper and middle class families flocked to the newly built outskirts of the city, but poor people, who were mainly African Americans, could not afford to do so. In a matter of years, many inner cities across America fell into disrepair: factories and businesses relocated to the suburbs, and housing developments focused on building new homes outside of the city. Inner city neighborhoods fell apart as buildings crumbled or became abandoned, and landlords moved out of the neighborhoods seeking higher paying opportunities. As a consequence, many people could not afford their housing anymore, and they were forced into row houses- abandoned buildings that were taken over by families who could not afford another housing option, which were often crowded and in disrepair. The schools in those neighborhoods slowly began to fall into disrepair too: schools became under-staffed and overcrowded, the buildings started to fall apart, and qualified teachers transferred to different schools. As expected, this created even more problems in schools that were already in desperate need of resources.

Other repercussions from the urban crisis were increased unemployment, substance abuse, and crime, which not only created a difficult environment for children to grow up in, but also created heightened risk factors that threatened academic achievement (Spencer, 3). In addition to school, inner city children were often faced with challenges due to poverty, abuse

(sexual, physical, emotional or substance) from their friends and family, and the absence of adult supervision. These factors, along with their environment, caused what Geoffrey Canada called cultural deprivation: “[these children] missed out on many of the millions of everyday intellectual and emotional stimuli that their better-off peers have been exposed to since birth” (Spencer, 1).” For example, children from urban neighborhoods were read to, were taught nursery rhymes, and were taught shapes and colors at home at a much lesser rate than their middle-class Anglo peers (Tough, 36). Middle and upper- class parents enriched the cultural capital of their children more so than inner city parents, and this was reflected in their children’s better academic performance. Statistics show that cultural capital increases academic performance, and, further on, that translates into better economic opportunities. For example, in 2006, Chaparral High School in Scottsdale, AZ had the highest percentage of graduation rates (55%) of all large school districts in the Phoenix metropolitan area. In that same area, 70% of adults have at least a college degree, and their median income in 2009 was \$101,135 (Ryman) (CNN Money).

Compensatory Education

As minority intellectuals like Marcus Foster, Kenneth B. Clark and Frank Riessman became more outspoken in the 1950s, African American and Mexican American teachers, advocates, and politicians struggled to find a way to bridge the education gap between poor and middle class children. Starting in the late 1950’s, organizations across the country began to create programs in inner-city schools to improve students’ academic achievement, through an approach called compensatory education, which meant using “specialized instructional programs to combat the alleged cultural deprivation of some children, particularly minorities (Blanton, 1). Under Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” in 1964, compensatory education became a part

of the Head Start Program, which sought to alleviate all ways in which poverty affected children. Keeping in mind their students' background and environment, compensatory education programs adapted their teaching methods and material to their students, hoping that these innovative methods would improve their academic success and would also compensate for the knowledge they did not learn in the past. Since compensatory education programs were adapted to suit the communities they served, each program was unique, and therefore yielded different results.

A successful example of a program based on compensatory education happened in North Philadelphia's Dunbar Elementary School from 1958 to 1963, and was led by the school's principal, Marcus Foster, with support from the Ford Foundation's Great Cities School Improvement Program (Spencer, 7). Dunbar Elementary was an inner city school that was greatly affected by the urban crisis. The community that it served was suffering from poverty, rising crime rates and students who were performing below grade level (Spencer, 3). When Foster became principal of Dunbar Elementary in 1958, he focused on raising expectations and morale from students, parents and teachers. He noticed that teachers complained about "children coming from broken homes" and having "behavioral problems such as fighting, cheating and stealing." (Spencer,5). Foster, as well as other educators, were concerned that their students had little pride in themselves and that their parents had little or no contact with the school. On the other hand, teacher/student relationships were "adversarial and custodial" (Spencer, 5). Teachers had low expectations of their students and were mistrustful of their students, and when it came to behavioral expectations, they were strict to the point of unwavering firmness.

Foster's main goal was to improve teacher/student relationships through trust and training. He gave teachers a recommended book list, assigned them summer homework, and made teachers connect with their students by sharing their talents in after-school clubs, like

chorus, sewing, and science, as a way to reshape how teachers saw and treated their students. There were also changes aimed to motivate students, primarily by raising students' self-pride. Pictures of prominent African Americans and their accomplishments were displayed throughout the school, and were called "Hero bulletin boards." The staff also brought in African American guest speakers to talk about their struggles and accomplishments. There was a larger focus on Black history, and in addition, teachers and staff took students on fieldtrips, even on Saturdays, anywhere from Philadelphia's Temple University to the United Nations headquarters in New York (Spencer, 6). Parents were encouraged to have a say on the activities that the school organized for their children, and Foster, along with a few parents from the community, began meeting weekly to discuss ways of keeping the lines of communication open between the school staff and the parents, among them, going to students' homes to get to establish a relationship with their parents.

The Great Cities program was a success at Dunbar Elementary. Focusing on raising the self-esteem of inner city children proved to be a very important factor in improving their academic achievement. Standardized testing showed that students at Dunbar Elementary improved their reading and math scores. Specialized teaching allowed for teachers and students to begin believing in themselves. A district official even declared that "a growing number of teachers were coming to believe that 'children of limited backgrounds can learn and be taught so that they want to learn,' and those children, in the process, were showing 'better work habits' and other positive 'attitudinal' changes" (Spencer, 10). Parents were also happy with the results. Although not all parents were changed by the Great Cities program like their children were, there was a rise in parent volunteers at Dunbar Elementary since Foster's home visits began.

