Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions of Low and High Socioeconomic Status Students

Patty C. Norman
Utah State University

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TEACHER ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF LOW AND HIGH
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS STUDENTS

by

Patty C. Norman

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Education
(Curriculum and Instruction)

Approved:

Sherry Marx, Ph.D.  Michael K. Freeman, Ph.D.
Major Professor  Committee Member

Cinthya M. Saavedra, Ph.D.  Steven O. Laing, Ed.D.
Committee Member  Committee Member

Lucy Delgadillo, Ph.D.  Mark R. McLellan, Ph.D.
Committee Member  Vice President for Research and
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

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ABSTRACT

Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions of Low and High Socioeconomic Status Students

by

Patty C. Norman, Doctor of Philosophy
Utah State University, 2016

In this qualitative study, the author explored the perceptions of 10 middle-class, teachers regarding the socioeconomic class of both impoverished and advantaged students with whom they worked. Teachers in two public elementary schools from one Intermountain West school district participated; one school generally served children living in poverty and the other generally served affluent children. Through analysis of surveys, interviews, teacher journals, and researcher journal, the complex and often times contradictory feelings these teachers have about the socioeconomic class of students were revealed.

Literature in class, socioeconomic class, deficit thinking, race and whiteness, and identity and multiple identities, situated the study. The author, who grew up in poverty herself, weaved in her own complex and often time contradictory memories and feelings about poverty throughout the manuscript. The work revealed that teacher’s positionality led them to a belief of “normal.” All teachers expressed the belief that parents were instrumental in determining their child’s academic success. Teachers had also not
recognized that their perceptions contributed to student learning. Perceptions were based on teacher’s upbringing, belief system, gender, race, and class. Students at high socioeconomic schools were perceived to be leaders, well-dressed, supported by families, and in constant need of enrichment. In contrast, students at low socioeconomic schools were perceived to need discipline and structure, opportunities to gather background knowledge, and support from parents.

Teacher’s felt student behavior was connected to their backgrounds, role models, race, class, and gender. Rarely did teachers feel students could attribute success or failure to their own actions. The final overarching theme was referred to as “SES-blind” in which teachers stated they did not notice the socioeconomic status (SES) of the students, or they felt all of their students were the same. The author noted there was much overlap between the literature on White teacher perceptions of children of color and teacher perceptions of children living in poverty.

(229 pages)
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In this qualitative study, the author explored the perceptions of 10 middle-class, teachers regarding the socioeconomic class of both impoverished and advantaged students with whom they worked. Teachers in two public elementary schools from one Intermountain West school district participated; one school generally served children living in poverty and the other generally served affluent children. Through analysis of surveys, interviews, teacher journals, and researcher journal, the complex and often times contradictory feelings these teachers had about the socioeconomic class of students were revealed.

Literature in class, socioeconomic class, deficit thinking, race and whiteness, and identity and multiple identities situated the study. The author, who grew up in poverty herself, weaved in her own complex and often time contradictory memories and feelings about poverty throughout the manuscript. The work revealed teacher’s lived experiences led them to a belief of “normal.” All teachers expressed the belief that parents were instrumental in determining their child’s academic success. Teachers had also not recognized that their perceptions contributed to student learning. Perceptions were based on teacher’s upbringing and belief system. Students at high socioeconomic schools were perceived to be leaders, well-dressed, supported by families, and in constant need of enrichment. In contrast, students at low socioeconomic schools were perceived to need
discipline and structure, opportunities to gather background knowledge, and support from parents.

Teacher’s felt student behavior was connected to their upbringing, belief system, gender, race, and class. Rarely did teachers feel students could attribute success or failure to their own actions. The final overarching theme was referred to as “SES-blind” in which teachers stated they did not notice the socioeconomic status (SES) of the students, or they felt all of their students were the same. The author noted that there was much overlap between the literature on White teacher perceptions of children of color and teacher perceptions of children living in poverty. Teachers were not given compensation for their time in this study.
DEDICATION

To my husband, Greg Norman,
with gratitude and love for his unselfish support in all that I do,
and
To our children, Kyle and Megan
with gratitude for their unconditional acceptance and love for me.
My family, you are both the inspiration for and the purpose of my life.
I would like to give a special thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Sherry Marx, who has encouraged, supported, and provided expertise in this process. I would also like to thank my committee, Dr. Michael Freeman, Dr. Lucy Delgadillo, Dr. Cinthya Saavedra, and Dr. Steve Laing for their time and willingness to participate in my behalf.

I give an indebted thanks to the teachers who freely shared their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. The honesty in the interviews truly showed the complexity of the issue at hand. Without these experiences, this study could not have been completed.

My husband, Greg, is the strength behind me who has made this possible. He has put his life on hold to help me accomplish my dreams. He has created a beautiful haven in our backyard for me to be able to retreat from the stress that occasionally accompanied a project of this magnitude. Thanks to my mother and grandmother for inspiring me to give and love unconditionally. My trials have become my strengths, my shortcomings have become my opportunities, and my love for all whom I meet has increased exponentially.

I also give a special thanks to you, the reader, for endeavoring to read this dissertation. My hope is that you will add to this beginning attempt to put into words the thoughts and perceptions of teachers that impact the futures of our children.

Patty Cearley Norman
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DEFINITIONS

In order to provide working definitions of the key terms used in this study, I have provided definitions using excerpts from the literature review. These explanations or definitions are not meant to be all-inclusive or without dispute. Scholars and educational entities have used the terms in both similar and different ways; therefore, an understanding of the intended vocabulary use of each key term throughout this study has been identified below.

*Colorblindness:* The idea of colorblindness denies racial difference, thereby masking uneven opportunity relative to racial difference, and precluding policy towards developing equal opportunity (Riley & Ettlinger, 2010, p. 1261).

*Generational poverty:* Generational poverty is understood to occur when families have experienced at least two generations of poverty. Families who are in this situation often believe they no longer have the necessary tools to get themselves back out of poverty (Jensen, 2013).

*High socioeconomic status:* High socioeconomic status (HSES) is the identification for students attending a school that has less than five percent of its student population receiving free and reduced lunch according to the National School Lunch Program eligibility (Public School Data Gateway, 2013).

*Identity:* When the ego (self) develops through social interaction (Erikson, 1950), a process occurs that develops a sense of self by connecting and identifying with significant others or groups of others (Deaux & Burke, 2010). Through this socially constructed process of defining the self, a person begins to know who they are, which in
turn provides feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.

*Identity salience:* “One of the ways, and a theoretically most important way, that the identities making up the self can be organized” (Stryker & Serpe, 1982, p. 206).

*Low socioeconomic status:* Low socioeconomic status (LSES) determination was identified through the single variable of more than 80% of a school’s students obtain National School Lunch Program (NSLP) eligibility (Public School Data Gateway, 2013).

*Multiple identities:* Multiple identities are the identities one assumes in differing social systems and categories (Sherif, 1982).

*Oppression:* A system of disadvantages placed upon a group “defined by a power elite as different or inferior on the basis of certain perceived characteristics and is consequently treated in a negative fashion” (Kinloch, 1979, p. 7).

*Perceptions:* Perceptions are thoughts, beliefs and opinions of someone or something. They are also thought of as a way a person or group of people understand, or interpret something (Miller, Kuykendall, & Thomas, 2013).

*Privilege:* Privilege can be defined as “a special right, benefit, or advantage given to a person, not from work or merit, but by reason of race, social position, religion or gender” (Liu, Pickett, & Ivey, 2007, p. 195).

*Race:* Race has been described according to biological distinctions in populations within the same species that have few genetic differences, even though the DNA of any two humans who are randomly chosen varies by less than 0.1% (Live Science, 2012). This paper refers to race as biologically and socially constructed.

*Racism:* Racism refers to “any act that, even unwittingly, tolerates, accepts, or
reinforces racially unequal opportunities for children to learn and thrive; allows racial inequalities in opportunity as if they are normal and acceptable; or treats people of color as less worthy or less complex than ‘White’ people” (Pollock, 2008, p. xvii).

_relative poverty_: Relative poverty creates a mindset that the class structure impoverished people find themselves at the bottom of is of their own making, and therefore justifiable (Fischer, et al., 1996).

_social class_: Social class is based on models of hierarchical social categories in which people who share the same economic or social status are grouped together. The most common groupings are: upper, middle, and lower class (Grant, 2001).

_socioeconomic status_: Socioeconomic status (SES) is based on the combined income, education, and occupation of an individual; like socioeconomic class, it also contains the three designated categories of high, middle, and low (American Psychological Association [APA], 2007; Brogan, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Wyatt-Nichol, Samuel, & Haynes, 2011). Santrock (2004) defined it as “the grouping of people with similar occupational, educational, and economic characteristics” (p. 583).

_social equity_: Social equity is defined by the National Academy of Public Administration (2008) as “The fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; the fair, just and equitable distribution of public services and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice and equity in the formation of public policy” (p. 1).
Qualitative research: Qualitative research denotes a “variety of research techniques and procedures associated with the goal of trying to understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting, and making meaning in our lives” (Ellis, 2004, p. 25).

Whiteness: Whiteness is the widespread belief that everyone has access to the same opportunities in the U.S., without recognizing the privileges that certain groups maintain.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Throughout my educational career I have continually reflected on the sharply contrasting attitudes and perceptions educators tend to have for children of differing socioeconomic status. When I was a classroom teacher, I pondered the significance of my role in teaching students who came from either an impoverished background or one of wealth. Was I at greater fault when either of them did not succeed? Was my role as an educator diminished if parents had more material resources or social capital to provide their children?

In contrast to having lived in poverty as a child in a single-parent home, I have spent the past 25 years bearing the status of a White, middle class, married female. When my husband and I attended the parent-teacher conferences of our children, the educators applauded us on the time we had invested in our children, which was thought to be demonstrated by their high academic performance. I felt joy in the fact my children were labeled as successful, and inside it kind of made me feel a little more successful too. This feeling of success made me feel like I had more of a say in what options my children had in their educational pathways. Yet I still remembered how it felt to be a student whose mother had to miss parent-teacher conferences because she was working two jobs and her night cleaning job did not allow her to take “time off.” I had felt a teacher’s eyes looking at me with sadness because my mother did not attend school events, when in reality I was
only embarrassed because the teacher felt sorry for me. Teachers tried to comfort me by telling me that it was my mother who was “missing out,” and that I should not feel bad about it. As an adult who now has the capacity to compare the feelings of success and shame, I wonder how teacher perceptions of me as a child living in poverty compared to those of children who came from affluent backgrounds.

I work as an administrator in a large district that has schools designated as low socioeconomic status (SES) and also schools where less than 5% of the student population is classified as low SES. I am curious to learn more about the inner perceptions of teachers regarding their students of various socioeconomic classes and how those perceptions influence their teaching. I see teachers who are constantly taking professional development classes to learn more strategies to teach their students. Yet, I wonder, how can they build on their own foundations of teaching if they are unaware of invisible obstacles that may be in place due to their own perceptions of students?

There has been much research on teacher perceptions of children from low-socioeconomic class backgrounds (Banks & Banks, 2010; Calmak, Demirkaya, & Derya, 2011; Kenyatta, 2012; Miller, Kuykendall, & Thomas, 2013; Siegel-Hawley & Frankengerg, 2012), but little documented work on teacher perceptions of students from high socioeconomic class backgrounds. Do teacher perceptions promote equity for all? In this study I will attempted to describe teacher perceptions of students within various socioeconomic classes. This is neither an attempt to vilify teachers nor an attempt to say that by simply identifying teacher perceptions all factors of poverty could be fixed and academic achievement gaps narrowed.
As a White woman who was born into poverty, educated in a plethora of different schools, and who now has an advanced degree and a leadership role in a large school district, the complexity of my multiple identities ranges from a disadvantaged child to an advantaged adult. The categories that make up who I am are not discrete, they intersect and meld into each other. Even though I no longer live in poverty, I still retain the thoughts and lived experiences from my upbringing. They have contributed to making me the person I am today.

**Conceptual Framework**

In this study I focused “on the webs of relationships instead of simply things in themselves” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 323). These relationships influenced both the background experiences and the current perceptions teachers had of their students. The teachers positioned themselves among social groups as they told their stories. Their personal experiences and their identity weaving within the experiences of the group.

In order to become aware of how the teachers situated their past experiences with their current perceptions, an understanding of identity and multiple identities theories is crucial. Erik Erikson, an American developmental psychologist noted for his work on identity theory, was one of the first to bring the concept of identity into the social sciences. He discussed how the ego (self) developed through social interaction (Erikson, 1950). This process occurs as individuals develop a sense of self by connecting and identifying with significant others or groups of others (Deaux & Burke, 2010). Through this socially constructed process of defining the self, a person begins to know who they
are, which in turn provides feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. Identities are not something people consciously think about on a daily basis. Josselson (1996) stated: “Living our identities is much like breathing. We don’t have to ask ourselves each morning who we are. We simply are…. Identity is never fixed; it continually evolves” (p. 29). Erikson (1963) believed a person had one identity that changed over time. The study of identity is described as “the ability to experience one’s self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly” (p. 42).

Sociologists have routinely used demographic categories a person belongs to (e.g., race, gender, and age) to describe the multi-faceted identity of an individual (Kroger, 2004; Sampson, 1985; Torres, 2009). Multiple identities are the identities one assumes in differing social systems and categories (Sherif, 1982). Initial studies of multiple identity models focused on people of color in the early 1970s (e.g., Sue & Sue, 1990; Vontress, 1971), addressed gender identities during the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Avery, 1977; Downing & Roush, 1985), and began to include biracial and multiethnic populations in the mid-1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Banks, 1984; Banks & Banks, 2010).

Researchers began to discuss the complexities of multiple identities in order to include all of the characteristics of a person’s self (e.g., Highlen, Speight, Myers, & Cox, 1988; McEwen, 1996). Psychologists then tried a different approach to describe the effects of multiple identities (Boeck & Rosenberg, 1988) by creating hierarchical tools to empirically describe all of the characteristics of a person, and the impact each characteristic had on their identity. These characteristics were each given a discrete
numerical value that, when combined, was interpreted to be the summative measure of a whole person. Psychologists also attempted to determine if a person had one overarching identity, or whether identities could coexist equally (Deaux, 1993). Frable (1997) noted theorist on multiple identities and marginalized populations, stated that identities are “fluid, multidimensional, personalized social constructions that reflect the individual’s current context” (p. 1).

The following literature review was divided into three sections that provide a framework to examine teacher perceptions of socioeconomic class on teaching and learning. The first section includes Whiteness theory and the ways it impacts teacher identities within the teaching and learning construct. The second section describes class identity, deficit thinking, and the prominent views of low- and high-socioeconomic class. The third section details the impacts of teacher perceptions on students of differing social classes and how these might affect the achievement of students.
WHITENESS, RACISM, AND COLORBLIND THEORY

Whiteness and Racism

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed by legal scholars including Cheryl Harris, who used the construct of Whiteness as property. Harris affirmed that Whiteness as property was “the legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of White privilege and domination” (Harris, 1993, p. 1715).

In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate published an article stating race was not a part of the critical discourse in education which left a void in addressing the inequalities of the educational system. This analysis built upon the construct of whiteness as property because “the law has accorded ‘holders’ of Whiteness the same privileges and benefits accorded holders of other types of property” (Harris, 1993, p. 1731). Holders of property have the absolute right to exclude, which is the premise of the exclusion of an equitable education for students of color. To illustrate this, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated:

In schooling, the absolute right to exclude was demonstrated initially by denying blacks access to schooling altogether. Later, it was demonstrated by the creation and maintenance of separate schools. More recently it has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence of vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by re-segregation via tracking. (p. 60)

These actions are visible, yet those in power attest to the belief that everyone can attain
these same rights through hard work and sacrifice.

Whiteness is the widespread belief that everyone has access to the same opportunities in the U.S., without recognizing the privileges that certain groups maintain. Privilege can be defined as “a special right, benefit, or advantage given to a person, not from work or merit, but by reason of race, social position, religion or gender” (Liu et al., 2007, p. 195). Within this study, 9 of the 10 participants were White, middle-class educators. The identity these teachers have constructed may be influenced by the privileges they benefitted from. These privileges have been categorized by Liu et al. as the privileges of, (1) housing and neighborhoods that are safe and clean, (2) economic liberty and the ability to spend money on items other than basic needs, (3) sociostructural support of knowing those in power are creating structures to benefit all, (4) power and the expectation that others will be respectful of, and towards everyone (5) familiarity with middle-class behavioral norms which allow one to understand and negotiate the middle-class structures, (6) self-satisfaction and the expectation of happiness, (7) leaving a heritage that one’s future generations can benefit from, and (8) leisure time that one has control of and can use that does not jeopardize their jobs. If these privileges are viewed as easily accessible and normative, then the social identities that develop surrounding them will be seen as ubiquitous.

Critical race theory recognizes that racism is founded on a “system of advantages based on race…[that] clearly operates to the advantage of Whites and to the disadvantage of people of color” (Tatum, 1999, p. 7), the same system that those in power refuse to acknowledge as being beneficial to them. Critical race theorists assert race/racism has
influenced people in the U.S., either advantaging or disadvantaging (Matusda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Racism refers to

…any act that, even unwittingly, tolerates, accepts, or reinforces racially unequal opportunities for children to learn and thrive; allows racial inequalities in opportunity as if they are normal and acceptable; or treats people of color as less worthy or less complex than “White” people. (Pollock, 2008, p. xvii)

Certain races are afforded definite advantages or disadvantages based on their race; this is especially true for people living in the U.S. (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matusda et al., 1993). Even though it is not always recognized by a group or a person, all people are racialized, even if they may not understand how White privilege has impacted their own, or another’s life (Kincheloe & Weil, 2004). Some Whites would like to reject their Whiteness, but as Sherry Marx (2006) suggested, “No White person can escape its influence, though they/we can learn to be critical of it and to work against the racism related to it” (p. 6).

**Colorblindness**

Some Whites have approached race/racism by making the claim that it does not exist. The argument is that racism existed in the past, and the future is one where race no longer exists in the melting pot of the world. The colorblind approach to rationalizing inequities was at first put in place as a form of counter argument to affirmative action. The belief held by many is that race-based action provided preferential treatment to individuals. Individuals who support the colorblind ideal believe the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause, which took effect in 1868, that forbids the consideration of race as an inequity. The line of the clause that is felt to address race states the U.S. shall not
“deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (U.S. Constitution, 1868).

Those who criticize the colorblind ideology recognize that colorblindness allows people to ignore race, thus reinforcing White privilege (Liu et al., 2007). A study conducted by Rousseau and Tate (2003) found that teachers overlooked race-related patterns of student achievement in their classes. When this detail was brought to their attention they either denied that the results of achievement were race related, or they attributed the results to socioeconomics instead of race. This refusal to address race as an issue created a stronghold for maintaining the status quo. If the teachers denied that race was a contributing factor, then they could not begin to reflect on some of their teaching practices that perpetuated the achievement gap.

The negative effects of the colorblind ideology were explained by Dixson and Rousseau (2005) as a viewpoint which regards race as a problem.