In the Southwestern part of the United States, compensatory education was enforced for different reasons. The Mexican American population began to grow as people from Mexico and other parts of Latin America started migrating to the United States in search of seasonal work on the fields. Most of these families moved from one farm to the next, usually across states, to pick the crops that grew in different seasons. The rotation worked well until after World War II, when migrant workers had children who were born here and the Mexican American child population grew sizably. Mexican American children began going to school in the United States, but as a whole, performed poorly compared to their Anglo peers.

As with African Americans, it was commonly believed that Mexican American children had an inherently low IQ (Blanton, 7). However, educator and activist Dr. George I. Sánchez believed that the problem in Mexican Americans' academic achievement was not due to an inherent intellectual trait, but rather that Mexican Americans were "educationally backward, culturally unincorporated into American life and victims of rapacious economic exploitation" (Blanton, 3) due to the unsettled nature of their work and their lack of assimilation into American society. In Sanchez's opinion, Mexican Americans were not genetically or culturally deficient; they were instead victims of neglect by the United States government because the government's programs promoting equality thought of race as a binary issue, and failed to address "the diversity of the past, alternative perspectives, and obscure daily acts of aggression and resistance" (Blanton, 2).

Like their African American counterparts, Mexican Americans students went to segregated schools that separated them from Anglo students. Even though this separation was originally rooted in racist beliefs, by the 1950's the segregation of Mexican American students was justified through compensatory education because the language they were most proficient in

was Spanish. The biggest handicap that Mexican American students had that prevented them from academically performing as well was not their cultural deprivation or their poverty-stricken communities, but was rather a cultural isolation, and also, a language barrier (Blanton, 4).

Migrant workers tended to stay together and form communities wherever they went, speaking their native language, Spanish. Their children grew up speaking Spanish and when they would start going to school, their failure to understand teacher instructions and assignments in English was seen by culturally unaware instructors as a behavioral and intellectual deficiency, as opposed to a linguistic difference. Instructors and politicians like Texas Education Agency's Commissioner J.W. Edgar supported segregation in the Southwest because they believed that Mexican American children would not be able to learn English unless they were given specialized instruction, and the curriculum taught in non-Mexican American schools was too advanced for their professional competency. These conclusions were reached through statistics and test scores that failed to acknowledge the demographics of their student body. For instance, in the late 1950's, the state of Texas reported that "over 80% of the total Mexican American school population spent more than one year taking the first grade, only 25% reached the 8th grade, and 8.5% reached the 12th grade" (Blanton, 4). This way of thinking perpetuated segregation in school, especially in elementary school, and was upheld into the 1960's through several court cases, like *Del Rio Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1930), *Westminster v. Mendez* (1947), and *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* (1948) (Blanton, 4).

Mexican American students struggled with the language barrier in two institutionalized ways. The first was the nature of their parents' work. Many educators and politicians, like Sánchez, argued that Mexican American students were culturally isolated and this contributed to their poor academic achievement. However, seasonal agriculture required that their parents move

to a new place every season to work the fields. This impeded children from finding their place in a community outside of their migrant worker environment: they never had the chance to settle or build relationships with others outside of this environment because they were constantly on the move (Blanton, 10). Secondly, the apprehension with which instructors taught and regarded Mexican American students perpetuated the idea that they were neither welcome nor worthy to be in school, and this therefore unmotivated students from becoming engaged and doing well in school, as seen, partially, in the previous statistics.

In the 1960's, Mexican Americans were one of the minority groups that were considered eligible for compensatory education. These new programs that were put in place did not make much of a difference in how students performed and how teachers saw them. Compensatory education was implemented because Mexican Americans were also seen as needing different instruction to overcome the pedagogical deficiencies caused by the linguistic barrier. Mexican American students had different classes because they needed specialized language instruction, according to the program, and consequently had to be separated from their other peers, continuing the decades-long segregation in schools that they had already endured. Compensatory education in the 1950's and 60's did not aim to produce college-bound minorities, but rather attempted to shape a new working- class that would not end in poverty (Waiting for Superman). The only difference was that national politics had changed, and instead of being subject to racist policies that went back decades, the new segregation was well meaning, albeit ignorant, and was put in place by innovative, liberal programs designed to give each group what policymakers and educators thought they needed, such as Houston's Little Schools of the 400 Program, the Preschool Instructional Program and the nationwide Bilingual Education Act (Blanton). Regarding this new compensatory education, Sánchez asked assistant attorney general Joe R.

Greenhill: “If, as your opinion indicates, pupils...can be segregated in separate buildings on the basis of ‘language deficiencies’. Why can’t they be segregated on the basis of deficiencies in arithmetic, or ability to draw, or muscular reaction speed, or any other arbitrarily selected subject matter, accomplishment, etc...?” (Blanton,5).

Like Marcus Foster in Philadelphia, Sánchez claimed that the environment that students grew up in greatly affected how well they performed in school. Minorities’ educational achievement was not determined by their race, culture, socioeconomic status, or language. Therefore, it was possible for students to improve their academic performance, if they just had a little help. One of the suggestions both Sanchez and Foster had was cultural assimilation of minorities into the mainstream culture (Blanton, 4; Spencer, 6), and this started by advocating for the leaning and use of Standard English. For both educators, it was important that students learned how to read, write, and communicate effectively in Standard English. This did not mean to stop speaking other languages or dialects, but rather emphasized the importance of being able to communicate in both, and understand the difference on when to use each one. In fact, Sanchez was a supporter of cultural assimilation, and was also an activist for accepting and embracing Spanish- speaking students in all American schools. He saw the education board’s stance on language as hypocritical: “The United States’ office of Education is spending millions of dollars now trying to teach foreign languages in high schools, trying to teach foreign languages at the university level, etc. Here are these kids right in your schools who already *know* a foreign language. Why not cultivate it? Why don’t we capitalize on that resource? We don’t do it” (Blanton, 9).

Despite the activism of educators like Marcus Foster and George I. Sánchez, there was still widespread racism against minorities. Compensatory education, although successful in many

schools, continued to enable discriminatory practices against these students and their parents, by having condescendingly-worded policies, and focusing on low-income racial minorities specifically, like calling African American children “culturally deprived” , encouraging their assimilation to the mainstream and making it seem as if their culture was sub-standard (Spencer, 12). Some critics of compensatory education denounced it as “a liberal way for white-run school systems to blame underachievement on black students and families rather than take responsibility for it themselves” (Spencer, 2). For instance, these programs focused on filling the educational gaps that they deemed students to have. Such a statement had serious implications regarding how minority parents raised their children, and whether they know how, or even cared to.

Sociologist Frank Reissman criticized programs like Higher Horizons for doing just that: believing that students could overcome the negative effects of their environment, but also assuming that nothing in their environment could be positive (Spencer, 12). Reformers like Reissman were concerned that compensatory education was teaching minorities that success required assimilation to the dominant culture. As a result, Mexican American and African American culture was stigmatized and treated as a lesser culture. For example, there were school reports noting that those students have a defeatist attitude that no matter how hard they tried, they would not be able to succeed in the “white man’s world.” Compensatory educators formed opinions on minority children and parents without thinking about what past experiences might have shaped their perspectives into seeing the world in this way. In addition, some educators were quick to blame lack of parental involvement in their student’s academic life as apathy or indifference, instead of reflecting on the parent’s environment that might prevent them from being involved (Spencer, 12). The conditions of poverty that these families suffered shaped their lifestyle and this was reflected in their parental involvement. For instance, single parents with

more than one child to take care of, or a parent who did not have a flexible schedule at work would not be able to volunteer at the school as easily as someone without those challenges. However, for many people this lack of involvement seemed related to racial personality traits, as opposed to socioeconomic circumstances (Spencer, 6; Tough, 43).

At the same time, many people expected compensatory education to solve all of society's problems. Proponents of compensatory education believed that improving poor minority children's grades and defeatist attitudes would eliminate poverty all together. Spencer explains, "over time, critics and scholars have been sharply critical of the War on Poverty and other social reforms of the 1960's for relying too heavily on educational solutions and failing to address the economic changes and persistent patterns of discrimination that underlay urban poverty and decline" (Spencer, 14). After a decade or so, they were very disappointed to see that some of society's most prominent problems were still relevant. Many policy makers and educators relied on compensatory education to improve the economy and push the country forward, and failed to tackle other societal problems that went hand-in-hand with education, such as urban poverty, urban renewal and racial inequality (Spencer, 14).

Compensatory education changed a lot of educators' perspectives, and they began to believe that their students could and were interested in learning. But it did not stop misconceptions based on racism from influencing how many other teachers saw their students or what expectations they had of them. Many parents and teachers fought to keep their schools segregated. Private and religious schools sprung up as a way to keep lower classes and minorities out (Haworth, 40). In newly segregated schools, teachers would often make remarks that the school "wasn't what it used to be" (Spencer, 4) and would dumb down their curriculum for their African American students. Teachers of all backgrounds often felt hopeless when teaching

minority students, and felt that they were wasting their time. In turn, students believed that they were hopeless, saw no point in trying to do well in school, and saw teachers as their enemies, people who did not care about them, and did not believe in them. These student/teacher attitudes were not limited to compensatory education, and continue to happen in American public schools today.

Student/Teacher Power Relations Today

The compensatory education program is not in effect anymore, but some of the prejudiced attitudes towards low-income minorities are still prevalent, as described below. At any school grade, there can be seen differences in the treatment of students depending on their socio-economic status and ethnic background. This is because many educators do not know how to teach or deal with students who come from different sociocultural environments. Due to the behavioral and academic differences that many students with disadvantaged backgrounds go to school with, they are seen as careless, apathetic or not intelligent, and are treated as such. On the other hand, students who come from economically stable households are often seen inherently as easy to deal with and easy to teach, and are given more autonomy to act and organize in the classroom and also to have say in the content and approach of their lessons. What is more, these stark differences vary from school to school alone, even within the same school districts, exacerbating inequalities in their own community.

In her book, *De-facing Power*, Clarissa Rile Hayward describes a case study she performed on student/teacher power relations in a low-income elementary school and a high-income elementary school in the East Coast. The low-income school she observed was North End Elementary School. Most of the children's parents are low-income, and worked clerical or

sales jobs, although unemployment is also very high (Hayward, 59). The poverty rate in that community is about 26%, and it is constituted by a largely African American (90%) population. The same demographics are reflected in the make-up of North End's student body, and also the staff.

North End has a very strict behavioral policy. On school premises, students are expected to "follow instructions precisely and unquestioningly" (Hayward, 74). Students are required to stay on task at all times, and have their eyes on the teacher when she speaks. Students are reprimanded by speaking out of turn, talking to their classmates, and not following other instructions, like getting into a "boy-girl-boy-girl" line and staying in it as they are escorted by their teacher to the cafeteria (69). Students are even supervised by the principal while having lunch in the cafeteria, and they are publicly reprimanded when standing up, running in the cafeteria, or expressing any behavior that may seem disruptive or disrespectful to the staff. As authoritative as North End staff may seem, they allow many other behaviors to take place. For instance, even though students are required to get into an alternating gender pattern before walking down the hall as a class, they are still allowed to talk, fidget around, and joke with their classmates.