If we accept the notion that whiteness is normal, then any person who is not white is abnormal. Thus, within polite, middle class mores, it is impolite to see when someone is different, abnormal, and thus not white. Hence, it is better to ignore, or become colorblind, than to notice that some people of color have the malady of skin color, or not whiteness. (p. 16)

Not noticing a person’s color creates a feeling of shame on the person who is different, and a sense of normalcy on the part of the person who is in the majority.

**Race and Whiteness as Complicating Factors to Class**

Just as people cannot be understood one dimensionally, neither can poverty. In the
U.S., poverty is complicated by race. As late as 2011, nearly 26% of African Americans and more than 23% of Latinos/as were considered to be living in poverty, while this was the case for less than 10% of “non-Hispanic Whites” (Macartney, Bishaw & Fontenot, 2013, p. 13). The numbers are even more striking when just children under 18 are considered: 34% of African American and 25% of Latina/o children live in poverty compared to 10% of White children (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010). It is important to emphasize that most people of color are not impoverished and most impoverished people in the U.S. are White (Macartney et al., 2013). However, proportionately, people of color are more likely to live in poverty.

At the same time, people in the U.S. tend to live in economically and racially segregated areas; thus is it often the case that high income White students attend school across town from low income students of color and children learning English (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Growing numbers of African Americans and Latinas/os attend schools where their own racial group is the majority (Aud et al., 2010) and many of these same students attend schools with high dropout rates (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Nearly half of all children in the U.S. attending public schools are children of color and about 18% are living in poverty (Aud et al., 2010).

Further complicating this complex mix of racially and economically diverse children is the homogeneity of the teaching workforce. Currently, 83% of public school teachers in the U.S. are White and 76% are female (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). It is also recognized that the majority of teachers have middle-class suburban and rural backgrounds (Banks & Banks, 2010; Sleeter, 2003). Thus, many
teachers and school administrators are quite different from the students they teach racially, economically, and experientially. At the same time, whiteness and middle class values are the norms in which most U.S. schools function (Norman & Marx, 2013). Very often, these values and norms do not match those of the diverse students they serve. All too often, the White adults in the school and district view the children of color and the children from impoverished backgrounds they serve as “others” suffering from a collection of deficits. In this way, children are often viewed, consciously and unconsciously, as broken and in need of fixing through the belief systems of middle-class White values (Bradshaw, 2006; Kenyatta, 2012; Marx, 2006; Milner, 2013).

Class

In order to understand the value systems associated with various class structures it is important to first understand how class is determined. Class is a social science theory centering on a hierarchical model of social stratification containing the upper, middle, and lower classes. Jean Anyon (1980) referred to the lowest level as “working class” honoring the notion that these families consist of blue-collar workers whose income is at or below the federal poverty level. According to M. Weber’s (1958) classic analysis, there are three independent factors that contribute to a stratified society: class, status, and power. Class impacts the educational system in a myriad of ways, one of which is through teacher perception. When educational institutions, administrators, or teachers’ beliefs and expectations separate the poor, middle class, and rich into distinct groups of capable and incapable (Gilbert, 2008), social injustice occurs. Gatto (1992) stated that our
Public schools are merely “an essential support system for a model of social engineering that condemns most people to be subordinate stones in a pyramid that narrows as it ascends to a terminal of control” (p. 13).

The relevance of social class in the discussion of social equity has not been as thoroughly examined as that of race, gender, and ethnicity (Wyatt-Nichol et al., 2011). Social equity is defined by the National Academy of Public Administration (2008) as:

The fair, just and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract; the fair, just and equitable distribution of public services and implementation of public policy; and the commitment to promote fairness, justice and equity in the formation of public policy. (p. 1)

Nine years ago, Oldfield, Chandler, and Johnson (2006) conducted an analysis on the entire Public Administration Review journal and found that only three articles on social class were published in the last 55 years. Five years after this analysis, Wyatt-Nichol et al. (2011) still found little research on class and education. They stated, “One consequence of ignoring social class and socioeconomic status in the classroom, journals, and textbooks is a diminishing ability to see the connection between inequality and public policy” (p. 194). These issues are rarely addressed from the national to the school level.

Socioeconomic Status

The participants within this study, and the intended audiences for the research, are those who operate within the educational arena, where socioeconomic status (SES) is the educational jargon used and understood. Therefore, it must be noted that the term “socioeconomic status” will be used instead of “class.” SES is measured using different indicators and methods throughout different studies, some which include neighborhood
factors, school factors, and access to resources (NCES, 2012; Sirin, 2005). School-level class status is determined through a Title I designation, meaning the school has more than 80% of its students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. The measure of student SES in educational arenas is determined through the single variable of National School Lunch Program (NSLP) eligibility. This precludes the possibility of using the class composite measure of education, occupation and income, and focuses solely on income. Schools have immediate, updated, access to the information contained in the NSLP report to determine which category a student is qualified for: eligible to receive free lunch, eligible for a reduced-lunch price, or not eligible (NCES, 2012).

SES is based on the combined income, education, and occupation of an individual; like social class, it also contains three designated categories of high, middle, and low (APA, 2007; Brogan, 2009; NCES, 2013; Wyatt-Nichol et al., 2011). SES can be understood subjectively, taking into account “group identities shaped by common, shared experiences” (Wyatt-Nichol et al., 2011, p. 189). It also “considers other influences such as the chance for social or economic advancement, influence on policy, availability of resources, and prestige of the primary occupation” (Brogan, 2009, p. 1). Santrock (2004) defined SES as “the grouping of people with similar occupational, educational, and economic characteristics” (p. 583). SES can also be defined “as one’s access to financial, social, cultural, and human capital resources” (Institute of Education Sciences, 2013, p. 4).

Often times students’ socioeconomic class influences how their teachers think about and interact with them (Garcia, Arias, Murri, & Serena, 2010; Miller et al., 2013;
Monzo & Rueda, 2003). As Greene (1988) explained:

Poor children and others often experience the weight of what is called “cultural reproduction.” Although they cannot name it or resist it. By that is meant not only the reproduction of ways of knowing, believing, and valuing, but the maintenance of social stratification as well. The young people may not chafe under the inequities being kept alive through schools, as inequities often are; they are likely to treat them as wholly “normal,” as predictable as natural laws. The same might be said about advantaged children who grow up with a sense of entitlement and privilege, but still feel they have no choice. (p. 21)

Educationally, there has been an attempt to address these inequalities through additional federal funding in low socioeconomic class schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). Schools have been designated as either having a Title I status or not having a Title I status. Title I is the short term used to describe the Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As amended, the act “provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). According to the ESEA the major goals of Title I are to:

- Help students to achieve academic success in Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics;
- Increase student performance in high poverty schools through school-wide reform;
- Build teacher capacity through quality professional development; and
- Enhance parents’ abilities to help their children succeed through quality parental involvement activities (p. 48)

The significance of this information is that money is being dedicated to address the socioeconomic achievement gap, but the discussion of class and how it impacts the thoughts and perceptions of teachers is not a funded “program” that has been addressed. In order to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged populations, the U.S.
Federal government issued educational mandates to disaggregate student achievement data into various “disadvantaged” sub-groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b). These mandates are part of the No Child Left Behind Act that promotes “efforts to close achievement gaps, promote rigorous accountability, and ensure that all students are on track to graduate college- and career-ready (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 1). Yet, these actions do not get to the heart of the socioeconomic class achievement gap, instead they are observable actions that can be marked off on a checklist. Better understanding the hearts and minds of those who interact with students every day may help scholars unravel the thoughts and attitudes that perpetuate the normalization of inequality.

**Low socioeconomic class.** Although low SES and poverty are not synonymous, there are many parallels in people’s perceptions of stereotypical traits that both a person designated as low socioeconomic status (LSES) and a person living in poverty are thought to possess (Bradshaw, 2006; Brown, 2009). People living in poverty are often understood one dimensionally as lacking economic stability (Jensen, 2009) and, as a result, lacking loving families (Gorski, 2008), intelligence (Bradshaw, 2006; Collins, 2007; Payne, 1996), happiness (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1995), skills (Milner, 2013), talents (Payne, 2009), and positive outlooks for the future (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Peterson et al., 1995). Although the “culture of poverty” and the many deficits it highlights have been debunked by scholars (i.e., Ladson-Billings, 2009), they remain part of the popular discourse and continue to be used as an explanatory framework by many folks working with people living in poverty. Ladson-Billings, for example, noted deficit
theory as the dominant way of understanding and teaching impoverished students in the U.S. Such practices illustrate how “students can be unfairly victimized by the labeling and sorting processes that occur within schools” (Noguera, 2001, p. 1)

“Generational poverty” is understood to occur when families have experienced at least two generations of poverty. The low socioeconomic school this study examined was considered to have a high level of generational poverty. Families who are in this situation often believe that they no longer have the necessary tools to get themselves back out of poverty (Jensen, 2013). They are often understood by people in higher economic classes to be afflicted with “learned helplessness,” a lack of control over the outcomes in their lives (Peterson et al., 1995, p. 8). Studies using this theory of poverty have found that children as young as first grade can begin to have thoughts and behaviors indicative of learned helplessness (Peterson et al., 1995) and “disillusionment regarding school excellence” (Lyman & Luthar, 2014, p. 913). As the above definitions and descriptions of poverty illustrate, the condition is generally understood as a deficit that holds people back from success in school and life, not just in this generation, but for many generations to come.

“Relative poverty” is assumed to arise when individuals remain poor due to making unwise decisions (e.g., Payne, 1996). In this way of thinking, impoverished people are viewed as lacking the incentive to give up immediate rewards in order to gain long-term stability (Payne, 1996). Some view this theory as a way to blame impoverished people for the circumstances they are in. The theory of relative poverty creates a mindset that the class structure impoverished people find themselves at the bottom of is of their
own making, and, therefore, justifiable (Fischer et al., 1996).

Parents have unequal resources to be able to participate in their child’s education, from time spent reading to their child, to attending parent-teacher conferences (Gorski, 2007, 2008; Jensen, 2009). This lack of time spent at school is oftentimes seen as a lack of support for student’s education (Howard, 2006), and a feeling that the parents are lazy, when in reality, “poor working adults spend more hours working each week than their wealthier counterparts” (Gorski, 2008, p. 34). Educators working with impoverished children often do not recognize the additive value of the lived experiences of these students (Cassidy, 2006; Gorski, 2008; Kenyatta 2012).

Parents of low SES students tend to believe that “teachers are responsible for education; they seek little information about either the curriculum or the educational process, and their criticisms of the school center almost entirely on non-academic matters” (Lareau, 2000, p. 8). These beliefs contribute to parents of LSES students feeling unwelcome in schools (Lareau, 2000). Lareau also found that low SES parents did not feel as if they were equals when talking to teachers about their children’s education.

If teachers operate under the assumption that “low income” is synonymous with “low ability” (Neuman, 2013), they will underestimate the capabilities of their students in the present, which diminishes opportunities for them in the future (Noguera, 2003). As Miller et al. (2013) stated:

Teacher perceptions are significantly lower in schools that serve relatively more economically disadvantaged students. When a greater proportion of students are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches, teachers have significantly lower perceptions of the character and academic development of students, communications and associations with parents, and the overall school climate. (p. 155)
Much evidence shows that educators often believe low SES students are full of deficits, gaps, and shortcomings that need to be fixed, rather than bursting with the assets these students and their families bring to an educational setting (Martinez & Rury, 2012; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Tate, 2008).

Researchers have observed lower expectations and negative bias behaviors of teachers towards impoverished students when assessed alongside HSES students (Barton, 2004; Brogan, 2009; Davis-Kean, 2005). An example of this is when LSES students are given drill and practice assignments, which prepare them for labor or factory work (Anyon, 1980). Teachers have even labeled minority and low SES students as lazy and defiant (Bradshaw, 2006; Cassidy, 2006; Noguera, 2001), which perpetuates negative treatment towards these students.

**High socioeconomic class.** Students from high socioeconomic status (HSES) backgrounds, like their LSES peers, also suffer the stigma of stereotyping. These traits include the mistaken belief HSES students do not have problems because they come from “communities dominated by white-collar, well-educated parents…[attending] schools distinguished by rich academic curricula, high standardized test scores, and diverse extracurricular opportunities…” (Luthar, 2013, p. 66). The first part of this section will describe the advantages HSES students have been found to have, and the second part will describe some of the complexities these students face.

Academic research on HSES students has been conducted mainly in areas of music, gifted programs, and mathematical achievement (Forgasz & Hill, 2013). HSES students are more likely to attend schools that have more experienced teachers; smaller
student to teacher ratios (Barton, 2004); more funding sources (Carey, 2005); more access to technology (Gorski, 2003); and higher teacher salaries (Karoly, 2001). Students of higher socioeconomic class typically have familiarity with the language structures, discipline, authority methods, and curricula of schools that advantage them in the system (Gorski, 2007; Lareau, 2000).

Compared to students from low SES schools, students at high income schools were found to be less likely be retained before entering high school; were significantly less likely to know or have a friend who dropped out of school; and were less likely to live in a nontraditional household (Palardy, 2008). HSES students have been found to enroll in a college or university directly after high school about 80% of the time (NCES, 2014), and the higher the SES of the parent, the greater the parent expectation is to have their children then finish their university education (Davis-Kean, 2005; Lippman et al., 2008).

Children who have been raised in upper SES families were sometimes described as having a sense of “entitlement” (Greene, 1988, p. 21) to educational opportunities and structures as their families groom them to ask questions to adults (Lareau, 2000); participate in extracurricular activities and lessons (Ehrenreich, 1989); and teach them to express themselves and their needs (Doob, 2013). Research suggests teachers may automatically infer that students from HSES backgrounds have a solid educational background, good work habits, and a dedication to learning. They may also unconsciously teach these students with different methods or different expectations than their low SES peers (Anyon, 1980; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Lareau, 2000). Examples
of this include HSES students typically being given opportunities for critical thinking
tasks, praise for leadership, and kudos for creativity in the classroom (Anyon, 1980).

Coinciding with the LSES research, Lareau (2000) suggested in the U.S., teacher
perceptions of their students are influenced by parent involvement. As she explained,

HSES parents forge relationships characterized by scrutiny and interconnectedness
between family and school life. These parents believe education is a shared
responsibility between teachers and parents, they have extensive info about their
children’s schooling, and they are very critical of the school, including the
professional performance of their children’s teacher(s). (p. 8)

Studies have found that teachers play an active role in maintaining class structures
through preferential treatment of HSES parents (Anyon, 1980; Lareau, 2000). Parent
involvement in the education of their child has been shown to positively influence and
strengthen learning (Epstein, 2001; Epstein, Sheldon, Sanders, Simon, & Salinas, 2008).
When parents are more visible within the school setting, teachers are provided an “extra
window into the lives and cultures of their students, helping educators understand the
specific circumstances shaping the educational experiences of their charges” (Siegel-
Hawley & Frankengerg, 2012, p. 8). Parents want their children to succeed; however,
socioeconomics plays a role in the opportunities and resources parents had “at their
disposal for upgrading their children’s performance in school” (Lareau, 2000, p. 9). One
of these resources, the ability to provide academic help to children, was perceived by
teachers to be a representation of how much the parents care about their students (Marx,
2006; Marx & Larson, 2012; Milner & Williams, 2008; Norman & Marx, 2013). Another
resource is time—the time to strengthen “links between schools and parent networks”
(Ream & Palardy, 2008, p. 241) through volunteer work at the school. These
opportunities are “more available and educationally beneficial to upper- and middle-class students compared with children from lower-class families” (p. 241).

In contrast to the above findings, research also indicate that affluent students have high levels of anxiety and depression (Luthar, 2003), more frequent substance abuse (Luthar & Ansary, 2005; Luthar & D’Avanzo, 1999), hide imperfections, and have an overall dissatisfaction with their bodies (Flett, Panico, & Hewitt, 2011; Patterson, Wang, & Slaney, 2012). Supporting these findings Luthar (2013) stated, “…the offspring of the affluent today are more distressed than other youth. They show disturbingly high rates of substance abuse, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, cheating, and stealing” (p. 62).

Studies have also shown that affluent students tend to be more envious of their neighbors or friends than LSES students (Fiske, 2010; Lyman & Luthar, 2014; Ninivaggi, 2010). This holds true when their “own self-worth, rests largely—perilously—on achieving and maintaining ‘star’ status” (Luthar, 2013, p. 66). The constant belief they need to be perfect isolates HSES students which “inhibits intimacy and further isolates them in their suffering” (Luthar, 2013, p. 87). Studies have also shown affluent students are often viewed as having “received more wealth, resources, opportunities, and power than others without expending any effort” (Zhu, 2009).

The danger of not recognizing the emotional disturbances of HSES students is when educators assume these students are well adjusted, intelligent, problem free young adults. Teachers may hold stereotypes or perceptions of these students that inhibits their ability to learn, and that further alienates them from forming productive relationships. The next section focuses on teacher perceptions, and how these perceptions influence
Teacher Perceptions

In this study, I rely on the words and thoughts of teachers because they have direct contact with students and are largely responsible for teaching practices and classroom climate. Studies on teacher perceptions of students have shown that teacher attitudes and behaviors do affect student learning (Milner & Williams, 2008). Teachers “are the mediators who provide or fail to provide the essential experiences that permit students to release their awesome potential” (Hilliard, 1991, p. 35). Some of the most apparent ways teacher perceptions impact the day-to-day life of student learning are: “What they pay attention to and reward, the way they allocate resources, role modeling, [and] how they deal with critical events” (Schein, 1992, p. 252).

Teacher perceptions and attitudes are so interconnected with their behaviors that the fabric of their thoughts and actions are at times indiscernible from the woven threads that create their entire being. Scholars have often overlooked how to loosen the threads of this tightly woven, intricate fabric in order to see the impact of each thread on the overall design. We need to stop weaving and examine the materials going into our design.

Teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about children can create educational obstacles, even if teachers are not aware of their own debilitating thoughts. As Greene (1988) tells us, “Among the obstructions to be removed (and preferably through social action) are those raised by poverty, sickness, even ignorance” (p. 42). Negative teacher perception of students’ academic abilities has been found to occur even before a teacher interacts with a
child; in some instances, negative perceptions begin as soon as a teacher knows in what neighborhood a child lives (Garcia et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2013; Monzo & Rueda, 2003). This perpetuates beliefs of classist thinking as the size and condition of a house impacts a teacher’s perception of how well the children inside the home are being treated, and how motivated the parents are to provide for their children. Such teacher perceptions can have a negative impact on student achievement through decreasing expectations, stereotyping, utilizing unfair placement and tracking procedures, and influencing educational opportunities for students (Miller et al., 2013).

Inadvertently, teacher perceptions of students influence the perceptions that students have of themselves (Tyler & Boelter, 2008). Spradley (1980) stated, “Although we can easily see behavior and artifacts, they represent only the thin surface of a deep lake” (p. 6). When teachers do not understand their own biased perceptions they are likely to continually repeat their negative behaviors with students (Calmak et al., 2011; Campbell, 2003; Miller et al., 2013; Redding, 1996).

Much attention has been placed on the academic achievement gap between LSES and HSES students (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006). The achievement gap can also be recognized as a power gap as it has been proclaimed that knowledge, in this case academic knowledge, is power. This gap is treated as a chasm that must be filled with teaching materials, smaller class sizes, and more money. A concentrated effort to look below the surface might find that, regardless of the amount of money spent on training teachers, the gap will persist if educators do not take the time to look inside themselves. A teacher’s identity and their attitudes towards teaching and learning are invisibly
connected. A teacher’s belief system generated from race, class and gender, and their consequent actions may be what perpetuate inequalities in their classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Marx, 2006; Milner & Williams, 2008).