North End's educators also stress intellectual obedience in the classroom. Open discussions are non-existent, and when students are asked questions, the only answers that are accepted are those that are found in their textbooks, and must be expressed in the same academic language that they are written in. Most of the curriculum taught at North End is extracted word-for-word from the textbooks they use. Teachers even instruct their students to complete their assignments by copying passages verbatim from their books. Questions that go beyond what is written in the book, or that are related to the topic, yet not completely relevant, are shut down,

ignored, or corrected (73). Teachers never express the importance or relevance of the assignments, or offer reasons for why students should do their homework or follow guidelines, other than it being “just the way it is.” The teacher sees herself as the only person in the room who holds knowledge, and it is her responsibility to impart that knowledge to the students. On the other hand, students are the recipients of that knowledge, not the holders of knowledge, and therefore they must listen to the teacher unquestioningly, if they want to be knowledgeable in the future as well.

Yet, the way that teachers enforce behavioral rules and how they measure academic achievement is arbitrary and can drastically vary from one student to another. Educators are not consistent in the enforcement of discipline in and outside of the classroom. For instance, behavior seen when students get into a “boy-girl-boy-girl” line is allowed in that formation (fidgeting, talking), but would hardly ever be tolerated in the classroom. In the classroom, 4th grade teacher Ms. Franklin constantly points out to the class that a student, “Booker”, is a “bad boy”, because he talks out of turn and asks questions that move away from where the teacher wants the class discussion, or rather, question and answer, to go (Hayward, 68). In contrast, when another student, “Asha”, makes a drawing that is irrelevant to the science lesson that is being taught in the classroom, Ms. Franklin does not say anything, and continues her lesson without correcting her behavior, unlike how she so often reacts to “Booker.”

Labeling students as “good” or “bad” in front of their classmates is common practice at North End. Teachers like Franklin publicly praise or reprimand students, and “good” students are those who not only obey behavioral rules, but also demonstrate that they have retained the information from the books used in class. These students have a much easier time getting away with behavioral missteps in the classroom by following the rules and completing assignments

according to instructions that are considered to be good. However, there is backlash from fellow classmates for the students who are labeled as “bad kids”, like Booker. When someone talks out of turn, a “stupid remark” is uttered (stupid is a word used in the classroom), or something disrupts the flow of the lesson, students were quick to place blame on Booker, their fellow classmate, without thinking about it, and Booker also labels himself as “stupid” and “dumb” (Hayward, 93). However, teachers switch from being harsh to being sympathetic towards Booker, because, like many other students, he is going down the path of “the street”, which he will not escape unless he makes the choice to do so.

This is a drastic difference from how students are seen and treated at Fair View Elementary, a middle and upper-class school not far from North End. Fair View’s student body is 90% white, and the neighborhood’s median income is twice that of the state’s, meaning more than quadruple of what North End parents make. The 4th grade classroom that is used in the case study has Monica Segal as a teacher, a young, energetic woman who was hired from hundreds of applicants to teach at Fair View Elementary.

Segal’s classroom is decorated with banners and mottos like “believe in yourself” and “work hard”, which are surrounded by aspects relating to those values, such as “trying your best” and “like who you are” (Hayward, 119). This is reflective of what the environment in the classroom is like. Students are asked to be respectful, but they are also encouraged to express their opinion and share ideas. Segal constantly brings up topics for discussion, asking for her students’ opinion. However, she also asks them for suggestions about how the classroom is run, which is completely opposite to how Ms. Franklin in North End addresses her students.

For example, Segal gathers her students in a circle and asks for suggestions to a problem she has encountered. She tells the students that while she was editing their writing assignments, she did not have enough room to write comments on the page, and she asked them how that problem could be solved. Several children offered suggestions, with Segal explaining whether that was the solution she was looking for or not, until a student expressed an idea that Segal seemed to like best (for students to skip every other line while writing to leave room for Segal's comments) (Hayward, 121).

However, it is not only in their relationship with Segal that students learn to think critically and formulate their own opinions. Fair View brings many guest speakers to the school, and one of the speakers who went to Segal's classroom was a Testing Manager from the state Department of Education's Bureau of Assessment and Testing. Months before, Segal's classroom had written him a letter expressing some of their questions regarding a standardized test the students must take every year. In the front of the room there is a chair for the guest speaker, and the rest of the desks are arranged in a semicircle around him, where all of the children sit. The speaker talks about what he does in his job and about how they organize the test. Afterwards, the floor is open to questions from the children to the speaker, which they had previously written, and included: "Why do we get timed?" "Why are there two math sections, and no sections on science and other subjects?" and "Why does it take so long to get back our grades?" (Hayward, 113). When the speaker leaves, Segal begins an in-class discussion about the speaker who was previously there. Students are critical of the speaker, saying things such as "He explained questions, he didn't answer them" and "He gave more excuses for why the test should stay that way, instead of how to change it" (114).

At Fair View, students are encouraged to speak their minds, even when they have an opinion against authority figures, such as the guest speaker. Though always challenging in a respectful manner, Segal's students form opinions and question the status quo being confident and assertive. Adults listen to the children's opinions, and unlike the staff at North End Elementary, they encourage the children to have well-formulated, thoughtful opinions in order to have a good discussion. After expressing their opinions about the guest speaker, Segal tells her students that the speaker had a difficult job, and was answering hard questions. She proposes to send the speaker a thank you card from the class. They all agree.

Students at Fair View are encouraged to talk to each other and work together. A large portion of the day is used for independent work, where students choose between certain activities and work on their own, with Segal close by to answer questions and give suggestions. Students are allowed to go from place to place within the school alone, and are not required to form any kind of pattern with the class before walking somewhere else. Despite the relaxed atmosphere of independent work time, students generally stay on task and feel empowered by completing assignments. For example, every year, students put together a portfolio of the work they are most proud of to show their parents during parent/teacher conferences. They work on them carefully and take their time, selecting and creating pieces for their parents to see. Segal opens up a discussion for every assignment and explains its importance. She makes sure her students understand why it's beneficial to learn each topic, as opposed to North End, where lessons were never questioned.

Even though students participate more actively in Fair View Elementary, Segal also experiences behavioral issues in some of her students that require her to take action. When students are disruptive (by talking or horsing around) and prevent discussion or a group activity

to begin, Segal waits patiently and says firmly but without raising her voice, “We are waiting for you to begin” (Hayward, 120). When students commit worse behavior offenses, like say something mean about a classmate, Segal rarely scolds them publicly. Instead, she takes him aside, and asks the student one-on-one to reflect on their behavior, think about why it was “undesirable,” and think about why he did it. After that, the student is asked to write a letter of apology explaining the conclusions he arrived to upon reflection (Hayward, 120).

And unlike North End, Segal values self-reliance and traits of independence in her students. A good student, on her terms, is a student who is curious and excited about learning. She is a hard worker, works well with others, and participates in class. A good student finds new and creative ways of completing assignments and solving problems. She listens to others but is also eloquent enough to communicate her own ideas effectively (128). More than doing things by the book, Segal sees value in the individual traits that her students bring to the table.

Discussion

In both the North End and Fair View environments, power relations were at play in different ways. Such power relationships exist in all schools across the country. It can be seen that the institutions that are put in place affect what rules are implemented and how, the way in which students are taught, and what dialogue exists between teachers and students. Who holds agency and who is a passive recipient depend on the angle from which the dynamic is seen, and this complex network of relationships work together to shape adults and children’s ideas and actions alike.

At first glance, it seems that students at Fair View hold more power than students at North End, because they are allowed to express their opinions and make critical statements to

adults, who are considered authority figures. On the other hand, students at North End are completely discouraged from having original thought, or asking questions beyond the scope of the textbook. At Fair View, the middle to upper-class school, students were trusted to work independently and help each other, whereas at North End, the lower-income school, students were not allowed to talk to their classmates, and were expected to do their own work and pay attention to the teacher at all times. The North End environment was framed by rules and expectations of what a “good” student should be, greatly based on passive behavior.

Schools like North End lack funds and resources to provide a variety of activities for their students, in comparison to better-funded schools, and this directly translates into student achievement. For this reason, many parents who cannot afford to enroll their children in private or better ranked schools often see charter schools as a good option. In the last decade or so, non-profit charter schools have sprung up as an alternative to public schools, and many of them specifically target lower income, minority students. These schools focus on improving student achievement and raising graduation rates for groups that, as we have seen, have historically fallen behind in school. These schools are regarded as effective and innovative, because they have a strict “No Excuses” policy and succeed on statistical results of student standardized testing and graduation rates (Ben- Porath, 119).

However, these “innovative” schools are even more authoritarian than low-income public schools, such as North End. Their daily activities are minutely controlled, and students are watched closely at all times. The schools’ success is dependent on the results it delivers through test scores, and staff feels pressured into taking drastic measures to help “disadvantaged” children succeed. These schools tend to have longer school days, Saturday school, and a narrower curriculum. In order to secure students’ success, many of these schools (poorly-

performing public schools included) focus on subject areas that are included in standardized tests, such as reading and writing, math and science. On the other hand, more specialized classes, such as civics and calculus, are either not offered or barely touched upon (Ben- Porath, 115). For instance, according to Ben-Porath, 29% of high-minority schools offer calculus, whereas 55% of low-minority enrollment schools offer it (115). These statistics further prove the education gap in the United States. Non-minorities are held to a higher standard and are expected to be college-bound, and on the other hand, the ultimate goal for minority students is to get them to graduate from high school (Ben-Porath, 119; Rodriguez, 1; Spencer, 4).

These kinds of charter schools have a behavior code based on detailed and numerous rules. Rewards and sanctions are administered, through reward systems made tangible with stickers or merit/ demerit cards. (Ben- Porath, 120). Behavior is expected to be passive and compliant with teachers' expectations, with actions such as not "tracking the speaker," talking to your neighbor, and not having your merit/demerit card as reasons for demerits (Tough, 89). Even known successful charter schools, such as KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) and Geoffrey Canada's charter school Harlem Children's Zone inculcate a school culture into their students, based on rules and mottos as a way to foster a sense of belonging to its students (Tough, 95).

What seems troubling is that even in high achieving, innovative schools that focus on low income minority students, authoritative discipline is the pedagogical approach of choice. Linda McNeil calls it "defensive teaching," and it is seen as a way of approaching a group of students in which the teacher retains control over his students at all times. Although superficially effective, this approach to teaching in which the teacher is the authority who holds knowledge and makes the rules, creates a greater divide between students and teachers, and is not conducive to long-term effective learning.

Such an approach to teaching is still deeply embedded in antiquated paternalistic views of education. The children are vessels that need to be filled with knowledge, and the teacher is the benevolent owner of knowledge that is helping them become more enlightened. This method of education, called the banking model by educator Paulo Freire (83), does not encourage creativity and critical thinking. Instead, it determines that a good student is one that passively absorbs information, memorizes it and is able to repeat it when necessary (Freire, 72). Such a mechanical learning process would do a disservice to any student, but is particularly damaging to low income minorities.