What Research Has Missed

The literature review above reveals that teacher perceptions regarding low and high SES students contribute to the total schooling experiences of children in both negative and positive ways. Inequitable practices are often maintained without teachers having an awareness of their perceptions and actions, or the consequences thereof. The intersecting webs of SES, deficit thinking, and educator perceptions allowed me to better understand teachers working with, and making sense of, students of varying SES. Student’s educational experiences oftentimes conflict with the mission statements of the schools they attend. In order to reduce educational inequalities and promote social justice, there needs to be an increased focus on the thoughts and perceptions of educators who are primarily White, middle class, women.

Purpose and Objectives for Research

The unique contribution of this study lies in its focus on teacher perceptions of students from high and low socioeconomic classes. I wanted to be able to grasp teacher beliefs of teaching and learning (Spradley, 1980). I hoped to comprehend the multiple thought processes that initiate teacher interactions with their students of various SES. I wanted to hear teachers describe their students of differing socioeconomic classes, and
understand the perceptions of the teacher. By looking for trends in teacher statements I began to understand what was currently happening in regards to socioeconomic class in the classroom.

**Research Questions**

Research suggests that disparities in educational outcomes may coincide directly with the resources and abilities of the community, family, and school (Beaulieu, Israel, & Wimberly, 2003). Compared to educational research on students of poverty, information on their high-income counterparts is meager. This study attempted to fill this gap by illuminating attitudes and perceptions of educators of both low and high income students. It also sheds light on ways in which teachers both strive to change the status quo and reproduce unequal socioeconomic structures in the classroom. Greene (1988) stated, “To undertake a search is, of course, to take an initiative, to refuse stasis and the flatness of ordinary life” (p. 21). The three central questions of the proposed study were as follows.

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding students from high and low socioeconomic status in their classrooms?

2. How do teacher perceptions regarding students’ socioeconomic status influence their teaching?

3. What personal life experiences and understandings do teachers draw on when making sense of students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds?

These questions will be analyzed further to delineate the impact of teacher perceptions.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

My experience growing up in an impoverished environment provided a set of experiences that help me connect with populations of similar backgrounds today. I also feel connected to middle-class values, to teachers, and the teaching profession as a whole. Scholars have found that this “connectedness” is quite common in educational fields (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Kincheloe & Weil, 2004; Thayer-Bacon, 2011). The complexity I bring to this study requires me to determine my own intersectionalities, some of which are influenced by advantages and others, oppression. I have been a low socioeconomic child who progressed out of the cycle of generational poverty. I have been a student, an educator, and a district administrator. I have worked alongside teachers who believed LSES class children were full of deficits, and HSES students were gifted. I am a mother, wife, friend, sister, and a daughter. I have seen disadvantaged populations sacrifice and advantaged populations prosper. These positionalities, combined with the disparities of oppression, are such that an examination of teacher perceptions and practices may help to uncover beliefs and biases. The following describes the underlying methodology for the research process used to gain knowledge and further the work of social justice in educational settings.

Setting

After receiving the letter of permission to conduct research (Appendix A), teachers in two public elementary schools from one Intermountain West school district
were invited to participate in this study. These schools were selected due to their SES classification on the Public School Data (PSD) Gateway (2013); one school generally served children living in poverty, the other generally served affluent children.

**Ridgecap Elementary**

The HSES school chosen for this study will be referred to as “Ridgecap Elementary.” It was located in a suburban area surrounded by large homes that had been built within the past 5-10 years on farm land that had recently been turned into subdivisions. This school was located in a community that was settled in 1847. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010), the population of the city the school resides in was 28,876 people with a population density of 2,802/sq. mile. In this area there were approximately 7,562 households and the racial makeup of the city was 95.2% White, 0.5% African American, 0.3% Native American, 0.8% Asian, 0.2% Pacific Islander, and 4.5% Latino. The census data also stated that households were 74.1% married couples living together, 15.8% were non-families, and 6.9% had a female householder with no husband present. The median income per household in the city was $84,509, with males earning a median income of $60,185 versus $15,673 for females.

According to the PSD report, this school consisted of 36 teachers, 804 students, 5% of whom were children of color, 95% were white, and 5% were from low-income backgrounds. Other factors indicated on the PSD report showed an average daily attendance of 97%, 1% mobility rate, 1% ELL, and 9% of the students identified as having a disability (Public School Data Gateway, 2013). Teacher socioeconomic class and race were not indicated on the PSD report, but were a part of the survey teachers
completed prior to the interviews.

The PSD report looked at two proficiency measures for each school: the academic achievement at the end of a school year and the academic growth between the previous academic year and the school year just ending. According to the 2012 standardized academic test, 94% of the students in this school achieved proficiency in mathematics and 95% were proficient in language arts. As determined by growth proficiency measures, this school had 100% of its students achieving growth proficiency in mathematics and 96% achieving growth proficiency in language arts. The growth proficiency measures indicate that the school was progressing in its academic achievement, having aimed for 100% of its students to become proficient in the tested subject areas of language arts and mathematics.

**Skyview Elementary**

The low SES elementary school selected, referred to as “Skyview Elementary,” was located in a community that was incorporated in 1936. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010), the population of the city the school resides in was 5,122 people with a population density of 3,532/sq. mile. In this area there were approximately 1,785 households and the racial makeup of the city was 86.88% White, 1.56% African American, 0.92% Native American, 2.75% Asian, 0.15% Pacific Islander, 10.5% Latino, and 4.73% from other races. The school consisted of 24 teachers, 309 students, 31% of whom were children of color, 69% were white, 14% ELL, and 59% were from low-income backgrounds. The census data also stated that households were 61.6% married couples living together, 19.6% were nonfamilies, and 13.3% had a female householder
with no husband present. The median income per household in the city $46,731, with males earning a median income of $31,867 versus $20,082 for females.

According to the 2012 standardized academic tests, 62% of the students in this school achieved proficiency in mathematics and 73% were proficient in language arts. As determined by growth proficiency measures, this school had 54% of its students achieving growth proficiency in mathematics and 52% achieving growth proficiency in language arts. The growth proficiency measures indicated that the school was behind in its academic achievement when it aimed for 100% of students being proficient in the tested subject areas of language arts and mathematics. Other factors indicated on the PSD report show an average daily attendance of 96%, 11% mobility rate, 14% English Language Learners, and 19% of the students identified as having a disability (Public School Data Gateway, 2013).

I had worked with a few of the teachers from both schools in the past, implementing professional development in mathematics and technology. During district sponsored professional development courses, all of the teachers had outwardly demonstrated high expectations for their students and a desire to continually improve their teaching strategies and practices. They had communicated a desire to teach students effectively and had willingly contributed many extra hours to ensure that all students at their school were learning.

**Participant Selection**

Five teacher participants were selected from each school using the following
criteria: They (1) had taught in the district 3 or more years, (2) were self-identified as someone who was interested in promoting social justice in their schools, (3) were currently teaching in an elementary school, and (4) were interested in participating in this study to begin to understand their own positionality. This criterion was used to select teachers who were dedicated to their students and wanted to add their experiences to the research community. There was a possibility of 36 prospective teachers from Ridgecap and 24 teachers from Skyview. The selection process began with teachers who agreed to be a part of the study and who could participate in the study while still maintaining their duties at their school.

Teachers were selected from the designated schools after receiving IRB (Appendix G) and District approval (Appendix B). A brief afternoon professional development about teacher perceptions (Appendix F) was conducted by the researcher and participants were invited to complete a survey (Appendix C). Interviews were then set up for selected study participants. After the initial interview took place, a 2-week time period lapsed where the teachers were asked to journal their thoughts and feelings about what was stated during their interviews. These reflections were submitted to the researcher prior to the second interview. After the second interview, the process repeated again. The researcher then transcribed the interviews and submitted a copy of the finished transcriptions to the interviewees who checked for accuracy of statements made. The transcriptions were then combined with the researcher journal, and analyzed for themes, including teacher perceptions of students from various SES backgrounds, as well as intersectionalities of teachers according to their descriptions of themselves.
Limitations of the Research

Because of the strict guidelines with the participating district, the interviews were limited to the teachers. Access to observe the students was not given. This study examined teachers in two schools in one district. These teachers do not represent everyone working with LSES and HSES class students. Schools with similar populations may have differing results due to other school factors, and, therefore, results are not generalizable to all subgroups and subpopulations.

As I interviewed teachers, I found that the answers to the questions could not be as clear cut as initially anticipated. For example, almost all of the teachers at the HSES schools had taught at a LSES school. Their answers reflected the positionality of teachers who had experience with both populations of students. Most of the teacher participants at the LSES school had only taught at LSES schools, in fact, three of the five had only taught at Ridgecap, and the fourth had taught 24 out of her 25 years there. Their answers to the questions about HSES students were based on conjecture; whereas, when the teachers who were currently teaching at the HSES School were asked about LSES students, their answers were based on perceptions of past experiences. This study also recognized the will and power of young students, acknowledging the fact they also have background variables that impact their educational experience.

The final limitation that I identified was one of my own biased perception. I hold a strong empathy for LSES students, and I know I am sensitive to negative statements made about them. With this in mind, I had concentrated solely on class when anticipating the diversity of the participants. I knew the demographics of the teachers in the district,
and I had originally thought the study would involve White, women, middle-class educators. It did not occur to me until I met with the faculties at the survey presentations that I would have the opportunity for more diverse demographics to be interviewed. When I chose the participants, I did not look at the gender or ethnicities of the respondents; instead I looked solely at their open-ended responses involving SES. The final study ended up being more rich and complex with the addition of a White, male, teacher and an African American, female, teacher. The limitation was based on my own background of being a White, woman, middle-class educator. The final background traits of the participants can be described as “middle class educators,” thus grouping them into the category of “people with similar occupational, educational, and economic characteristics” (Santrock, 2004, p. 583).

Data

In seeking to answer research questions on teachers’ perceptions of high and low SES students, how these perceptions influence their teaching, and the personal life experiences and understandings they draw on to make sense of their students, data were gathered from three different sources: a teacher survey administered after an initial staff meeting; two face-to-face interviews with each teacher; and journals completed by teachers and myself. All data sources were transcribed verbatim and imported into Dedoose (2014), a cross-platform application used for analyzing qualitative research. After I imported all digital media (e.g., survey, interviews, journals), I then added codes and descriptors to the transcribed excerpts. Central to the overall interface design of the
Dedoose program was the ability to analyze patterns in the coding of the written data and to disaggregate information into themes.

**Teacher Survey**

Survey information was a valuable contribution when used to determine background data that may not be addressed in interview questions (Russell, Malfroy, Gosper, & McKenzie, 2014). When I talked to both principals whose teachers might be involved in the study, I let them know I would be surveying the teachers, interviewing them on two occasions, and asking them to journal their thoughts during and after the interview process. After I described the study, both principals were fully supportive of the questions that would be asked, and they requested that I speak to their teachers about the study and the time commitments it would require. They invited me to begin the study by conducting a brief professional overview on positionality. Appendix F contains the script I presented to both faculties separately. I allowed time for discussion and questions during and after the presentation.

After the discussion I invited the teachers to participate in completing the confidential survey. Appendix C contains the questions teachers were asked to respond to after the presentation. I read aloud some of the questions on the survey during the training to familiarize the respondents with the types of questions to be asked. The potential participants were asked to go online and take the survey. I informed them that they could stop taking the survey at any time and either submit the answers they had, or end the survey without submitting their answers. I concluded the presentation by informing the teachers of the main request I would ask during the first interview (Appendix D) and the
main question to be asked during the second interview (Appendix E).

All teachers at the LSES and HSES schools received the survey link via email. The web-based hyperlink directed the participants to a secure survey site approved by the participating district. The survey began with specific questions designed to elicit an exact response of demographic information (Appendix C). These questions included information such as gender, race, years of experience teaching, and years of experience in district, years at current school, proximity to school, SES as a child, current SES, and grade levels having taught. The survey also included open-ended questions that were included as part of the group analysis of high and low SES teacher trends, and analyzed separately by teacher with the additional information contained in the face-to-face interviews.

**Interviews**

All teachers ($N = 10$) were interviewed on two separate occasions with two weeks in between each session. Interviews have been identified as an effective tool to understand another person’s perspective (Patton, 1987). Each interview session lasted 30-60 minutes, starting with informational questions and then moving on to the bulk of the interview being one open-ended question. The interview questions were set up to be broad enough to have participants skim across, dive into, or expand upon their responses individually. The first interview session (Appendix D) started with the request of, “Tell me about yourself,” and “Tell me about your students.” On the second visit the participants were asked, “How does the socioeconomic status of your students guide your teaching practices?” and “How do perceptions regarding your students’ socioeconomic
class influence your teaching?” (Appendix E). I also developed a set of guiding questions to use during both interviews to maintain similar interview protocols and questioning during all interviews. Appendix D and E contain guiding follow-up questions asked during the interviews.

These open-ended interview questions were the same for each participant, but there was a need to ask additional probing questions so that the participants could give as much detail and information as they desired (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1996; Turner, 2010). The open-ended questions followed the General Interview Guide Approach (McNamara, 2009), which allowed flexibility for the researcher to ask follow-up questions as the interview was being conducted based on the responses participants give. The strength of this format ensured “…that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee, this provides more focus…but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee” (McNamara, 2009, p. 725). All teachers were asked the same initial series of questions, and all interviews were audio-recorded and translated verbatim. The accounts were then coded, utilizing the Dedoose software, into categories of similar word choice, descriptions, trials, and opportunities that may be identified (McNamara, 2009). The final step involved the human touch of the researcher analyzing the responses and making connections.

The survey and interview questions were used to aid teachers in telling personal life experiences and understandings they draw on daily when teaching their students. These responses helped provide information of their intersecting identities as they made sense of students from high and low SES backgrounds. Participants were provided copies
of their typed transcripts and verified their statements, clarified anything that was stated, or expanded upon areas they felt needed more explanation. Participant member checking of changes to the original transcript was then included in the final interview records.

**Journals**

Journaling provides a first-person observation of one’s own experiences that are a record of relevance meant to be read by others (Krishnan & Hoon, 2002). Researchers that utilize journaling as part of the qualitative process are usually classified as ethnographic studies that reveal participants’ inner thoughts (Bailey, 1983). In order to provide a more coconstructed version of the interview, I asked teachers to journal thoughts they had after each interview session. Topics included personal life experiences or feelings they had as they told their stories, described students, or were interviewed. I also annotated my thoughts and feelings after each individual session, taking into account the environment, items discussed, and the observable emotions of the participants (McNamara, 2009). The journals were then read and disaggregated to find salient patterns within the written text. Salient identities are those that come to the foreground or are most recognizable in a given setting (Goodman, 2014). I then cross-analyzed the survey responses with the interviews and journals for emergent themes and performed a final analysis of all data.

**Methods of Findings and Analysis Overview**

Central to this research is the “unit of analysis is the individual situated in larger social locations” (Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012, p. 702). The beginning of the findings
section analyzes the makeup of the school followed by profiles of the teachers and their backgrounds. Salient factors of the teachers were analyzed to develop an overall impression of the teachers. Statements were included that helped the researcher get an overall sense of what factors influenced their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. The teachers told of their lives through stories. Many of the characteristics may seem common or not noteworthy, but when combined together, they make up the lived experiences of the teacher. For example, it may seem “common” to some that teachers felt students should be raised in a two parent home with a mother, having the father be the bread winner, and the mother staying home to care for the children. Elsewhere in the world, for example in the African Aka tribe, if people were asked how typical family units function, their perception of normal would be males and females sharing equal roles of hunters and domestic caregivers, even having the males taking part in the nursing ritual of suckling (Hewlett, 2005).

The second section examines the data of the combined surveys, interviews, and journal entries. This section concentrates on taking the individual data of section one, teacher profiles, and relating it within the larger context of “teachers.” Teachers are complex in their thoughts, actions and history, and themes within categories began to arise which were interrelated.

Before discussing the categories that emerged, it may first be helpful to glimpse what the respondents stated when they were asked to define HSES and LSES on the survey. This small subsection was placed here because it was one of the first pieces of information gathered from respondents demonstrating the complexity of their perceptions
of socioeconomic status.

**Respondent’s Definitions of Socioeconomic Status**

In order to better comprehend the complexity of how teachers perceived students of high and low SES, they were asked to define HSES and LSES. These definitions were a starting point to begin to understand teacher intersectionalities before the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews. According to the APA (2007), a person’s socioeconomic status is a combination of their occupation, education, and income. As noted in the Literature Review, the measure of low SES in school settings is NSLP eligibility of free or reduced status. All respondents were asked to define the terms “low socioeconomic status” and “high socioeconomic status.” The quotes below may come from either teachers who responded to the initial survey, referred to as “respondents,” or those that participated in the entirety of the study, referred to as “participants.”

Definitions of LSES included:

Families who fall in the low/poverty tax bracket, those who are renting, those who live in multifamily dwellings, and those who are transient in nature. They have a high school degree or less for an education and work in minimum wage jobs. They qualify for free/reduced lunch and welfare. Their children go without beds and necessities, but the parents have the latest smartphone, TV, and have their nails professionally done. They are usually divorced, and their children are being raised by other people such as grandparents, aunts, uncles. (Anna, Participant, LSES School)

I understand by current standards that many teachers, depending on their family situations, can qualify for free or reduced lunch. If I don’t have to discuss percentages or wages, I would say that a low economic status means that folks do not have enough resources to buy food or shelter. Often folks in low economic situations also lack opportunities for education, dependable, trustworthy relationships and religious support. (Corrine, Respondent at LSES School)
These two situational definitions provide a small insight into teacher perceptions of what low SES means to them. Anna’s first definition contains beliefs of items parents are perceived to have or value in low SES households such as “smartphones, TV’s” and having their nails “professionally done.” It further defines low SES to include behaviors/situations such as being divorced or having children living with other family members. Corrine’s definition includes indicators she identifies low SES families to lack, such as opportunities, trustworthy relationships and even religious support. When I analyzed all respondents from the LSES school, definitions ranged from using one variable, generally that of income, to those that included parent effort, expectations, and lack of hope.

The teacher respondents were also asked to define HSES. Their definitions included items the parents were observed to have, or what they perceived HSES parents to value or experience. Samples of definitions include:

When the father works and is able to adequately provide for his family’s needs. The mother is able to stay home and provide for the needs of her children. When the parents are not living beyond their means. These families seem more adjusted and emotionally stable. (Judy, Participant, LSES School)

I define high-socioeconomic status as folks who have enough resources to be concerned about many properties. They have enough resources that they can be concerned with spending their money to better the world. Sometimes they have to be concerned about how to communicate with the maid or their chauffeur. Sometimes they lack trustworthy relationships and religion. (Corrine, Respondent, LSES School)

Judy’s definition added the perceived roles of the mother and father while Corrine’s definition emphasized material possessions and altruistic ideals of spending money “to better the world.” Judy’s definition implies HSES families are well adjusted emotionally
and that their main concern might be “how to communicate with the chauffeur.”

Interestingly, Judy felt that HSES families “lack trustworthy relationships and religion.”

The beginning glimpse of teacher perceptions, that of their personal definition of HSES and LSES, becomes more complex as they begin to describe their own students, interactions with parents, and teaching methods. Before analyzing the findings, a few cautionary explanations must be given on how the transcripts were coded. There is also a brief explanation on how I interpreted these findings during this study.

**Background Information to Consider**

The emergent themes were complex in the form of how to disaggregate the information because the one simple noun “teacher” was multifaceted. Educators from two different schools were interviewed, yet during that process all of their combined lived experiences, from their years of teaching to the variety of schools in which they taught, became a part of their current answers and stories. Therefore, when they talked about HSES parent expectations, it could be the perceptions they had of the current HSES parents they interacted with, parents from a former HSES school they had taught at, or even HSES parents from a LSES school in which they had worked. This is an important complexity to recognize before reading the analysis.

The themes from the LSES school and the HSES school were not parallel or mirror images of each other. If one thing was a theme in the HSES school, it was not always a theme in a LSES school, or even an opposing theme in an LSES school. The questions were open-ended, and the teachers spoke about perceptions that were real for
them; therefore, even though the questions were the same, the responses led down different paths. It must also be recognized that just because something was not mentioned, it does not mean it did or did not exist within the school. The analysis is derived completely from the responses given by participants.

The next two chapters are divided into three major sections. Chapter IV describes the data gathered from the HSES teachers. Chapter V details the data from the LSES teachers. The chapters are organized in the same pattern according to the teacher profiles and identified major themes: (1) teacher profiles, (2) perceptions of family, (3) perceptions of students, and (4) teaching practices. The chapters describe the common thread of thoughts and feelings that emerged when the individual teacher interviews were coded together. The strands developed around the pattern of teacher’s backgrounds, values, and beliefs impacting their day to day interactions with their students. The strands are listed in the order of magnitude of discussion taken from the Dedoose programmatic analysis, and the researcher-interpreted account of word count or coded count. They may at first seem commonplace; for example, teachers felt their upbringing influenced their current perceptions, and actions. Common does not mean that it should not be mentioned; instead “common” is an affirmation that certain structures or systems of power remain in place because they appear to be the norm. The next section details the combined information gathered from the individual teachers at the HSES school, and are reported according to emergent themes.

The teacher profile sections within Chapters IV and V disaggregate the teacher data into categorical terms—researcher interpretations and participant stories. The
categorical terms begin with how the participant described and classified themselves based on the survey taken after the brief professional development. This information is titled “Stated Background.” Next will be the “Researcher Added Teacher Background,” which resides in the juncture of categories and “treat[s] race and gender categories as ‘anchor’ points—though these points are not static” (Glenn, 2002, p. 14). The Anchor Background was added in order to determine group membership with the larger group of “teachers” once the profile data is combined. The final piece of the teacher profiles retells the stories that emerged as defining belief systems within the teacher’s everyday life.

**Socioeconomic Status-Blind**

Before the teacher profiles are disaggregated into findings specific to HSES and LSES, there is one overarching theme that will be discussed first. Both HSES and LSES teachers expressed a parallel version of “colorblind” that I will refer to as “socioeconomic status-blind” (SES-blind). I am taking the liberty to introduce the term SES-blind as one being similar to the work conducted on teacher colorblind perceptions and attitudes (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Marx & Larson, 2012; Riley & Ettlinger, 2010). The belief that money or socioeconomics does not matter or all students have access to the same opportunities regardless of SES mirrors colorblind ideology. Colorblind ideology states differences according to race are Non-existent, such that all Americans are subject to equal opportunity.

Accordingly, this ideology interprets failure to achieve equal status on the part of the minority persons as an individual (not structural) failure. The idea of colorblindness denies racial difference, thereby masking uneven opportunity relative to racial difference, and precluding policy towards developing equal opportunity. (Riley & Ettlinger, 2010, p. 1261)
Although it is a giant leap to connect the term colorblind and SES-blind, the two major similarities are that teachers denied SES differences, and they felt LSES families could achieve equal status if they just worked hard enough. The data collected showed many teacher perceptions of SES-blind beliefs as well as a desire to share these values with their students. For example:

I don’t think the things I do here are determined by SES. I have never looked upon my students as a low socioeconomic student or as a high-socioeconomic student. I think I automatically think of them as all the same SES. It doesn’t matter the SES of the kids, the bigger factor is parent support. (Cathy)

There was an avoidance on the part of many teachers to talk about any disparity or inequity between the LSES and HSES students. Teachers who had not lived in a LSES home showed a lack of understanding as to what it meant to provide equitable opportunities for students. For example:

We have quit a few after school things. They don’t have to pay for them if they don’t have the funds. We are putting on a Broadway musical. We have choir, orchestra, and a Lego club. Students can pay for them if they have the funds, if they don’t then they don’t have to. We have a lot of enrichment in place where money isn’t a factor. (Sharon)

Teachers had not taken into account transportation, students who were needed at home for child care or other home responsibilities, or even the cost of an instrument. The central opportunity the teacher felt they were making equitable was providing the opportunity at no cost.

Another example of SES-blind was when a teacher stated student success had “nothing to do with how much money their parents make. Their parents aren’t involved in this part at all. This is what is happening in the classroom. The money is not what makes a difference” (Sharon). The teacher failed to connect any outside experiences
which may impact a child in their home due to SES.

One of the teachers expressed her frustration when she noticed her colleagues were not taking into account the needs of the LSES students.

There wasn’t support at the school level to train them on what they needed. They treated these kids just like everyone else. This meant they would not give them additional support if they needed it. They were thinking of giving the kids equal opportunities as the other students I didn’t feel this was equitable because these kids needed more help to get them to where they needed to be. (Anna)

She felt additional training should be given to teachers at an LSES school so they could understand, and even talk about what their population of students may need in order to be provided an equitable education.

At times teachers gave conflicting statements. In the same sentence, one teacher stated she did not recognize SES differences, yet later combined characteristics of special education students to include those with lower incomes.

I don’t really see there are differences in kids from HSES or LSES backgrounds, but I do see that students in special education or resource seem to usually come from a single parent family, come from lower incomes, or are dysfunctional in some way. (Cathy)

This denial again reflected the SES-blind ideology in which she didn’t “see” differences, but noted there were “dysfunctional” characteristics of some of her LSES students.

Teachers at the HSES school, who had not taught at a LSES school, felt their teaching strategies would not need to change if they were to move to a LSES school. For example, Cathy stated: “If I were asked to go to a low SES school I would hope that the district would provide computers for the kids there. Other than that I feel that my teaching would not need to change.” These teachers believed in their abilities to teach, and had seen results with their students. This could have spoken to the fact they had
mastered outstanding teaching strategies, or that they felt there would not be differences in the students. Without having observed the teachers, this is an unanswered question.

The difference between equity and equality was also noted when teachers talked about parents. A few of the teachers expressed the belief that parent support was the equalizer for students’ SES. For example:

A lot parents buy into the belief that it doesn’t matter what they do, but it does. It is the biggest different I can see, regardless of SES class. The biggest difference is what the parents tell their kids because that is what they believe. (Mark)

This belief coincided with colorblind ideology where teachers believed all students could succeed if they, or their parents would make more of an effort, or place education as a priority (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This belief put LSES students at a distinct disadvantage if an educator had believed everything would equal out if students just tried harder.
CHAPTER IV
HIGH SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS FINDINGS

Teacher Profiles: Ridgecap

Ridgecap Elementary, the HSES school, had a potential of 36 participants. There were 16 respondents who responded to the survey and 15 who completed the survey in its entirety. From this survey information, it was found that the average number of years of teaching experience was 13 years with a range of 25 years’ difference between the least and most experienced district employee. Contrary to other studies (Brogan, 2009; Karoly, 2001), the teachers at the HSES school did not have higher salaries than their LSES counterparts. District salaries were determined according to the number of years of service and the number of degrees held, teachers at the LSES school had taught longer and held more advanced degrees. The respondent’s average number of years teaching in the district was 11 with a range of 26 years’ difference between the least and most experienced faculty member. The average number of years that the respondent’s taught at their current school was three years with a range of 2.5 years’ difference between the least and most experienced faculty members. Additional information concluded 13 of the 16 respondents at Ridgecap lived outside the school boundaries, and three respondents had children who were currently, or had in the past, attended the school.

The following subsections introduce each teacher participant. The word choice of the stories told were determined by each teacher’s data in its entirety. After analyzing their survey, interviews, and journal entries, I found the statements or stories that gave
the essence of the individual. Items stated more often, or with the greatest emotion were tagged as relevant to their backgrounds. For example, many of the teachers talked about how they grew up or their family life, therefore these stories are told here. The stories they told about their families becomes important when they describe their perceptions of their students, when they unknowingly mimic their perception of what “normal” is by using their own experiences as a baseline.

The five selected teacher participants from the HSES school were given pseudonyms, and any information too specific that may have led towards identification became generalized. For example, where they were from, who they taught with, or names of their students. The following profiles include Mark, Sharon, Trisha, Cathy, and Pauline.

**Mark**

*Stated background:* Husband, father, teacher, and friend.

*Researcher Added Anchor Background:* White, middle-income, male, and educator.

When I first met Mark, a White, middle-income, male in his mid-30s, he led me into a small conference room away from his teaching area. Mark was a sixth-grade teacher who loved teaching his students to think and write. We walked the hallways and he seemed to know every child by name. He would greet them and they would show excitement at being recognized. He seemed both happy and humble. He came to the U.S. as an immigrant from Europe, which had been experiencing social unrest. He had been brought up in an affluent home as a child, but when he and his mother reached American
soil the sum of their wealth was $250. His father and brother arrived in the U.S. at a later date, with nothing in their pockets to contribute. As Mark was being interviewed, he expressed his views from both the HSES and LSES perspective.

Mark conveyed that his mother was his role model. She continually stated, “Work hard, plug forward, and don’t look back. Just have faith in yourself and don’t let people put you down. Just keep going.” Mark took this advice and worked hard to get out of poverty. He earned a business degree at a state university. His first career was in business where he “earned three times the amount” of what he currently earned after being in education for over 10 years. Mark had quit his high-paying job because of moral issues and his desire to find a career that would leave him happy and “feeling good” about what he could give to others. Mark’s daily philosophy was:

You need to be anchored. Life is short. You never know how much time you will have. You need to know who you are. You can’t be defined by where you live or where you came from. You can’t be defined by how you grew up. Your definition comes from inside you, so you need to understand who you are at some point.

Mark began his teaching career at a Title I school and felt he “couldn’t keep afloat” after the first year. The emotional needs of the students combined with the physical abuse that he was made aware of drained him on a daily basis. He held the utmost respect for teachers who stayed at Title I schools, and stated, “Maybe now that I have all of this experience I could go back. Maybe…but as a first year teacher that was tough.”

Mark had been teaching at HSES schools for the past 9 years and felt HSES students had their basic needs met so they could concentrate on learning. He felt that parents had the biggest impact on student achievement.

The biggest difference is what the parent tell their kids. What they tell their kids is
what is believed. It doesn’t matter what I say, or anyone else, or even what they see on TV. If their parent tell them what life is really like, and what they should expect out of life, then that is what they believe.

He felt that one of the things he needed to instill in his students was that money will not be the thing that brings them happiness. He had money as a child, lost it, earned it again as an adult, and chose to leave it behind. “If you are happy, and you are okay, then it doesn’t matter.” Mark’s stories of his home life were reflected in his current perceptions of the students he taught. He believed students needed to value hard work, money doesn’t buy happiness, and parents have the greatest influence over their child’s success.

Sharon

Stated background: Single mother, teacher, professional quilter, friend, and musician.

Researcher-added anchor background: White, middle-income, female, and educator.

Sharon, a White, middle-income, female teacher in her mid-40s, walked with an air of determination and kindness. Sharon had taught in the current district for the past 10 years, almost all of them as either a third- or sixth-grade teacher. Her room was organized, showing very little in the way of unnecessary adornment. Sharon grew up in a low- to middle-income family, and she recognized that she did not have as much as other children in her neighborhood. At a young age she decided that if she wanted what other children had, she would need to work to get it, for example, she wanted nicer clothes, so she learned to sew.

Sharon had three children of her own from two marriages. She stayed home from teaching while she raised her two boys who were now college age. After having her
daughter, she was able to get a job teaching online school so that she could stay home with her daughter until she was old enough to go to school. Her daughter currently attends fifth grade at Ridgecap Elementary, even though they did not live in the school boundaries.

Sharon’s master’s thesis was on the variety of behavioral issues educators encounter in students once they reach the teaching field. She felt that undergraduate work had not prepared teachers for these different situations, and that universities sent teachers off with a degree so that they could “go out into the field to learn.” Sharon believed that one of the most important things a school, grade level, and individual teacher could do was let students know what the expectations were, whether behavioral or academic. She created songs for both her school and the classroom so student’s knew from the very first day of entering school what they needed to do for procedures, rules, behavioral expectations, and academic motivation. For example, “The topic of the paragraph tells the theme (clap, clap). The topic of the paragraph tells the theme (clap, clap)…” and “Be safe, be kind, be respectful, and be responsible…” She taught students through song because “putting it to a jingle or rhythm helps things stick.”

Sharon said that her daughter had come into her classroom one day when she was sick, and she stayed there until Sharon could take her home during the lunch break. While she drove home her daughter said, “Mom, you are strict!” The next day she asked her class if she was strict and they said that she wasn’t. She stated:

I like structure. I feel like the more structure I can give them the more they can relax because they know what is coming. It becomes predictable, and it is something you do for kids who have attention issues, or any issues. You provide structure and routine to help them become comfortable.
This structure was one that allowed Sharon to work with every child in her classroom, from those who excelled and seemed to have everything going for them at home, to those who struggled and had “huge issues” at home. They were all her kids, and she would not give up on any of them. Sharon’s responses centered on the beliefs that there should always be a parent at home for a child, behavioral issues need to be identified and managed, classroom structure evens the playing field for all students, and challenging situations can be overcome.

Trisha

*Stated background:* Teacher, friend, leader, sister, and daughter.

*Researcher added anchor background:* White, middle-income, female, and educator.

Trisha had the kind of smile that lit up her whole face. Her eyes twinkled, and you could see the joy on her face when she talked about teaching. Trisha was raised in a low-SES household, and was the second of eight children. Trisha was in her late 30s and had never been married or had children. One of her siblings was born with cerebral palsy, and Trisha smilingly stated, “She is definitely the boss. She doesn’t talk but she communicates with us very effectively!” She moved around a lot when she was younger and had attended several different schools until she moved to Utah at the age of 15. She had been in education for over 20 years and had taught at her current school for the past 4.5 years. Trisha had taught various elementary-grade levels and was currently been teaching resource.

One of the reasons Trisha decided she needed to transfer to this new school was
because she felt her old HSES school covered up the lack of success they were having with various subpopulations of students. If the school had less than ten students in any subpopulation then they did not need to report that score to the state accountability system; therefore, the administration knew “they wouldn’t count against us on academic scores.” The data also showed that these students were being overrepresented in resource. Trisha stated, “I realized our students were being successful in spite of what we were doing, not because of what we were doing.” Trisha could not get the administration to recognize this inequality, so she moved on to a new school when the opportunity became available.

Trisha was engrossed with student data and student outcomes. She believed that “every single child should show progress, regardless of how high or low they are academically.” She had considered going into administration at one point in her career, and even took most of the classes to get her certification, but she knew her “heart was in the classroom with students; not in the office dealing with difficult parents.” Trisha’s stories of her students were focused on her perception of never giving up (as told in the stories of her family finding a way to communicate with her sister who had cerebral palsy), all students can excel, and there are populations of students being underserved due to educational systems of power.

Cathy

*Stated background:* Wife, mother, grandmother, sister, friend, and teacher.

*Researcher-added anchor background:* White, middle-income, female, and educator.
Cathy, a White, female teacher in her late 50s, grew up in a middle-income home where her dad was a junior high teacher. She remembered “correcting papers for him, going on field trips with him, and being involved as much as I could.” Cathy entered the university right after high school and planned on going into home economics, but she met her husband and fell in love. She only had 1 year left to finish her degree but they decided to start a family instead. When her youngest son turned 4, she decided to start volunteering at a school and the principal recommended that she go back and finish her degree and become a teacher. Cathy reported she comes to school each day to make a difference—not for the money.

Cathy had taught for more than 21 years in several school districts and at a variety of SES schools. She had been an educator in this school district for the past 7 years. Cathy felt the biggest difference in SES levels that can be seen at school was parent support. When she taught at an LSES school with over 20% English Language Learners (ELL), she felt she was unable to “communicate with parents to let them know how to help their child.”

Cathy was constantly trying to individualize learning experiences for students so they could succeed. One student had trouble with his homework and his father came in to talk to her about his frustrations. She told the father, “Homework should take about 30 minutes a night. If it takes longer than that send it back to school so that I can finish it with him.” She then came up with a plan to help this child in completing his homework. Being an advocate for children was one of her primary goals. Cathy’s sphere of perception was based around the importance of family, mothers should stay home with
their children, LSES parents need to be more involved in their student’s education, and children should be responsible for their own learning.

Pauline

Stated background: Mentor, teacher, role-model, and friend.

Researcher-added anchor background: White, middle-income, female, and educator.

Pauline, a White, middle-income, female in her late 30s, had the opportunity to teach at some of the lowest SES schools along the east coast and some of the highest SES schools in the west. Pauline took a 10-year break from teaching to be able to stay home with her children. Pauline looked at teaching as a “calling” instead of a job. She wished the students in her class knew how amazing they were. Pauline stated, “These kids are going to be running the world when I am old, sick or dying. They will be doctors, lawyers, running technology companies, or being Silicon Valley multi-millionaires.”

When she first entered the field of teaching, she had gone to the eastern states to support her husband. She took the first job she was offered and had not done much research on the surrounding community. She later found out they “were just looking for a warm body to fill the classroom.” On her first day of school, the custodian advised her, “Go straight home right after school. Do not stay late, and do not go by yourself.” Pauline struggled with understanding the speech patterns at this school. Although they were all speaking English, the slang they (students, parents, and staff) used was such that it was hard for her to decipher what they were saying.

Pauline recognized the advantages the students in the HSES schools had. She felt
the biggest difference between teaching at the LSES school and the HSES school was the students at the HSES school come ready to learn. She knew these students needed more enrichment opportunities. She was also very grateful for all of the support, “financial, academic and spiritual,” the parents at her school showed their students and their teachers. Pauline’s perceptions of students centered on the belief that there should always be a parent home for a child, HSES students are more prepared for the world due to parent support, LSES students need more education on academic fundamentals, good habits, and manners.

The individual teacher profiles created a background from which the rest of the interview responses could be associated. The next section will combine their individual responses into the larger category of “HSES teacher.” At times the individual background will be disaggregated again within the larger context, but only when the complexity of the individual does not reflect the positionality of the group.

The findings and analysis of the surveys, journals, and interviews are the emphasis of the following three sections. Each major section contains subsections identified through teacher perceptions and the background of the teachers contributing to the voice of the identified theme. The sections are: (1) Perceptions of Family, (2) Perceptions of Students, and (3) Teaching Practices.