For a group struggling with notions of belonging and becoming a part of a society that has oppressed them in the past, minority students already feel as if people in positions of authority have power over them. For this reason, students are vulnerable to the opinions of their teachers and school staff. Many times, these people are the first academic role models in their lives. Students listen to what teachers how to say and respond to how teachers treat them. The oppressed, who in this case is the student, wants to become better, and in their reality, the “better” person is the one who holds power, who in this case would be the teacher (45). Students want to emulate their teachers, know what the teachers know, so they can too be respected and well-regarded.

However, when a teacher treats a student with indifference or mistrust, the power relation dynamics is most troubling. Consider Gaventa’s third dimension of power, which occurs when preferences are exerted so that they do not know that power is being exerted. It is also the most complex dimension of power due to the complexity of human relationships and the inequalities that are bound to exist in most interactions. The most severe and damaging form of exerting and maintaining power over others. Students who are seen as “bad” or “stupid” or who are not

encouraged to have their own opinions, internalize how they are seen by others and begin to see themselves that way too, and this can have lasting repercussions in a student's life well after school. Students are shaped to "obey," as well as take in the perception of their group as regarded by the teacher or school. Freire states: "Later, when the young should, tortured by all kinds of disappointments, finally turns suspiciously against itself... in this transition one punished oneself with mistrust against one's own feelings, one tortures one's own enthusiasm with doubts; indeed, one experiences even a good conscience as a danger, as if it were a way of wrapping oneself in veils and the exhaustion of subtler honesty." (p. 233)

With enough reinforcement, a student will internalize that their opinions do not matter, and they will stop creating opinions altogether or simply adapt their preferences to those of authority figures. Students will begin to resent school, and stop trying, because others do not seem to value their efforts. In the worst cases, students stop caring and do poorly in school. Some get in trouble, and some drop out. Many educators are not aware of the impact that their words and actions have on their students, let alone how to approach the rising demographic of minorities in schools.

Ms. Franklin singled out Booker as an example of a bad student, but such actions did not correct his behavior, and did not make any student understand why his actions were wrong. All that was learned was that challenging Ms. Franklin's authority made a student "bad". In addition, her actions had an impact on Booker, who began to call himself "bad" and "dumb," because those words were so constantly reinforced as identifiers of his not only by his classmates, but by an authority figure, an academic role model, as well.

Ben- Porath (122) thinks that high disciplined schools are counterproductive and dangerous. Having an inferior perspective on minority students causes them a great disservice that stays with them for the rest of their lives. Not seeing low-income, minority students as equally capable and equally intelligent as their more affluent counterparts creates a problem in society that extends beyond a K-12 education. When teachers have low expectations of students, students also have low expectations of themselves. Their self-assurance and autonomy is not fostered, and values such as team work, responsibility and perseverance are not regarded as important. Many of these children drop out, and are thrust into the workplace without those important, intangible traits that employers look for when hiring employees (Ben-Porath, 123). Those things outside of the curriculum that a student learns in school can't be taught outside of an academic setting in the same way. At school, students not only learn about history, math, and English. They also learn time management, being accountable for their own actions, and taking pride in their work, among many other things, that are important in order to be successful in a person's professional and personal relationships.

Teachers play an important part in the power dynamics that are seen in the classroom. They not only influence how students learn, but also affect how students see themselves in relation to the classroom and the world around them. That is why teachers have a great responsibility to empower their students, especially low-income, minority students, into believing in themselves and setting big goals for the future.

The education system in the United States had struggled for a long time to find a way to motivate students and make them see the value of doing well in school. The problem is that for many students, how school is run and the lessons that are taught do not reflect their reality outside of the classroom. Students do not feel like they have a voice in their educational

environment, often feeling like they are inherently not intelligent enough, or capable enough, and teachers are usually passive enablers of this negative perception that they have of themselves.

Teachers are often at a loss when teaching students who they do not relate to, and who are experiencing difficult challenges in their personal lives. Personal and emotional struggles are part of a student's identity, and they carry that part of themselves into the classroom. Many teachers struggle, and feel powerless, when dealing with this part of their students' lives, because they feel that they cannot change their students' circumstances beyond the school environment. However, if teachers take a critical approach to education, not only will they help their students do better in the classroom, but they will reshape their student's notions of the self that will impact their personal lives as well.

There are inherent power relations that exist between students and teachers, and for that reason, it is the teacher's responsibility to reshape how those dynamics function, in order to make the learning process a transformative experience for everyone involved (Freire, 54). Students seek to be recognized as people, with ideas, feelings and experiences that contribute to the classroom. As Frantz Fanon said, "a central factor in the power struggle between master and slave is the battle for recognition- the struggle for one to recognize the existence of the other. This is significant because recognition of one's existence is, in part, recognition of one's humanity" (Rodriguez, 4). When students are not encouraged to share their own thoughts, and are not given the opportunity to become an active participant in the learning environment, they struggle to find their own voice, assert their own beliefs, and become empowered to control their own actions. When internalized, these students grow up to become passive adults with no power over their own lives.

It is important that teachers and other educators “rethink their agency” in order to stop perpetuating oppressive classroom power relations (Pieterse & Parekh, 182). One way to do that is to have a more critical approach to education. It is possible to motivate students by enabling a more fluid student/teacher dynamic. It is important to recognize students for who they are, where they come from, and the rich cultural capital that they bring into the classroom (Rodriguez, 8). The teacher should not be regarded as the sole owner of knowledge in the classroom. Instead, there should be a power posing education approach, with a teacher/student, student/teacher relationship (Freire, 80), in which the teacher allows himself to be transformed by his students and is open to transform the students as well, and the students enrich others’ knowledge by sharing their own experiences and by being receptive to learn from others.

Changing student/teacher power dynamics is a difficult task, given the long-standing legacy of oppression that has existed in those dynamics, especially with low-income, minority students. However, progress is already occurring when a person is aware of their own agency in the classroom, and how their power or powerlessness affects how others see themselves and how that person sees herself as well. In order to break down the feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness that many of these students experience, it is important to recognize their existence as people, and as intellectuals who have their own knowledge to share. In order to do that, we must legitimize the unequal conditions and struggles that these students face in school. Only then will we reshape the role that minority students think they have in relation to the world, and we can empower them into owning their agency and achieving their dreams.

Research Proposal

As previously seen, there has been extensive research in the past few years regarding student/teacher power relations in different socioeconomic settings, which allow us to have a better understanding of the issue and provide noteworthy evidence that can help us greatly ameliorate the problems in our own education system. Even though research shows that minority students are more likely to belong to low-income families, most of the research done regarding classroom power relations has focused on African Americans.

The southwestern United States, and Arizona in particular, has a different cultural makeup compared to the rest of the country. The growing Latino population and the constant influx of immigrants poses a different set of challenges and perceptions in the average classroom, influenced by political, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity. Yet little research has been done on this demographic, especially in Arizona. For that reason, it is imperative to shed light on Arizona student/teacher power relations, to find out how classroom practices in Arizona classrooms influence students, their opinions on school, and on pursuing higher education. In addition, the research should also focus on the teachers and their opinions on their students and their prospects and potential for future success.

I propose to conduct this research project in Tucson, Arizona, because it has a growing Latino population, and also because of the inequalities in education within its own school system, the Tucson Unified School District. There is a big education gap within TUSD, which highlights the inequalities that schools are perpetuating through education. For instance, Tucson alone has 7 “dropout factories” out of the 35 total that exist in Arizona (20%) (Dropout Factories) Dropout factories are high schools where over 40% of the students do not graduate on

time (Waiting for Superman). Of the ones in Tucson, all of them have an average of at least a 75% minority student body, and more than 50% on average qualify for free lunch (Dropout Factories). However, one of the best schools in the country, BASIS Tucson North, although a charter school, exists in the same district, and ironically, University High School, ranked 3rd best in the state, shares a campus with Rincon High School, which is not ranked, and only 47% of its student body is proficient in math (US News). Due to these disparities, the Tucson Unified School District is an appropriate place to explore socio-economic effects on classroom power relations, and their effects on their students' goals post-graduation.

The research at hand will focus on student/teacher power relations and the effects of their methods of rewarding and punishing on achieving success. This research should be conducted with high school juniors, because at that level many of them are beginning to think about their plans after graduation and are beginning to explore their options, but they still have enough time to change their mind or work towards achieving a specific goal. I propose to conduct online surveys using the website [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) in one Junior English classroom in a low-income school, and one Junior English classroom in a high-income school. These classes are chosen because of the diversity of their students in regards to race, grade point average and extracurricular interests, and also because age-wise the student body is mainly homogeneous and their years in school and place in life are similar. Choosing to conduct research on a more interest-specific class, such as AP English or Art would not be as effective because it would focus on a more homogeneous group of students with similar interests, and therefore bias the results. 4 teachers in each school should also be asked to complete a survey, which will ask them about their own teaching practices and their opinions on their students. (Both surveys are outlined below).

To narrow the scope, it is recommended that charter schools and private schools be excluded. Pueblo High School and Sunnyside High School, which have been declared as “dropout factories,” are recommended to participate. For comparison, it is recommended that high-achieving schools such as Catalina Foothills High School and Sabino Canyon High School be asked to participate as well.

An Application for Human Research Form should be completed and submitted to all participating institutions for IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval. In this case, different forms must be completed and submitted to TUSD, each participating school and also the University of Arizona, assuming the investigator(s) is affiliated with the institution. Research with Human Subjects training must be completed.

Upon approval, an e-mail should be sent to the principal of each school requesting permission for their students and teachers to participate in the project. The e-mail should also inform them of the purpose of the project, how many students are being asked to participate, and the potential benefits that would exist from their participation. Once the principal agrees, subsequent e-mails or calls, depending on teacher preference, will be sent requesting their permission to participate and also to come into their classroom at a scheduled time to administer the survey to their students. Since the survey will be online, technology availability must also be arranged (whether that be smart classrooms, personal computer/tablet use, or trip to computer lab). Teachers will be asked to complete their survey on their own time within a specific time frame.

Students will be given a summary of what the research is about a week before the survey will be taken, and both students and teachers will be given a written consent form (in the case of

minors, that must be signed by their parents) and a confidentiality agreement guaranteeing that no personal identifiers such as name, contact information or physical characteristics will be recorded. The consent form should explicitly state the time, date and location of when the research will be conducted, as well as the name of the researcher, contact information and organization affiliated with. It is also recommended that all of these materials are provided to students in English and Spanish, regardless of language barriers, to avoid miscommunication.