**Teachers Perceptions of Family**

This section details out the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes teachers held towards the family unit of their HSES students, and addresses the research question: “What
personal life experiences and understandings do teachers draw on when making sense of students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds?” Four of the five teachers came from two-parent families and believed students needed a loving mother and father who were available to their children emotionally and physically. Their perception of family included a working father and a stay at home mother.

**Mothers**

Teachers tended to be unforgiving of their student’s mothers who lacked traits they deemed to be “good mother” qualities. For example, Mark felt many mothers came to parent teacher conferences dressed in name brand clothes, and their “attire and the things they wore, made it clear what they valued.” He felt these mothers were not focused on the important things in life, and he “tried to remind [students] that values like being happy, enjoying what you do, enjoying life, being with your family, those are the things that were important.”

HSES teachers mentioned their mothers inspired them to be strong. Mark’s mother was the strength behind him as a child growing up in a new land, Trisha’s mother modeled courage and kindness in the face of strangers who were cruel to her disabled sister, and Cathy’s mother modeled the importance of education. Their life experiences had defined the role of “mother” and perceptions of qualities that strayed from this definition were looked on with disdain.

**Fathers**

Fathers were also perceived as influencing teachers’ lives. Their fathers included
businessmen, teachers and firemen, and were viewed as hard workers who supported their families. Cathy stated: “I think that growing up with my father, who said that I could do anything, and that I could be anything, made a big impact on my life. As a little girl he told me I was a leader, so that is what I became.” Her father was a teacher, and even though she knew he spent many hours “correcting papers, going on field trips, and being away from his family,” she also saw that he loved what he did. This inspired her to choose the career of teaching, because it was rooted in service, and that was what her father stressed was most important. Teachers who had a mother at home to greet them after school and to help with homework, usually mentioned those as things their students also needed. Teachers who felt their father served as a trusted advisor in their life, also wanted the same experiences for their students.

Parents

This section details the perceived impact mothers and fathers sharing the combined role of “parents” had on the educational outcomes of their children. The organization of this section was divided into the following areas: (1) HSES Parent Expectations, (2) HSES Parent and Student Anxiety, and (3) HSES Parent Involvement. The first area, HSES Parent Expectations, identifies what the parents expect from the school, their teachers, and their children.

Parent expectations. Teacher’s perceptions of parent expectations were stated on two extreme ends: the expectations were either high or nonexistent. Many of the teachers expressed HSES parents were apt to believe their child was gifted or needed enrichment opportunities. This posed problems for teachers and administrators as there were limited
openings in these district sponsored programs. They had to use multiple test data points in order to identify students who had the unintended consequence of placing undo pressure and anxiety on students to perform even better on tests not intended to have high stakes.

There was a competitive culture in the community and at the school, and it was perceived that parents wanted to “keep up with the Jones’s” (Cathy). Parents expected so much from their children that teachers felt their “childhood was being taken from them” (Cathy). Parents continuously asked for additional enrichment opportunities such as summer language programs, after-school enrichment, and even technology classes, and then created strict inside and outside of school schedules for their children to accommodate these activities (Mark, Sharon). The teachers felt HSES parents told their children, “You need to do well in school. This is important, this is how you do well in life, and this is how you will make a good living” (Mark).

The parents placed importance on where the school placed academically in reference to state test scores, but sometimes this knowledge translated into added stress and anxiety for their children. Student pressures were identified as coming from parents who wanted their students to be “better or smarter” (Mark) than other students. The parents expected the teacher to have knowledge of where their child was in comparison to their peers, and they sometimes expressed anger when their child was not at the top of the class.

It was perceived that HSES parents who did not place an importance on school were those who had been successful on a business venture not requiring an advanced
degree. Teachers sensed these parents did not value education and they felt like their children only needed basic skills. Cathy felt parents told their children:

“Look at me, I didn’t need math and look how well I am doing.” It is parents from another era looking back who are saying math and science are not important. These entrepreneurs who have recently come into money have wives that have not needed to work. They sometimes think that girls don’t need school learning because they didn’t need it. They feel that girls are never going to work. What they don’t realize is that those girls need those skills whether they are going to work or not.

These students tended not to do well in class and stayed stagnant in their abilities. This belies the assumption that all HSES parents want their child to have strong academics.

**Parent and student anxiety.** The HSES teachers felt their school had a large population of highly anxious students. The HSES school consulted a child psychologist specializing in problematic behaviors to teach the staff about childhood anxiety and how to decrease it. The overarching understanding from the training was anxiety was due to heredity. “You have high performing parents that are often driven by anxiety. Then these parents want to shield their kids, and in turn there is some enabling of their anxiety or they compound their anxiety” (Cathy). The parents at the event agreed with this summation, stating they wanted to “make their child’s life perfect” (Cathy). Teachers felt they were continually trying to convince parents their child needed to have consequences, and those consequences were a part of the learning process, not a fuel for their anxiety. Parents of students who misbehaved had to be told, “It is good for them to feel remorse for this. It is good for them to have a consequence. We are building strong students, not trying to make their lives perfect” (Cathy).

Parents were perceived as being anxious about every detail that happened in the
school day because they were afraid that if they were out of touch for even a day, their child might miss out on something. In fact, it was felt that many of their students’ parents were so “anxious about their kids’ lives they were putting that anxiety on their kids” (Mark). Parents who had tried to excuse their students from completing assigned work because they did not want to make their child stand in front of the class to share their report. Teachers felt they needed to spend time teaching both the parents and the students how to become more independent, and how to have friends outside the family unit. Cathy stated:

> It is threatening to some parents to have their child become independent. It threatens some parents to give up that relationship. I have had parents pull their kids out of this school because they didn’t want to have the anxiety of leaving their child, or the anxiety they think their child is going to have if they leave them at school.

These parent anxieties transferred over to the students both mentally and physically. Teachers felt student tensions started to build at the beginning of the day and increased as the day progressed. Students wet their pants in the middle and upper grades more frequently at the HSES schools than when the teachers taught at LSES schools.

> Last year I had a student who was staying in for recess to finish something. It wasn’t a punishment, he just wanted to finish something. He was afraid to go to the bathroom without asking permission and I had stepped out of the classroom for a minute to make a copy when he wet his pants. When I came back he was crying and very anxious. (Sharon)

> I had a girl who really wanted to perform well for her parents at the school play. She stood on the front row and sang her heart out. About halfway through the program she wet her pants. She didn’t even stop singing. Her parents didn’t acknowledge it. They just knew that was what happens when she gets stressed. (Pauline)

Students wetting their pants was only one of the physical demonstration of the anxiety
students faced. There were also many tears shed at small situations. Children would cry as they were walking in the door in the morning if they had forgotten their lunch. Most of the teachers had snacks or granola bars in their drawers in case this happened, to try and help alleviate stressful situations. They told their students, “It is not big deal. You can come and pick from the treats in my drawer, no big deal” (Sharon). The students would begin to relax, but needed to constantly be reassured they had not failed or let anyone down.

One of the requirements in the school was completion of daily math timed tests to help students memorize their math facts. The goal was to have students fluent in basic facts in order to “free up their brains to concentrate on the harder math skills” (Cathy). Teachers found these math timings contributed to the student’s stress level.

I had a little boy that burst into tears taking his timed test on Friday. He was daydreaming when I started the timer so he didn’t have the full minute to complete the timing. He burst into tears because mom was going to hold him accountable for that. As soon as I said don’t worry about it, we can do it over it again, he was able to begin to calm down, but it took some time for him to not be anxious. (Cathy)

Teachers recognized this as a point of anxiety and unnecessary competition for the students, but had not found a way to make it less stressful for them. They tried to emphasize timings were about doing “your personal best” (Cathy, Mark, Pauline, Sharon, Trisha), but the students felt their personal best should be “better than others” (Mark).

Students were already being medicated as early as third grade for stress and anxiety. When Sharon encouraged her students to get a good night’s sleep and to eat a good breakfast in order to perform well on a test a student said, “Oh I will be asleep as soon as I go to bed.” One of the students asked her why and she said, “Because I take a
sleeping pill every night.” Sharon was shocked at his information and asked, “What third grader does that?”

Anxiety was not always a result of academic pressures. It was also found to be exhibited when students were fearful of catastrophes that were unlikely to occur. Cathy summarized this difference:

I think there is more anxiety with our students here. There is less worrying about their physical needs, less abuse, less social concerns. But then there is this high anxiety that exists when handling fire drills, lock downs, and evacuations differently. There are many irrational fears that they worry about.

Perhaps it was the fear of the unknown that caused the emotions. Regardless of the source, anxiety, and the treatment of anxiety were recognized as a theme in HSES schools.

**Parent involvement.** Parent volunteers were felt to be the backbone to successful operation of the school on a daily basis. Teachers averaged between two to five parent volunteers per day in their classrooms. Teachers perceived parents appreciated volunteering because “they liked being here, they had a good feel for what was happening in the school, and they kept up better with what was going on in the class” (Sharon). Having so many parent volunteers “was good, but it was not relaxing” (Cathy).

Teachers planned for parent volunteers just as they planned their lessons for students. The parents volunteered to help with reading groups, field trips, events, small group instruction, individualized math games, reinforcement, running off copies, creating homework packets, charting and acknowledging student success, teaching lessons, and sharing talents and strengths. The teachers at the HSES school felt they were fortunate to have this support, but they had also come to expect it. They felt they could ask anything
of their parents and community, and they would receive what they needed.

All HSES teachers stated they usually had 100% attendance at Parent Teacher Conferences. Even if the student “came from a divorced family” (Trisha), both sets of parents would make conferences a priority. Pauline reflected on how different this was compared to her experiences teaching at an LSES school:

At my LSES school, there was only one parent who showed up for parent teacher conferences. The parents didn’t show up because they just didn’t care. They were either high on drugs, in broken homes, or working two jobs so they didn’t have time. They just had other priorities in their lives that were more important than going to their child’s school. (Pauline)

It was felt the lack of attendance demonstrated a lack of caring, or a lack of moral integrity on the part of the parent.

Pauline felt every parent should be required to volunteer a certain amount of time in their child’s classroom throughout the year. She stated:

At this school I can call a mom or dad who has the expertise, know-how, or willingness to serve, and they would do it. I probably have about ten a week that come in to volunteer. I have some parent’s file, get homework folders ready, teach small groups, correct spelling tests, take reading minutes, and do a variety of jobs. Having parents who were educated or familiar with the academic world made it easier to “let them loose in the classroom” (Cathy). They knew the structure and expectations and were focused on having their children learn while they were there. Sharon, who had worked at various SES schools, jokingly stated, “Here I think I can be a little lazier because I have parents who can pull students out for these types of things.”

Teachers perceived their parent support made up for the lack of fairness associated with federal funding. Their HSES school could not be classified as a highly impacted school needing extra resources, therefore they did not receive money to hire
teacher aides. LSES schools received more money to hire tutors, aides, recess monitors, instructional coaches, and administrative assistants due to their Title I status. Cathy stated, “Teachers do not have the luxury of a lot of extra support from district or federal funds. We utilize our school money to provide specific support for teacher assistants so teachers can work with small groups of students.” Cathy went on to say LSES teachers “have had a lot of tutors, their programs are constantly changing, and these teachers have had to become managers of teacher assistants instead of teachers of students.” The lack of support from district funded positions was thought to be fulfilled by the parents as they volunteered at their child’s school, but they still felt this put them and their students at a disadvantage. Teachers knew the more parent volunteers they had, the more one-on-one a child was able to have with an adult.

**Homes**

Teachers felt the greatest advantage for children living in a HSES home was parents met, or exceeded meeting, their basic needs. Students were able to concentrate on school instead of safety.

Honestly, the kids here at this HSES school know their basic needs are being taken care of. They don’t worry about where their food is coming from, they don’t worry about if they have a home to go to, they don’t worry about who, if anyone, will be at that house. (Mark)

These kids have stable homes. I taught in another school district on the west side and there was a lot of divorce, parents who were in jail, and it wasn’t uncommon for kids to be left alone. These kids have mostly stay at homes mom, and a dad that has a profession that gives them some of the luxuries in lives. (Cathy)

Some families at the HSES school had moved in and out of the school fairly quickly.

This was usually attributed to families who lived in apartments. They were not
necessarily LSES, but students still had needs due to being displaced.

We do have our own sets of diverse needs here. Not every child here is rich. We have apartments here, and granted they are nice, but the apartment kids seem to stand out. I don’t think they stand out due to SES, it is more the fact that they are people going through transitions. They move around more. They are people who may not afford a down payment on a house. We have wonderful families but high needs over there. (Cathy)

Teachers tried to make extra efforts to help these students during the time they were in their classrooms.

The SES of their community allowed more than half of the mothers to stay at home while their children attended school. These mothers were able to be with their children to talk with them, or they could take them to “simple” (Pauline) locations like the zoo, library, or park. There were also experiences provided for students when they traveled. “When we talk about the ocean most kids have seen the ocean. When we talk about other things like mountains, farms, Hawaii, or skiing, these conversations are not foreign to them” (Cathy).

**Extracurricular**

Extracurricular activities were promoted in the HSES homes as a way to “round-out” (Cathy) their child’s experiences in life. Parents were involved in creating special memories for their child during the school year. Sometimes the extracurricular activities “got out of hand” (Trisha). Simple events turned into major events to create even “more elaborate memories and experiences” (Cathy) for the students. A wax-museum assignment where students were asked to give an oratorical on a famous person turned into the parents renting a costume and then purchasing the necessary make-up to make
the event more realistic. The sixth-grade dance became more like the high school dances. Parents would rent wedding arches and benches, and they would provide a professional photographer to take pictures.

Teacher perceptions of extra-curricular activities ranged from admiration to disbelief.

Outside of school these kids take gymnastics, soccer, and piano lessons. The other day I asked them how many of them play an instrument and I would say three-fourths of the kids rose their hands. They have music lessons, and they play a lot of sports. Some kids talk about art lessons they have taken. I have had other years with actors and actresses, those types of skills are not uncommon. These students are mini-professionals and their parents take these obligations seriously. (Cathy)

They have lots of lessons: karate lessons, dance lessons, acting lessons, sports. They have a lot going on after school. It doesn’t seem to make you a better student academically in my class if you are taking acting lessons, karate or football, in fact it makes it a lot harder for them to get the extra practice done for homework. (Sharon)

The process of scheduling children’s time at home with as many extra-curricular opportunities and outside of school experiences as possible seemed foreign to some of the teachers who had not grown up in a HSES home. As students talked about their experiences in their summer cabins, trips to Europe, Christmas vacations to Disneyland, Spring Breaks in Hawaii and numerous smaller vacations during the school year, it seemed that these students had wonderful adventures. They had everything their hearts could desire. (Sharon)

These students were perceived by teachers to be learning how to operate within their HSES lifestyle, and their parents were their best teachers (Mark, Pauline).

Although there were many positive attributes noted within belonging to a HSES community, or living in a HSES home, it was stated that not all HSES homes were believed to share the same characteristics. There was not one existing culture “all of the
students shared” (Cathy), and teachers felt that lifestyles were different for every student who came to school. They may have had some things in common, but “each home was unique” (Sharon) in some small way. Teachers shared some of the experiences they felt were either unique to HSES homes, or were secrets of “being a part of a HSES community” (Trisha).

**Addictions, Lack of Support, and Abuse**

Teachers spoke of parents, especially mothers, of their HSES students as being open about relying on stress medication and pain killers. Teachers perceived the cause of this to be a method of trying to ease the anxiety and stress they felt from being high performers themselves or wanting their children to be high performers (Cathy, Mark). Teachers tried to pay close attention to these students to make sure their emotional and safety needs were being met. They felt they were better able to help those types of situations at an HSES school because there were very few of them (Pauline, Mark).

Parent support was not always perceived as better at a HSES schools. There were parents who seemed to not value education, and who were not committed to following through with school requests at home. To illustrate this, it was mentioned:

My lowest reader, the one who turned in the least number of minutes, doesn’t turn in homework. Her parents seem very educated, they live in a nice neighborhood. When I delivered treats at the beginning of the year it was a beautiful home. Yet, I can’t get mom to come to parent conferences. (Sharon)

I had a student whose dad was a successful lawyer and mom was a surgical nurse. They were usually gone when he got home from school and he never did his homework or followed through with school assignments. Both parents blamed the other one when we conferenced about it. It became clear that any parent follow-through was not going to happen. (Sharon)
Teachers felt they could intercede on the child’s behalf by having them get the extra
attention they needed at school to keep up with the class. Teachers had the child stay in
from recess to give them the structured time they needed to complete the assigned tasks.
A couple of the teachers (Cathy, Trisha) felt students needed parents at home to help
them develop good study habits. If a parent refused to help, then that responsibility was
placed back on the teacher.

You see values given to kids from their parents. You see that parents that are
academic pass that on to their kids. Parents that are academic want their kids to
learn. Parents who value money or making money, which is fine, tend to pass
those values on to their kids. Parents who are always trying to keep up
appearances will influence their kids to do the same. Parents who just want to get
by, pass those values on to their kids. It is what they are comfortable with, and it
is understandable because it is what they know. (Mark)

Overall, it was perceived parent expectations influenced student behavior.

Teachers perceived the outside world viewed their community as one where every
student was the same. Due to the high incidence of divorced families, there were also
stories from the HSES teachers whose students occupied the border of HSES and LSES
in their classrooms. One of the adverse experiences a teacher had at the HSES school
involved a girl whose time was divided between a LSES and a HSES home. The HSES
father and mother had divorced, and the father had recently come into money from being
successful in his own business. The mother had become addicted to drugs and after the
divorce led a lifestyle where she had resorted to prostitution to earn money. The story
was one in which it took a team of teachers to bind together to be able to help the student.

I had one little girl who was so abused. Kids talked about her and said she beats
up everyone. She came into my class and she had cut her bangs short at an
awkward angle. She was very pale and wore raggedy clothes. Her dad comes in
and he is full of tattoos, smelling of smoke, and grandma is there with a shirt on
that has most of her bosom hanging out. I thought that this was an interesting support system for this little girl. I also knew this is one angry little girl. Well come to find out, the little girl is angry because mom is a prostitute to help pay for her drug problems. One of the John’s raped and beat this little girl. This is a little third grade girl who attends this school; this high SES school.

At the time I was job sharing with another teacher and we just wrapped our arms around her and focused on her. We went to a training on discipline and they mentioned having a ‘check-in’ and ‘check-out’ system for students who may be struggling. This is when someone checks them in in the morning, and out in the afternoon. Someone who is fun. We sent her to our librarian, who is so fun. When this little girl would go to the librarian in the morning she would give her a little pep talk and tell her, ‘Hey we are going to have a great day!’ She would then check her out at the end of school. That was helping a bit, and then we got a structured recess person that helped her learn how to play without hurting others. That got her a little better, but then she would have a bad day and take out four kids at recess.

We finally figured out the pattern that these outbursts coincided with her mom showing up. Finally the librarian said, “Hey, I know you have been quilting. She says that she has this little cat and it is the only thing in her life that hasn’t hurt her and she loves it more than anything. She said that her cat has been killed by the neighbor dog. I figured out it is a stuffed animal, not a real cat.” The librarian asked me if I thought I could repair it. We needed to fix it. I got this little cat and it had no face. The ears had been chewed off. The belly was missing. There were no legs, they were just little things of something. There was no stuffing anywhere. I was thinking that there was no way that I could fix it. I asked the dad and the little girl the night before at conferences if they would trust me with this kitty. I told them that if they would trust me then I would make it better. And oh boy, it stayed in my bedroom for a month as I carefully pieced this kitty together, each tiny piece, by each tiny piece. I worked on a leg, then another. It took the whole month to repair this little kitty.