Survey Samples

ALL SUBMISSIONS ARE COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS

Teachers

1. Please rank the following adjectives from the one that describes your job the best to the one that describes them the least.
 - a. Rewarding
 - b. Fun
 - c. Challenging
 - d. Frustrating
 - e. Disappointing
 - f. Inspiring
 - g. Boring

2. Is it better for a student to follow the rules or challenge them?
 - a. Definitely follow the rules
 - b. Mostly follow the rules
 - c. Somewhat follow the rules
 - d. A balance of both
 - e. Somewhat challenge the rules
 - f. Mostly challenge the rules
 - g. Definitely challenge the rules

3. Please elaborate in 50 words or less.

4. Is it better for a student to master the way things are taught or to be creative in learning the information?
 - a. Definitely master the way things are taught
 - b. Mostly master the way things are taught
 - c. Somewhat master the way things are taught
 - d. A balance of both
 - e. Somewhat be creative
 - f. Mostly be creative
 - g. Definitely be creative

5. Please elaborate in 50 words or less.

6. Students understand and retain the material better when they engage in projects/ group discussions than when they listen to lecture and take tests.
 - a. Definitely agree
 - b. Mostly agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. A balance is most effective
 - e. Somewhat disagree
 - f. Mostly disagree
 - g. Definitely disagree
7. Please elaborate in 50 words or less.
8. Think of an instance when a student did something wrong, how are they punished? What did they do to be punished? Please explain using examples.
9. In your experience, have you found that the punishment method used in the case mentioned above is effective in general?
 - a. Definitely effective
 - b. Somewhat effective
 - c. Effective, but there is room for improvement
 - d. Somewhat ineffective
 - e. Definitely ineffective
 - f. Punishment is non-existent
10. Think of an instance when a student did something right, how were they rewarded? What did they do to be rewarded? Please explain using examples.
11. In your experience, have you found that the rewarding method used in the case mentioned above is effective in general?
 - a. Definitely effective
 - b. Somewhat effective
 - c. Effective, but there is room for improvement
 - d. Somewhat ineffective
 - e. Definitely ineffective
 - f. Praise is non-existent
12. How do you reconcile the problems students may be dealing with in their personal lives with their performance in your classroom? Do you intervene in any way in your students' personal lives? Please respond in 75 words or less.

13. Do you think that cultural differences affect academic performance? What about social class? Please explain in 75 words or less.

14. How do you think the curriculum you teach is relevant to your students' lives? Please respond in 75 words or less.

15. Overall, do you think your students will be prepared to be successful in college upon their high school graduation? Where do you see them in 10 years? Please respond in 75 words or less.

Demographics

Gender:

Race:

Years teaching:

School Size:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

ALL SUBMISSIONS ARE COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS

Students

1. Which of the following adjectives describe your feelings about school best?
 - a. Rewarding
 - b. Fun
 - c. Challenging
 - d. Frustrating
 - e. Disappointing
 - f. Inspiring
 - g. Boring

2. A student understands the material better when he/she is encouraged to create a connection to the material than when he/she is encouraged to memorize information word for word.
 - a. Definitely yes
 - b. In general
 - c. A balance of both is better
 - d. Not really
 - e. Definitely not

3. Please elaborate in 50 words or less.

4. Students would put more effort into school if teachers showed that they believed in their students.
 - a. Definitely yes
 - b. Yes
 - c. Not really
 - d. Definitely not

5. Please elaborate in 50 words or less.

6. Students understand and retain the material better when they engage in projects/ group discussions than when they listen to lecture and take tests.
 - a. Definitely agree
 - b. Mostly agree
 - c. Somewhat agree
 - d. A balance is most effective
 - e. Somewhat disagree

- f. Mostly disagree
 - g. Definitely disagree
7. Please elaborate in 50 words or less.
8. Think of an instance when you (or a classmate) were punished? How were you punished? What actions lead to you (or your classmate) being punished? Please explain using examples.
9. In your experience, do you think that the method of punishment mentioned in the example above is effective?
- a. Definitely effective
 - b. Somewhat effective
 - c. Effective, but there is room for improvement
 - d. Somewhat ineffective
 - e. Definitely ineffective
 - f. Punishment is non-existent
10. Think of an instance when you (or a classmate) were rewarded. How were you (or your classmate) rewarded? What actions lead to you being rewarded? Please explain using examples.
11. In your experience, do you think that the method of rewarding mentioned in the example above is effective?
- a. Definitely effective
 - b. Somewhat effective
 - c. Effective, but there is room for improvement
 - d. Somewhat ineffective
 - e. Definitely ineffective
 - f. Rewarding is non-existent
12. How do you think teachers deal with the issues that students may be dealing with in their personal lives and their effects on students' performance in the classroom? Do your teachers intervene in any way in your personal lives? Please respond in 75 words or less.
13. Do you think that cultural background or social class affect academic performance? How so? Please explain in 75 words or less.

14. How do you think that the material that your teachers cover is relevant to your life?
Please respond in 75 words or less.
15. Overall, do you think your teachers are preparing you to be successful in college upon your high school graduation? Where do you want to be in 10 years? Please respond in 75 words or less.

Demographics

Gender:

Age:

Race:

School Size:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Conclusion

The education gap between low income minority students and high-income Anglo students has existed for decades, if not longer, and it changes over time, but it never closes. Now that sociocultural diversity is increasing, there are more challenges to face regarding education. However, this changing demographic is also a great opportunity to revise our current education system and make it better. Antiquated ideas and the lack of recognition of people different from ourselves is stunting our system, and just because it stays the same, does not mean that it remains effective, as we have seen.

It is important to conduct studies like the one proposed above, especially in Tucson, to welcome a discussion between teachers and students, so they can understand each other and cultivate a more effective relationship. When people feel valued and capable, they tend to be more resilient about the work they do and the goals they set for themselves. In order to better understand that, it is necessary to give students and teachers a voice and a space in which they can be actors in shaping education.

The diversity of the American population has enormous potential, and it is time to embrace those differences to make us stronger as a whole. With enough information, enough training, and enough enthusiasm, we can narrow, if not close, the education gap, and allow all students, regardless of who they are, to have the power to control their own destiny and follow their dreams.

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