Because it took so long it became so symbolic of this little girl for me. At the same time I was fixing this little kitty we were carefully putting this little girl back together too. We watched this little girl heal day by day, it was small little stitches but you could see this little girl healing. Then it got time for the face. I think I looked at that little face for two weeks. There was a faint tiny little “x” in the middle so I could kind of tell what it had looked like before. I ended up making a whole new face for the kitty. When I went to sew eyes I was using a zigzag stitch and it caught, but it made these little eyelash thing that looked so cute. As I was finalizing this little kitty, I thought to myself that I needed to include a little heart in this thing. A little heart signed by all of the people at the school that she loves and feels safe with. I am going to make sure she knows that
all of our names are inside there and that we love her. It was so emotional when I brought it. It was spiritual too. I knew that I didn’t have the skills to do that. I felt like that there were angels that directed my fingers as I tried to figure out how to piece the tattered pieces back together.

This story was included in its entirety as a reference in which to frame Sharon’s background and experiences with impoverished children. She had a background in recognizing behavioral issues and creating frameworks in which to help. She also expressed, as did many of her colleagues, that teaching was “spiritual” or a “calling.” Sharon mentioned she was deeply religious and she knew teaching was her way to serve others, which was an expectation in her family. Her parents had modeled their expectations of her, and she in turn modeled behavioral expectations for her students and her children.

Perceptions of Students

This section addresses the second research question, “What are the perceptions of teachers regarding students from high and low socioeconomic status in their classrooms?” The organization of this section is according to sub-themes identified; the sub-themes mentioned most often are at the beginning of the section and are as follows: (1) Student Attributes, (2) Student Absenteeism, and (3) Bullying and Teasing.

Student Attributes

Overall teachers at the HSES school felt their students were “good” kids from “good” families. Pauline felt the students in her classroom were very bright. She stated:

At this school you don’t see as many light bulbs going on because they have already been turned on and have been burning for quite some time. They now
have to catch the lightening instead because they already have the talents and gifts and learning inside of them.

This general theme of HSES students being described with positive attributes was prevalent through the coding of the data. The traits for the HSES students covered a wide range, for example:

They have a lot of character, values and integrity. This group is one that doesn’t have to worry about things in life. They are well fed, they are taken care of. They don’t come from broken home, instead they come from well-loved homes. The struggle to try and get kids ready to learn is not there. I don’t have to worry about their safety. I don’t have to worry about if there is food in their stomach. (Pauline)

The perceptions the teachers had were the student’s “hit that door and they are ready to learn” (Pauline); “They want to do their best no matter what” (Cathy); and “There is a lot of support behind them, whether financial, academic, emotional or spiritual” (Sharon).

Teacher’s statements mentioned what the future would hold for their HSES students.

These students are leaders, they just don’t know it. They have so many gifts and talents. They are so capable and can do so much. We just need to give them the opportunity. They can be so good, and we are the ones that need to instill that into them to guide them. They are just so good. These kids are going to be running everything when I am old, sick or dying. They will be the doctors, lawyers, running technology companies, or being Silicon Valley multi-millionaires. (Pauline)

The baseline assumption from the teachers held fast to the belief that their students were full of positive attributes that would lead towards a successful future.

Even with all of the positive traits the HSES teachers felt their students possessed, students still worried about their appearance, and were teased by other students for how they looked.

They worry about the clothes they are wearing. They notice shoes, shorts and pants. They notice that 5 kids are wearing name brand shirts. They notice those things. (Pauline)
Name brands are a big deal here. From electronics to clothing, the students know what is more expensive. They don’t necessarily tease kids for not having name brand clothing, but they do let everyone know when they do! (Sharon)

This caused teachers to create mini opportunities to teach kids about values they thought were missing from the HSES homes. For example:

Here the kids say, “I just want to make a million dollars. I want nice clothes, nice cars and a big home.” I try to remind them that values like being happy, enjoying what you do and enjoying life, being with your family, those are the things that are important; it’s not what you wear or how much money you make… Here at school it is our job to balance that by teaching kids that it is also okay to pursue those things that make you happy, to pursue those things that are important. (Mark)

It was mentioned by all teachers that parents and students of HSES were seen as valuing material things and were superficial. Superficiality was mentioned with terms such as, “caring about appearance,” (Pauline), “making sure their children had the best of everything” (Sharon), and “parents sent their kids to school in expensive clothes” (Cathy).

It was uncommon for an HSES teacher to mention negative characteristics or traits about students. One teacher talked of an unusual situation in her class where she felt her student had a behavior disorder. The student was labeled by their teachers as defiant, was teased by his peers, and had acted out animal behaviors. The teacher felt she could concentrate on helping the student find coping strategies to manage his behavior.

For my kid with the disorder his head goes down when he is about to become defiant. He used to curl up in a fetal position on the floor and kick and scream, and even throw things. Now he gets very quiet and his head goes down. I have gotten much better at reading him. I can see when the frustration is building and we are about to go to that place. That is when I distract him by having him do me a favor, or do anything to distract him. (Sharon)

She felt she could better help this student because almost all of her other students did not
have behavior problems. When teachers perceived students had common behaviors and beliefs, it was seen as easier to meet the needs of their students through purposeful planning.

**Student Absenteeism**

There were many reasons stated why students did not attend school every day, but the reasons were perceived by the teachers to be important to student learning. It was believed students developed character through interactions with their parents, or through structured experiences purposefully designed by their parents to provide learning opportunities. These experiences took precedence over traditional schooling. Students were allowed to miss school if the parent perceived the extracurricular activity to have greater value than the school experience, or if the school experience could be made up at a later date. At the HSES school students missed all or partial days most often for events. For example:

When students were absent they were usually at a dance rehearsal, a dentist or doctor appointment, or because they were going out of town. They could have also been “going on a cruise, to Disneyland, or to Lake Powell. (Pauline)

Children here miss school due to vacations. For vacations they go to Disneyland, Hawaii, Mexico, Europe, and for long trips. Parents let us know up front if their child will be gone, and they ask for the work. They don’t care [about falling behind] because they have the parent support when they get back. (Mark)

Teachers felt students tried not to miss school for being sick. Teachers expressed that students who missed school for vacation became popularized, and those who missed school for illness became temporarily isolated. Parents and students made great efforts to make sure they fit in and were accepted, and being present at school kept them involved.
Bullying and Teasing

At the HSES school the term “bullying” was perceived as violent behaviors, and it was perceived these types of aggressive behaviors did not happen at their school. Instead, when students interacted inappropriately towards one another, it was referred to as “teasing.” For example:

Kids really don’t get teased here. We try not to have any, but it does happen. Sometimes students who are really short get teased about their stature. Usually this has to do with athletics or the fact that a boy doesn’t like athletics. I haven’t had too many teased about their color. (Cathy)

Students were also teased for their interests (Sharon), not knowing the rules of a game (Pauline), lack of competitive drive (Trisha), and speech impediments (Cathy).

Teachers mentioned girls had their own specific form of behaviors in regards to teasing. Sharon describes these as “put-downs.”

There was one child who was doing some “put-downs” with other students. It was a girl and she was saying, “Oh, you are wearing that today?” It was the kind of put-down you would usually here in junior high, not at an elementary school. That was really troubling to the other girl who was at the receiving end. The other girl was so sweet and sensitive that we had to keep those two apart.

Pauline believed this behavior was not as worrisome as the bullying behaviors she had witnessed when she taught at the LSES school.

It is nothing like when I was back east and the kids fought about, “So-and-so called my momma a name,” or “So-and-so said my momma was….” It was all of those “your momma” comments that made them so angry. It is nice being here not having to worry about that.

Overall, the teachers believed the teasing at their school led students to feel anxious but not afraid.
Teaching Practices

This section directly relates to the initial research question, “How do teacher perceptions regarding students’ socioeconomic class influence their teaching?” The teachers recognized their perceptions led to beliefs, and those beliefs led to actions in the classroom. HSES teachers tried many ways to help their students learn what was expected of them. The following section details the classroom strategies teachers perceived to work for their students. The first of these strategies was collaboration.

Collaboration

Teacher collaboration was mentioned in all of the teacher interviews at the HSES school, during both interview sessions. This was a big theme used not only as a teaching strategy, but also as a structure of the school. When the school first opened, a group of teachers met at the school to determine what a day in the life of their students would look like. They collaborated on school rules, school discipline, schedules, rewards, consequences, and expectations.

Before school ever began we all met and talked about what we wanted our school to look like. We all agreed that we wanted order and structure. We had very clear expectations of behavior. Now they start in kindergarten singing, “Be safe, be kind, be respectful, and be responsible...” (Sharon)

You have to work together and collaborate as a team and figure out what needs to be done for a particular child. I know exactly where my students are. During our evaluations our administrator asks us about individual student growth. (Trisha)

Most of the teacher collaborative work practiced at the school was completed in Data Teams. These teams focused on a variety of data attached to each student: previous end-of-year data, current reading and math data, and even behavior data. A specific example
of this shows the cycle of the collaborative data teams: analyzing data, determining a plan, assessing results, and determining next steps.

Teachers shared what they did that gave them their highest [test] scores, and shared it across grade levels. This was kind of hard for them because they had to stand up in front of their peers and confess to being great. These teachers find things that work by choice, not by command. That is really the best, is when they engage with instructional strategies because they are finding success with them. (Cathy)

Successful teacher collaboration models were mirrors of what successful student collaboration models looked like. Many of the teachers spoke of what a well-functioning classroom looked like. Some of the responses included:

At our school a well-functioning classroom looks like a lot of collaboration, students working together or working on their devices, and a lot of project based learning. Not necessarily is everyone sitting in their seats quiet, but there is a lot of collaboration. (Trisha)

Teachers were quick to mention that just because collaboration occurred it did not necessarily mean learning took place. The collaboration had to be purposeful and well planned in order to achieve academic results.

Sometimes a class may look like they are learning, but if you dig deeper you will find that the way it is structured does not promote learning. The teacher is not as organized so it may look like the kids are working, but their time is not spent doing things that are effective for learning. It is more busy work and talking and less collaboration and effective teaching. (Trisha)

Teachers also reviewed student data on their own, outside of collaboration time, to determine if they were achieving their own teaching goals. Teachers who did not maximize school time for learning fell behind. The atmosphere at the school was one that did not tolerate teachers who were unwilling to put forth extra effort in their teaching.

This was a daily challenge that took its toll on the teachers.
All of the HSES teachers interviewed expressed the high expectations they had for themselves, as well as for their students. They knew they were going to work hard, be emotionally drained, and experience uplifting experiences. These expectations were found to be a recurrent theme.

**Emotions**

All of the teachers stated they had high expectations for their students. The HSES teachers frequently mentioned they were held to a higher standard than teachers at LSES schools, and therefore had higher expectations of themselves academically.

Here we are this big, beautiful new school, and we are the highest school in the state academically. These teachers are working hard. We had someone tell us that the reason we do so well is because of the mansions that are around us. There are many like SES schools around us who have not met the same achievement goals. It is not only SES that makes us successful, it is that these teachers put students first. (Cathy)

If you are not a good teacher in a high performing school you will be quickly uncovered. You will be running and trying to catch the back of the train. I work with teachers to bring them up. Some teachers don’t take care of their PR and start to get a bad rap, so parents might start saying things that are not true. (Sharon)

They felt there was never a moment to relax, and sensed their school was constantly being scrutinized. This led them to feeling stressed and anxious. Their jobs were rewarding, their test scores were high, but they were becoming burned out.

These high expectations for HSES teachers manifested themselves during data team meeting, parent conferences, faculty meetings, and individual goal setting meetings

Trisha stated:

The administration expects us to have progress for every single student we have, whether they are high or low. Our administrator knows every kid that is low. When we have our data meeting they are writing this down, they follow-up, they
know who these kids are. They are watching, helping, and providing interventions to help them make the progress.

The HSES teachers felt perceptions of them were based on the belief that their job was easier than that of teachers at LSES schools. Yet, when other HSES schools looked at the gains the school was making in all areas they could not “believe what we are accomplishing. We work very hard. We have very high expectations with specific goals, and we always know if we are meeting them or not” (Trisha).

Teachers felt they were not adequately trained for the task at hand when they entered the teaching field. They also expressed they had large class sizes that were very diverse in their academic needs. Due to these factors they stated their jobs were stressful.

We have all these children with attention issues, anxiety and other issues, and we really didn’t have anyone teaching us how to deal with that in our undergraduate work. Where do teachers feel they learn how to handle all of these different situations? (Sharon)

Trying to make sure that you reach every student, every day is a challenge. I have put in more hours this year than any other year. I used to average about 5-10 hours per week after school, but now it is up to about 20. It is stressful to be looked at so carefully all of the time. I ended up taking a sick day last week because I could not handle the stress. I needed a moment to recover. (Trisha)

Sharon felt HSES teacher’s levels of stress were similar to those of teachers at LSES schools:

Working with either end of the SES spectrum is highly challenging. You have to be an incredible teacher to make a difference in their lives. One is physical and educational needs, the other is emotional and academic needs. The impact of a teacher is not more important at either place.

HSES teachers stated that when they had worked at a LSES school they had also held high expectations, and they had worked hard, but they did not achieve the same results.

Pauline stated:
At the LSES school it was exhausting. It was one new teaching initiative after another. The longest a new program would last is two years. This gave it just enough time for the federal government to decide we were still failing so we needed to try something new. They never gave us a chance to really get comfortable with a program so that we could implement it correctly.

Even though their jobs were physically and emotionally draining, every teacher knew this was the career they wanted to continue for the rest of their lives.

The final way teachers felt their high expectation were worth the extra effort was described as a form of spirituality. They described teaching as a “calling,” and knew it was fulfilling something inside of them:

I don’t teach for the money or to be away from my family. I teach because I know it is something I am supposed to do. It is a gift I have been given and an example I have been given. This job is so challenging and different that I know I will never be bored. It is challenging, but so rewarding at the same time. (Pauline)

These types of comments were usually followed by a statement about the piety of teaching or being humbled as a teacher.

**Tracking Data**

Although data teams were briefly mentioned in the Collaboration section, a different perspective of HSES teacher strategies describes the types of data to be assessed. The HSES teachers repeatedly talked about “focus skills,” “priority skills,” “data charts,” and “learning targets.” These words represented ways the HSES school interpreted mastered skills. For example,

Students understand exactly where they are at on their priority skills. They graph it daily or weekly. When it comes time for parent conferences they share it in a data portfolio or a slide show they have created. They know where they are with their priority skills and learning targets, not just the teacher or administrator knowing where they are. They can look at their data and say, “Here I am, and here is how far I have to go.” (Cathy)
The entire school was focused on learning targets and priority skills. The learning targets were centered on “I can” statements, or a learning objective posted in student language. Teachers pointed to the target at the beginning of a lesson and said to the students, “This is what we are going to learn today.” During the lesson teachers said they referred to it again and said, “This is what we are learning right now.” Then, at the end of the lesson they referred to it and again said, “Boys and girls what did we learn today? What did we figure out from this learning activity?” The teachers felt their students would be able to repeat the learning target or objective, and be able to say what it meant. Students would also connect it to what they were doing in class. These learning targets and prompts were determined collaboratively in their Data Team meetings. Every child tracked and monitored their own personal progress.

One of the teachers (Trisha) had taught at a different HSES school where they did not have focus skills or data tracking. Without these structures in place, she felt:

Our students were being successful in spite of what we were doing, not because of what we were doing. Their success was because of their demographics and their parents more than because of our teaching. Our administrator was great at showing a positive front, but nothing was happening behind that front.

HSES teachers believed the focus on learning targets and tracking of data helped them attain gain scores when other HSES schools had remained static.

**Predictable Routines**

Teachers believed predictable routines helped their HSES students focus and stay on task. The HSES teachers referred to them as “powerful predictable routines” (Cathy, Sharon, Trisha). One of these routines was aimed at making transitions smooth and less
Transitions at this school waste no time. When student’s transition from the carpet on the floor to a desk, or the transition from the students collaborating and the teachers want their attention; are all things that have routines put in place. These transitions are sharp and crisp. We plan for transitions to maximize learning time (Cathy).

Without these routines, HSES teachers felt their students were easily led off task and valuable learning time was wasted. When a teacher did not conform to the required predictable routines, it was noticed by other staff members. One teacher described by the other teachers as being “ineffective” was said to have:

…a lot of teacher lecture and the kids aren’t focused. There are many activities, but they aren’t focused and aligned. They seem random. The kids are playing with things in their desks. In this classroom they aren’t being out of their seats running around. They aren’t being disrespectful. They are just quietly being disengaged, and that is hard to watch. There are no teacher checks, no sign of teacher preparation, and no sign of the routines. That is not acceptable (Sharon).

When faculty members were hired at Ridgecap they were asked about their classroom structure and routines. They were then led on a tour of the school to see the routines the school implemented. All teachers at the HSES school were expected to follow through on the powerful predictable routines they believed maximized student learning.

Routines had been implemented in both general and special education classrooms. All teachers met in a systematic, routine structure that involved a team (teacher, tutor, administrator and resource teacher) to decide on routines for classroom academic interventions. The students knew the routines and managed their schedules efficiently knowing what had been expected of them. It was perceived by the HSES school that students would receive a natural reward for their efforts in following the routines because their academic scores would increase. The next section describes the reward system
Rewards and Discipline

This section details the teacher actions and perceptions about the importance of rewarding student behavior. Themes addressing reward systems at the HSES school developed a distinct pattern of extrinsically rewarding students by providing leadership and event opportunities. All HSES teachers provided extrinsic rewards for their students, but most of the rewards were notes, compliment cards, or other written pieces of specific information that could be kept in a memory book or shared with others.

We reward true achievement at our school. Students get rewarded when they pass off a benchmark or a priority skill. In a teacher’s classroom it may be that the student has six weeks of 100% on their spelling test, or they have completed chapters in an enrichment program. Today I celebrated a first grader who past off 1000 sight words. But I also celebrated the kids who pass off 300 or even 200. It is based on their personal goals. They get rewarded for academic achievement by the note, then they get rewarded by me when they hand me the note. (Cathy)

Students get rewarded with Compliment Cards here. It is up to the teacher as to what they hand them out for. Effort is the thing that is rewarded the most. If students are achieving their priority skills or reading their minutes at home. Teachers reward those things heavily; success is about progress and effort. (Trisha)

The HSES students were rewarded for perfect scores, finished programs and personal best’s. Teachers felt if they acknowledged positive behaviors then those behaviors would increase.

Another method of rewarding students was through leadership and event opportunities. The purpose of the events was to encourage students to be strong leaders.

Leadership is when students help others make good choices. Or they set a good example. It is also shown by showing respect. We watch and foster students for leadership. When it is exhibited it is recognized. (Sharon)
An example of how leadership was rewarded was when the City Mayor recognized students by going to lunch with them.

He comes with the fire department once a month and lets the kids ride on the trucks to the City Building. He brings in the policemen, firemen, parks and recreation people, and they have a fun joyous time. It is a great teaching moment and an honor. The teacher gets to write a note as to why they were chosen. One student gets chosen from each grade level each month. (Cathy)

Students received various leadership opportunities as rewards, including when teachers selected them to visit the County Justice Center.

We perform a mock trial with a real judge. Students who have excelled in their classrooms are allowed to go. Frequently, I select high socioeconomic students to be part of the cast. I have found those students who perform in the mock trial have better reading speeds and comprehension skills. (Cathy)

Other types of leadership opportunities students received as rewards for high academic outcomes or demonstrated leadership at the HSES school were: being on student counsel, going to summer technology camp to be trained to be on the student technology team, being a library helper, or participating in the after school robotics club. Students had to earn the right to be invited to participate in the opportunities mentioned, and the invitations were decided upon by individual teacher criteria.

On a daily basis the students looked for leadership opportunities. The HSES teachers felt their students loved being a peer tutor the very most. They believed the best thing about giving the students an opportunity to be a peer tutor was:

Every student can earn it every day. My kids love when they get to be a peer tutor. My favorite is when you get a kid who is usually struggling who gets a concept, and I am able to announce loudly to the whole class, ‘If anybody needs help then (name) is ready to be a Peer Tutor. Just raise your hand and he/she will come be with you right away.’ It is a reward to them and a real ego boost. (Sharon)
With all of the teaching strategies and reward systems that had carefully been put in place, student discipline problems still occurred. Discipline was either used as a punishment or a tool for learning. Rules were created to prevent things from happening, or to stop behaviors from reoccurring.

Creating a school wide discipline plan was perceived by the HSES school as one of the most important first steps in learning. The teachers felt they had better classroom instruction when students behaved. Teachers systematically created their school discipline plan in the following order: (1) created the rules, (2) identified possible behaviors that would manifest a breaking of the rules, and behaviors that demonstrated what it looked like to follow the rules, (3) identified consequences of when rules were broken, (4) created a support system to implement consequences, (5) implemented consequences, and (6) checked back to make sure consequences positively impacted behavior. If these steps were followed, the plan they believed the plan would be successful.

Every teacher in the school was supposed to follow this agreed upon school wide discipline program. This structure was believed to provide consistency for the students and allowed every person in the school to be able to enforce it. For example:

People ask why we are successful in this school, and I really think it is the behavior model we have implemented. Every teacher that walks into my classroom knows how to reward my students, what behavior to expect, and what the consequences should be if they don’t follow school wide expectations. It is amazing the culture that is created when all teachers and students are on the same page. The discipline isn’t new, it is just visible and consistent. (Sharon)

A perceived added bonus to the HSES Discipline Program was parents supported it.

“These kids know they have to be well behaved, because if not the parents will follow up
on it” (Cathy).

At the HSES school it was apparent when a teacher was not following the discipline routines. A lack of teacher support was viewed as impacting multiple classrooms and students. Teachers believed the school administrator was central to the success of the discipline plan. Some of the teachers had been at schools where the administration seemed to be sabotaging their best efforts of teaching students how to behave.

I have been at other high socioeconomic schools where the principal’s philosophy was that if you have to ask for my help, then it undermines your authority, therefore, deal with discipline problems yourself. The only things the principal dealt with was safe school violations. The principal before that was not much better. His philosophy was that ‘Kids will be good if you expect them to be.’ If the kids aren’t being good then he saw it as the teacher’s problem. If kids were sent down to his office he would pat them on the head and ask, ‘Now you won’t do that again will you?’ Then he would give them a candy bar and send them back to class. (Trisha)

Teachers in the HSES classrooms felt expectations should be engrained in the students because they started learning them as early as kindergarten. They believed their classroom plan should not be separate or in addition to the school plan, instead it should be the enforcement of the consequences.

Most student behaviors which required discipline measures at the HSES school involved behaviors teachers referred to as “nonrisky.” Some of these behaviors included students being sneaky or cheating. For example:

When a student gets in trouble here it is usually for doing the sneaky things. These are just little naughty things that are small. I think that is because if you stay on top of the small stuff it doesn’t build. If it does start to build you just have to take them out in the hallway and say, “That is not the way we do it in our class. Please tell me what you did that was inappropriate (they tell me). What school rule did you not follow (and they will say)? What can you do differently next
time? How can you make your mistake better?” (Sharon)

HSES teachers felt they did not have many students who misbehaved.

Those that don’t have a disorder usually don’t have behavior problems. I really don’t hear about a lot of discipline problems here. I think that is because of the expectations here. The parents really support us here. If there is a behavior problem the students will get the opposite of a Compliment Card which is an Off Target card. This means they go to the principal’s office and their parents will be called. (Trisha)

Behavior rules and consequences were enforced with precision. This meant the teachers at the HSES school were careful about what actions and behaviors they requested from students. For example:

I expect 100% compliance when I ask students to do something. Even from my oppositional defiant or Asperger student, I find a way for compliance. That means I am careful about what I ask. That means if I say, “We are not going until it is quiet,” then I have to be willing to wait until they are quiet. If I have someone who can’t comply with the request, then I have to give them another option before I make the request. (Sharon)

Teachers talked about ways in which they tried to prevent students from misbehaving by creating a successful environment. Different students had different needs, and even if the discipline was the same, different students had distinct triggers manifested by inappropriate behavior.

**Role Models**

Although it was not a part of the basic interview questions, several of the teachers brought up “role models.” The premise of the conversations was usually about finding ways to engage students in their learning, or trying to motivate them to achieve great things. Three different types of role models emerged in the study: parent, teacher, and student. Students could have different combinations of who their role models were
depending on the situation. For example, at the HSES school Cathy stated:

These students look to their teachers and parents as role models. They love them. They look to our sixth graders as role models. I promote that. I constantly tell the upper grades that the little ones are watching them and looking up to them. These students really put a lot of authority into their parents. I am surprised because that is no longer something you find everywhere. Maybe that is just because of their age so they are exposed to their family all of the time and their immediate teacher the rest of the time. That is what is really important to them.

Trisha felt her HSES students all looked to their parents as role models. Contrary to this, she also stated, “I only have a few kids that I know are on the lower SES end. I don’t know if they would give that same answer.”

According to the educators, after parents, teachers were the next person most likely to be a role model for their students. Teachers spoke of themselves and teachers they had in their own lives as positive role models. Teachers recognized there were many adults in the school a student could look up to or be influenced by.

The HSES teachers felt they could increase the collaborative spirit and work ethic of younger students simultaneously by recognizing older students more frequently. The HSES teachers capitalized on this belief by planning for opportunities for different ages or grade levels to work together. They purposefully strove to find ways in which older students could be perceived as role models for the younger students. The leadership opportunities they provided the older students with (e.g., librarian helper, student counsel), created a desire in the younger students to work towards those things. Some of the opportunities were pretty simple, for instance, Sharon stated the younger students “look up to the older students” when they see them in the school musicals and plays. The older students took on a “star-like” status to the younger kids.
The HSES teachers felt they had established a school culture which celebrated student success. Students who excelled became role models, or classroom examples for younger students, for example:

We have a school reading trophy that travels from classroom to classroom each week according to who reads the most minutes. It doesn’t matter necessarily if we get it or not, they get just as excited if one of their siblings or neighbors receives it. They are like, “Oh! She is on my bus! Yay!” They are continually looking at other students in the class who are good readers, and they want to be more like them because it helps the whole class. (Cathy)

These examples showed students did not necessarily have to be older to be a role model, they could also be a role model because they accomplished something or persevered.

Teachers intentionally created opportunities for their students to achieve at higher levels, and to work hard. This was the expectation.
CHAPTER V
LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS FINDINGS

This section is organized in the same pattern as Chapter IV. It is structured according to the teacher profiles and identified major themes that include: (1) Teacher Profiles, (2) Perceptions of Family, (3) Perceptions of Students, and (4) Teaching Practices. The themes addressed common thoughts and feelings that emerged when the individual teacher interviews were coded together. The strands were again developed around the pattern of teacher’s backgrounds, values, and beliefs impacting their day to day interactions with their students. The strands were also listed in the order of magnitude of the discussion taken from the Dedoose programmatic analysis, and the researcher’s interpretations of all data. The findings begin with an overview of Skyview Elementary School.

Teacher Profiles: Skyview

Skyview Elementary, the LSES school, had a potential of 24 participants. There were 14 people who responded to the survey and 12 who completed the survey in its entirety. From this survey information it was found that the average number of years of teaching experience was 16 years with a range of 22 years difference between the least and most experienced district employee. The average number of years that the respondent’s taught at their current school was 10 years with a range of 22 years difference between the least and most experienced faculty members. Additional information concluded that 13 of the 14 respondents at Skyview lived outside the school
boundaries, and only one respondent had children who were currently, or had in the past, attended the school.

**Anna**

*Stated background:* Mother, daughter, wife, teacher, leader, grandmother, and friend.

*Researcher-added anchor background:* White, middle-income, female, and educator.

Anna, a White female teacher in her early 40s, lived in the community where she taught almost her entire life. She completed her student teaching requirements and was immediately hired on to be a teacher at the school she still teaches at 19 years later. Anna had taught almost every grade level and had watched her students grow up and have children of their own who had also been Anna’s students.

Anna’s household was classified as low SES while she was growing up but she did not know it because her parents hid it from her. They went without so that their kids could have “normal” experiences.

I remember hearing my mom crying because we were struggling, but they never let us kids know. It made me appreciate how much they had done for me. I also knew I never wanted to feel like my mom did on that night (Anna, Participant).

She remembered never having friends over, and that she did not eat school lunch once she entered junior high. She said that when she went over to her friend’s houses and they were two-story or they had basements. They seemed like mansions to her.

She did not eat school lunch because students on free lunch, which she was on, were given tickets to redeem for their food at the end of the lunch line. “I wouldn’t eat because I didn’t want to give them the ticket. I would eat nothing or I would scrounge
quarters to buy something so no one would know.” Anna said she was not ashamed of her background, instead she felt she did not identify herself as being poor until she looked back as an adult and saw her life from different eyes.

Anna chose to remain living in the school boundaries because her daughter had been born with a developmental disability and she wanted to make sure that she got all the resources and opportunities she needed to be successful in elementary. Her two children both attended Skyview Elementary. Anna had recently moved out of the school boundaries to a newer area after her daughter came home from junior high telling her that the girls who came from the part of town they lived in were called “slum” or “sluts,” while the girls who came from the adjacent town who went to their school were considered to be of a much higher caliber. She had also started having trouble in her community because she was no longer “poor enough to be considered religious.”

I realized we didn’t fit here anymore. We were looked down upon because we didn’t have any hardships. We went to Hawaii for a family vacation, and the community looked down on us. I think it is a kind of sickness: a competition to see who can be the poorest.

Anna’s perceptions centered on the beliefs that LSES students could succeed, had additional basic needs, and required more experiences to relate current learning. She felt she may be too “soft” because she identified too much with how her students felt. Having lived a life in, or surrounded by LSES, her perceptions of HSES were based on conjecture. She stated HSES students were easier to teach, had more parental support, and did not value the material things they were given.
**Morgan**

*Stated background:* Mom, teacher, judge, caretaker, role-model, and advocate.

*Researcher-added anchor background:* White, middle-income, female, and educator.

Morgan, a White, middle-income, female teacher in her late 20s, invited me into her classroom with a guarded demeanor. She grew up in a middle SES household in a HSES community. She was the youngest of three children in a very close religious family where “working and playing together” were valued. As a child her parents emphasized education.

My grandfather always said, ‘It doesn’t matter what you get your degree in, as long as you get a degree.’ You are taught as a girl that you don’t need to be gung-ho about a career. Getting the degree teaches you how to find resources to find the things you need in life.

Morgan lived with her sister in a townhouse about a half hour drive from her school. She began her career at Skyview elementary 8 years ago, and loved coming to school every day. She felt one of her biggest jobs was to teach her students things they might not get at home. She explained, “They aren’t always taught in their homes that they are supposed to be a good person. I try to give them that here.” She felt she could recognize what these families went through, but she did not understand why they did not “push their kids, or instill in them a desire to go beyond high school.”

Morgan centered her teaching on high expectations and kept the kids actively involved in their learning. She worked hard each day to provide a foundation for her students so that one day they could be “productive members of society.” Accomplishing this task took “a lot out of you.” Although Morgan felt she did not put in as many after
school hours as some of the other teachers, she felt like teaching was not a job that could be left at the school house door. “Even when I go home I think about, and dream about these kids.” Morgan’s perceptions of LSES students were centered on the beliefs that poverty breeds poverty, a child should be raised in a two parent home, teaching is a spiritual calling, and a mother’s role is to stay home with the children.

**Judy**

*Stated background:* Wife, mother, grandmother, and teacher.

*Researcher-added anchor background:* White, middle-income, female, and educator.

Judy, a White, middle-income, female teacher in her late 60s, had worked at Skyview for 24 of her 25 years in education. She grew up in a middle- to high-SES household where her mom was able to stay home and care for the children. Her family valued service to others, and she had many fond memories of helping others with Sub-for-Santa opportunities as a little girl. She felt she had “plenty as a child by growing up in a comfortable and loving home.”

Judy started teaching after having raised her children. She felt her life inside and outside of school could not be separated. “I know that I bring everything that I have to this job. You have to bring everything. Your teaching is who you are.” She felt her responsibility did not end with the students in her classroom. “As a teacher you are always on the border of their home life. I make these kids my own; they are my kids.” Judy both celebrated success with, and worried about, her student’s parents.

I feel like I am not just the kid’s teacher, I feel like I am a part of the parents’ lives too. I am not afraid to be a part of their lives. I feel a personal connection to
the parents. They are my good friends that year and I care about them too. Maybe it is just my personality; I am not sure if everyone feels that way.

Judy felt her love of family was something she had in common with her students. This was a central topic that bound all of them together.

Looking back in my life I feel like I have made a difference since I have had to work. My mom didn’t have to work, so I thought I would never have to. I went back and earned my degree. I feel like I have made the right decision, being in the right profession. It is kind of a calling. I feel like I am in the right area because I care- maybe even too much sometimes.

Judy felt a part of the school, the community, and the family lives of her students. She arrived at the school early in the morning, and stayed late into the night. She felt “these kids,” her kids, deserved everything the world had to offer. Judy’s perceptions of her students stemmed from having been raised in a loving and secure home, her desire to serve others, her diligence in staying current on what was happening in her student’s lives, her love of people, and her actions that were driven by emotions.

**Kristen**

*Stated background:* Woman, teacher, sister, daughter, aunt, friend, advocate, and confidant.

*Researcher-added anchor background:* White, middle-income, female, and educator.

Kristen, a White, middle-income, female in her 20s, grew up in a middle-SES household in the city adjacent to Skyview Elementary. She decided to become a teacher because of the examples she had of educators in her own schooling experiences. Her mom had worked in education as a reading tutor in the district where Kristen worked. Kristen felt this helped prepare her to work with students from varying ability levels. She
felt her mom had been a good example to her by having a job as a tutor, which allowed her to be at home as her children got ready for school and to be there again when they returned. Kristen wished her students had the comfort of coming from homes with two supportive parents. Many of her students came from “split homes” or they lived with their aunts, uncles, or grandparents.

Although Kristen was one of the newest members of the faculty, she felt she fulfilled a need in the math and science areas that had been missing. Kristen still lived at home and had not married or had children yet, and she felt her students “get to be my kids.” She hoped her students wanted to come to school each day and know “we can have fun together while working hard. I want them to know they can come to school and just be themselves.”

Kristen realized her background was different than many of her students. She tried to think of these differences in planning her lessons each day.

I don’t wish that I grew up in a low SES background, but I do think this would help me understand these students more. I constantly try to figure out what expectations I need to have from homework of parents at home. I can’t use my own background experience of having someone at home to help me with my homework all of the time. I can try to put myself in their place and think through what they might be needing or what they might be thinking. I guess people don’t have to go through the exact experiences in order to understand other people’s experiences that are different than their own.

These experiences were something Kristen had tried to understand since she was a small child. She recognized early on some people had more than others, and it made her “feel sad for those people that didn’t have enough money to buy proper clothing or basic resources. I wanted to help those people, but I didn’t know how.” Kristen’s perceptions centered on providing students a safe, loving, and academically challenging experience
for her students; she wanted to be able to replicate the positive experiences she had enjoyed. She grew up in a home where continuous learning was valued, and she knew she still had a lot to learn, but she seemed uncertain of how to obtain the knowledge she needed.

**Melissa**

*Stated background:* Teacher, counselor, mother, advocate, friend, and employee.

*Researcher-added anchor background:* African-American, middle-income, female, and educator.

Melissa, an African American, middle-income, female in her mid-40s, grew up in a low-SES household. She was born and raised in Utah, a fact that many who meet her were surprised to hear. She felt people tended to assume she was not local because they could not connect the fact African Americans could be born and raised their entire lives in “their” state. Her family roots “run deep,” and she was raised with many cousins always at her house. She attended a nearby elementary school as a child and had only one friend who was also African American. They were 1 year apart in school and had different lunch and recess times, which had made her feel she was the only African American student at all times. She stated, “Since my world was distorted, I felt I was this alien in a foreign world. I looked around and see White faces. I looked in books and saw White faces. I felt like I was the ‘Other.’”

Melissa said school life had been tough for her. In elementary she had not wanted to go to school. At one point her mother had to leave work and “come home and spank” her in order to make her attend school. All of that changed when she was old enough to
understand more.

It was a constant struggle until my mother and I started having long talks about why education was important. She taught me about African American history. When I started to learn about Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth and all of their strength and fortitude, it gave me the strength and fortitude to pursue an education despite of what was going on around me.

In high school Melissa had tried out for the drill team and made it. She had been excited to be on the team and have the opportunity to represent her school. She soon found out she could not stay on the team because of the expenses of the outfits, camps, and “other things.”

I really didn’t know my place, but there is one teacher who changed my perspective of who I was or could be. She was an African American teacher who taught at this school for a short time. Seeing her here was an “ah-ha” moment of “Oh! I can be a teacher.” It was proof that I could be something. That set me on the path of wanting to be a teacher. Plus, I wanted to make experiences different for children than what I had. That was my driving force to becoming a teacher.

This inner drive had helped her handle tough situations, and she felt it had made her stronger. She hoped the students who had been in her classroom over the years would also carry some of her strength with them.

Family was the most important part of Melissa’s life. She had taught in a HSES school and moved to the LSES school because her father was ailing in his health. His house was located a few blocks from the school, which enabled her to go home and care for him during her lunch break. Her sons and husband were the center of her world. She wanted to have all of the children in her class feel the connection of a family and to feel important. She wanted to instill in her students the belief “knowledge is power.” Melissa’s perceptions centered on the belief students should not be marginalized in any way, especially in regards to race or SES. Her statements were kind, yet no nonsense in
their approach to empowering her students. She also had the experiences of teaching both HSES and LSES, so the complexity of her background drew from her perceptions of working with both student populations.

Parallel to the HSES individual teacher profiles, the LSES teacher profiles created identities from which the rest of the interview responses could be associated. The next section will combine their individual responses into the larger category of “LSES teacher.” Of note was both Mark and Cathy, although currently not teaching at a LSES school, they distinctly answered their interview questions from two perspectives: LSES and HSES. Therefore, throughout this data set, their comments were also included. At times the individual identities of the teachers were disaggregated again within the larger context, but only when the complexity of the individual did not reflect the identity of the group.

**Teacher Perceptions of Family**

One of the salient themes that emerged from the teachers of LSES students was valuing family and relationships. In a running word count the noun “parent” or “parents” was stated over 350 times in both positive and negative terms. Teachers acknowledged the greatest influence in their own and their students’ lives was their families. For example, Judy’s love for her family guided her interactions with her students and their families. She felt “some of the things I have in common with my students is love of family life, and relationships with brothers and sisters.”

Other teachers felt they knew their student’s parents wanted what was best for
their children, yet at times the teacher felt it necessary to take on the parent role at school:

   Just like my parents wanted what was best for me. I try to look at all my kids and think what I would want for them, or what I wanted when I was growing up not having a lot. We have all these other roles we assume and I think it is almost like being the extra parent, but we are at school. (Kristine)

Teachers recognized the love parents had for their children, and the struggles they encountered on a daily basis. Anna, who grew up within the school boundaries for almost her entire life stated:

   These children and their families become your children and your family. That is just the way it works. These families stay here, so if you teach here a long time you will have several generations of children from one family. You come to love and care about them.

In order to really care about individual students, the teachers expressed a need to spend time getting to know who their students really were. These relationships were real. They did not “try” to connect with parents, they felt those relationships came naturally.

   I love making connections with my kids. I love that they feel they can come in and tell me stories. I love the stories that I hear. I even love sharing my own stories with my kids. With that connection, it fosters a better environment in the classroom because it develops relationships and they feel like they know me better. (Kristine)

Teachers shared their life experiences with their students, and through the power of stories, teachers felt there was a reciprocity of information from teacher to student about their home lives. These stories, whether written on paper, told to the entire class, or shared one-on-one, influenced the perceptions teachers had of their students.

   All of the teachers at the LSES school referred to the guidance and influence of their mothers while growing up. Morgan’s mother had stayed home instead of pursuing a career in order to be there for her children physically and emotionally. Although Morgan
was not yet married, or a mother, she stated that when that time came she would stay home, as her mother and grandmother had, and she would be there to raise her children “instead of going to work.” She felt her students would be better equipped to handle the academic rigors of school if their mothers “cared more about their children than the few dollars they earn from a minimum wage job.”

Both Anna’s mother and Melissa’s mother inspired them to be strong in the face of adversity. Anna’s family struggled financially, but her mother kept them focused on education. Melissa shared the powerful role her mother had in her life, by ensuring her children had the knowledge of their history. She empowered her children through meaningful conversations and actions that enabled them to become leaders instead of fearful victims.

Anna had more forgiving expectations of her student’s mothers. If she needed to meet with a mother about their student, she did not feel it was the sole responsibility of the mother to find a way to get to the school to meet with her. Instead she would drive to their home, or even find a time they had a break during their job to meet with them. Having been without a car growing up, she knew transportation could not be assumed.

Melissa was the only LSES teacher who spoke of the impacts her father had on her life. The influence Melissa’s father had on her life was so powerful that when he became ill she moved from the HSES school she had been teaching at to be closer to her father and be involved in his care. No other teacher mentioned their own father, but they did mention the role a father should have in a family unit. Judy mentioned a “father” was one who “works and is able to adequately provide for his family’s needs.” Morgan felt,
“every kid should have a father there.” Most of the LSES teachers shared the view that the father should provide for the family and the mother should care for the children.

When the teachers spoke of LSES parents, their stories tended to either center on the “good parents,” or the “poor” parents. The good parents were usually those who did not come from LSES backgrounds but found themselves there now. The poor parents usually came from backgrounds of generational poverty or who had been imprisoned.

Teachers perceived poor LSES parents needed to make better decisions, especially with the income they did receive. Judy stated her students “do have a lot of things. Parents buy them things that they think are important. For example, many of these kids have iPads, or games.” Morgan’s commented that poor LSES parents “choose to spend money on dumb things that they don’t need instead of what they do need. I think that because they are poor they stay in a rut and don’t pull out of it.” One of the teachers felt LSES students “go without beds and necessities, but [their] parents have the latest smartphone, TV, and nails professionally done” (Anna).

Whether a parent had been in the cycle of poverty for a long time, or were currently categorized as LSES, teachers felt they were aware if parents placed an importance on education. The “good” LSES were usually talked about with a smile on the face of the teacher and a look of relief in their eyes. Judy expressed that it was “always nice to know when some good ones were coming along. Those who have stable families that will be good examples.” Teachers perceived these “good” moms showed up to school events, helped their children with reading at home, and sent children to school well disciplined. Teachers felt the expectations of these families were different than those
who had been in poverty a long time. Judy referred to these “good” parents as “visitors” to LSES, and she felt they had high expectations for their students, and they always made sure their children came to school ready to learn. Morgan also felt these students completed their homework which was a sign school was important to them.

Mark mentioned that although he had little money growing up, he did come from a “good” home; the same was true for Anna. They felt the reason they were able to rise above poverty was because their parents helped them value education.

We need to let parents know that if they want their kids to do better then they need to help them with their homework. If [parents] don’t have time then make the child responsible for it. Make sure that they have that innate drive to do well. That desire to perform because even if the parents don’t have time to help them; have time to check their homework, if the child has that quality themselves then they can perform worlds better. (Mark)

Placing the responsibility of learning on the child was seen as a way to give the child one more chance at overcoming poverty. “There are some that beat the odds. They don’t have good parent support but still succeed. That’s a rare little child” (Morgan). Morgan went on to state that she identified with the LSES families because she also struggled with paying a mortgage on her own.

When teachers spoke of parents and used the descriptor “poor,” there was a noticeable difference in their stories. It was as if they were consciously, or unconsciously wanting to recognize that not all LSES parents were the same. “Poor” was used as a derogatory term that held blame for the parent. Even when teachers had grown up in a LSES home there were still perceptions of parents in “poor” homes who did not try hard to overcome their current situation. If a parent appeared to be working to help their family get out of the cycle of poverty, they were perceived to have been a “good parent.”
Those who seemed comfortable being LSES were perceived as lacking.

Contrary to the belief of most of the LSES teachers, Anna felt parents and students were not always ashamed of their poverty. Anna had been around poverty and homeless people throughout different stages of her life and she felt there were some parents who wore their poverty “almost like a crown.” She stated:

A lot of people who abused the welfare system have ended up homeless. Growing up here, living here, and going to church here, I have been around people who are at all levels of the poverty spectrum. When going to church here there were families who seemed to be in a competition of who was the poorest. The poorer you were the more righteous you were. Almost like a crown. I think it is kind of a sickness. It is almost a competition of who is the poorest. (Anna)

Anna stated she had little patience for parents who taught their children these “schemes.”

Teachers recognized LSES parents might not have the time to take their children to the library because they may work two jobs, work odd hours, or both work and go to school. Morgan said there were students that “have moms who work but are there when their kids get home. I hate to say the stereotype, but those that have a mom who is home, or a parent who is home to help them, it shows.” This has a compound effect because the lower the wages, the less income there was coming into the home to afford basic necessities. Therefore, LSES parents were perceived to lack time as well as money. The teachers were often at war with themselves over what they could expect from their students’ LSES parents, but teachers perceived LSES parents had common expectations.

**Parent Expectations**

Teachers perceptions of LSES parent expectations ranged from trust to blame and from high expectations to not knowing what expectations were. Parents at LSES schools
were perceived to be unfamiliar with the academic world, therefore they needed to trust the teachers more. Teachers wanted parents to believe they had done everything possible to help their child be successful. Cathy sensed parents “trusted you with their child. The parents have to trust you when they walk away.” Anna felt LSES parents “considered learning a teacher responsibility not a parent responsibility…[they] let us know that they send their kids to school for us to teach.” Anna also indicated that LSES parents blamed the teachers if their child “did not succeed or progress.”

Teachers recognized that some, but not all, of the parents were familiar with the academic standards for their students. Parents at the LSES school were encouraged by the teachers to learn more about what they could do to help their children at home.

This is what you need to do so that your child does well. This is what your child needs to do so that they don’t stay in the same situation that you are in. Parents want their kids to do better no matter where they are. Giving that information to parents and showing them how big a difference it makes is important. (Mark)

Information was perceived to be a powerful tool teachers gave parents, but it was stated that parents did not always know what to do with the information they had been given.

Parents did not always agree with the teaching practices at the LSES school. Melissa spoke of a time when there was a student in her class that had been accelerated a grade level. She had a firm belief that no matter where a child was at academically, her job was to help them progress even more. The parent of a particular child in her class felt their student should be recognized for their abilities and not “picked on” for their work habits. The parent did not want their child “pushed” any more than they already had been by accelerating a grade level. Melissa believed the parent held low expectations of their high ability child, which eventually caused the teacher and the parent to “agree to
disagree.” This meant there was no longer parent support at home for the required work, and consequences were not followed through at home when misbehavior occurred.

There was a reoccurring sentiment that LSES parents did not expect their children to be good at math. Several comments were made that the LSES parents usually shrugged away concern about low student achievement in mathematics. They did not understand the importance of mathematics, or the need to have students understand and be successful in it. The teachers tried to emphasize understanding mathematics was the “gateway to getting into college.” Yet the parents gave the much heard response of, “I wasn’t good at math. I don’t expect my child to be good at math either” (Anna).

It was expressed that LSES parents sent students to school for reasons other than academics. Instead they were sent to school to learn how to:

Just get by. This is what you need to do to get by. Focus on how to get food, focus on how to blend in with the rest of society. That is a big deal for them, blending in. They try not to be labeled in a certain way, especially in social situations, because people do tend to label them. (Mark)

This was an expectation the teachers were trying to break. They wanted their students to come to school to get out of the situations they currently found themselves in. They wanted the parents to want a better life for their children than what they had experienced.

I wish I could expose these kids to the world. Try to get them to see outside of their community: to see what goes on at other schools, to see big cities, and other communities. They need to see what is out there so they have an idea of what they are working towards. A lot of students will be stuck with the same old thing. It is all they see and they don’t know anything else. (Morgan)

Teachers voiced many times that LSES parents did not have high expectations of their child when it came to academics, but they did not have knowledge of the educational system, were unaware of how to how to make their child’s experience successful, and
were unable to help their children complete schoolwork. Overall, the LSES teachers were
resigned to the fact their students would not complete homework, yet they judged parent
priorities if it was not returned. Morgan stated, “I see the parents that don’t care. The kids
that live with grandparents. Those that don’t understand how to do the homework.” She
went on to say: “It is harder for them [parents] when they are exhausted from working
two jobs, they don’t want to help their kids with homework.” Lack of parent involvement
was viewed in many different ways; some teachers understood why parents could not
volunteer during the day, while others felt it was inexcusable.

Some SLSES teachers (Judy, Melissa, Anna) felt they had tremendous parent
support. They believed they had good room mothers who did everything they could to
create special memories for their children. Judy stated “I have some good kids in here and
a lot of good support here. I have mothers who are now my room mothers who had been
my former students. These make the best room mothers” (Judy).

Parent’s work schedules often conflicted with school volunteering opportunities.
Parents needed to take time off from work or needed to hire babysitters in order to
volunteer in the classroom. It was felt if a parent made the commitment to help, they
would finish the task. Melissa stated: “I usually always have people follow through and
take care of [commitments]” (Melissa). Judy felt regardless of the level of school
involvement a parent could commit to, it was necessary to “honor the fact that these
parents love their children and want them to be successful.”

When LSES parents felt their child needed something, or felt something was not
fair for their child, they usually worked directly with the teacher. Most of the teachers
worked through parent concerns without feeling they needed to involve the administrator. Melissa had a parent who had been unhappy with a situation in the classroom. The situation escalated to the point where she felt it would be beneficial to have the student removed from her classroom. She finally told the parent: “Obviously you are unhappy with me, let’s go to the principal about this so we can resolve it.” The parent said, “No, I like the principal so I don’t want him involved.”

Melissa felt parents did not want the school administration to view them in a negative light, or to perceive them as troublemakers. She still looked back on the situation and wondered if the parent would have handled the situation differently at a HSES school. She wondered if the LSES parents were afraid of the administration, or if they were unaware of how to “move around in the educational hierarchy.”

**Homes**

Teachers talked about ways their students home lives could be more equitable to their HSES counterparts. One of the most mentioned items was the need for a complete family unit at home for their students.

This comment comes from my upbringing and my background, so it may sound prejudice. But, coming from this background I believe that if every kid could have a father there, and a mother who could stay home or just be home when the kids come home. Someone who could greet them when they come home from school and be there at all times. You have kids who get sick at school and the school can’t get a hold of their parents because the mom is working. (Morgan)

Anna expressed similar sentiments, but knew the “old-fashioned” family unit was not a reality in her student’s homes.

Aunts, uncles, and grandparents were often seen as the primary care givers for
many of the students. Teachers felt it was good for students to live with family members, but it was not always the best solution. Judy talked of a situation where an aunt had adopted four siblings because their mother was serving a long term sentence in prison. She stated, “The aunt was non-supportive and did nothing for these kids. She changed this kid’s name in the middle of the school year from Steve to Kevin. Who would do that to a child? That is the child’s identity.”

Morgan also shared a story of a student who had lived with his aunt. She said that just because a child lives with a family member it did not ensure a safe environment.

The aunt had an older son who was a bully to the cousins. This older boy would lock the little boy out of their home when she was gone to work, and not give him a coat. Things that were just mean that he had to live with at home. (Morgan)

Teachers believed the primary reason students were placed in homes of extended family members was their own parents were either in jail or prison. This was also identified as one of the causes for the high mobility of students.

Home lives of LSES students were often described in negative terms: unsafe, single-parent, no-parent homes or multi-family homes, abuse, bullying, violence, lack of basic needs, language barriers, and high mobility. Not having a stable location to call home was perceived as detrimental to the academic achievement and emotional well-being of a student.

When I hear these kids, and I listen to their stories, it breaks my heart to hear what they are going through. When we were writing Christmas lists or our letters to Santa and they ask for a bed because they are sleeping on the floor it breaks your heart. Or their parents are in prison. Or they don’t know which house they will live in night after night. Or they are living out of their car. Some of these stories blow my mind. (Anna)

School was not important to him, but getting enough to eat was and staying warm
during the winter months was. The roof of his apartment was in need of repair and he often complained that he couldn’t sleep at night because it was so cold. (Melissa)

Teachers felt students lacked the comfort of a safe, predictable pattern of belonging somewhere surrounded by things they could call their own.

By not staying at one school, the students were sometimes lost in the system, coming and going sometimes in the same year. This caused them to become further behind academically.

We have a lot of kids that come and go in this school. A lot of times these kids will come back. They come in second grade, move out in third grade, then back in third grade again, then out in fourth and back in fifth. (Morgan)

Teachers perceived most of the students who struggled were new to the school or community. They felt it was hard to get them caught up socially and academically.

“Whenever a new student moved in, the whole class had a few days of disruption” (Morgan). When they had students for the whole year they could get used to the routines of the school, the discipline program, and the academic expectations.

**Safety, Abuse, and Violence**

LSES homes were perceived as unsafe in many ways, from lack of supervision to physical abuse. Teachers worried about their students physically and mentally. According to Judy the students seemed like “wise old souls in little people bodies.” In other cases, the home circumstances were so extreme students were not able to concentrate at school:

These kids have things on their minds. I have one student who has a dad in jail right now. She will tell me all the time that she is missing her dad. I have kids who have parents getting a divorce, and those are things that they can’t check at the door. (Kristine)
Students were not immune to seeing and experience violence on a regular basis. Teachers found out about these situations in a variety of ways: other students, other parents, or by accident. Teachers were hesitant to share the “worst” stories of their students and often times mentioned they wouldn’t “go there” because those stories were too tough to share.

Parent drug addiction was mentioned several times. It was seen by teachers as an excuse for parents to not have to take responsibility for themselves and their children, or as a lack of self-control parents were engaging in which kept them in their LSES designation.

I think in the low SES [homes] drugs are obviously an issue. Abuse is something they deal with all the time. I think this definitely changes things for them and makes it harder for them. They are worrying about it in the classroom which would make it so they can’t perform their best in the classroom. These are little things these little elementary students shouldn’t have to be worrying about, but these are real things for them. (Kristine)

At times the teachers at the LSES schools perceived themselves to be more like social workers than educators. Events that transpired at home reinforced the belief that the purpose of school was to provide a safe environment. They struggled daily to come to terms with feelings of trying to “rescue” their students (Cathy, Judy, Mark, Morgan).

These students experience violence and not feeling safe at home. These are times you feel you need to step in and rescue them. Somehow you need to help them in these situations. As a teacher you are always on the border of their home life. These students are my kids. (Judy)

These statements often highlighted the “us” against “them” dichotomy of teacher versus
Many of the teachers could not stop thinking about the stories of their students, or the unsafe environments their students were going home to after school hours. Teachers felt students were grateful when they entered the safety of the classroom because they were able to leave the chaos of their home lives.

Perceptions of Students

This section mirrors the framework of the previous HSES section titled “Perceptions of Students,” which addresses the second research question, “What are the perceptions of teachers regarding students from high and low socioeconomic status in their classrooms?” This section was organized according to subthemes identified; the sub-themes mentioned most often are at the beginning of the section. The subthemes are as follows: (1) Student Attributes, (2) Student Absenteeism, and (3) Bullying and Teasing.

Student Attributes

This section focuses on qualities teachers felt their LSES students possessed; from when they entered the classroom, to the traits they acquired by the end of the year. The first of these traits was described through the analogy of the “light bulb that goes on when students learn” (Anna); in fact, four of the five LSES teachers, and four of the five HSES teachers mentioned “light bulbs” in this manner. Contrary to the HSES teachers feeling that the HSES students had their light bulbs “already turned on and have been burning for quite some time” (Pauline), the LSES teachers referred to light bulbs going off as the symbol of when students had been struggling with a concept finally understood. The light
bulb effect was the gleam or look in the eye of the student who finally “gets it” (Morgan). Teachers lived for these small moments. “I saw the light go on, and knew I had opened that door” (Anna).

In contrast to how the HSES teachers talked of their students’ future, the teachers of LSES students used different scenarios such as: “I hope they at least graduate” (Judy), “A good paying job is something I hope for all of my students in their future” (Anna), “I am used to these delinquent kids who are resilient” (Melissa), “These students will amount to more than their parents” (Morgan); and “A sign of their success will be if they enroll in college” (Kristen). Cathy felt their school and home knowledge was disconnected. She stated: “Sometimes their learning just doesn’t transfer into the knowledge that is expected for them to pass the end of level tests. Those tests don’t have meaning to those kids” (Cathy).

Many of the LSES teachers felt academic learning was the secondary goal of LSES education. In fact, many times it was stated that high expectations may be too much for their students to handle. Anna felt “The reading program is way too hard for our students.” She also felt that regardless of SES, students were being asked to do things that were not age appropriate; “These kids are five years old. How much more can be stuffed into a five year olds brain?”

When teachers at the LSES school spoke of their student’s specific attributes the word “good” was used by all of them. Other traits used to describe the LSES students were: “They are cute little people and I want them to know they are wonderful little kids” (Morgan), “these kids are kind and very sweet” (Anna), and “I love how tolerant they are
of each other” (Kristine). The most common point of discussion centered on the students’ social abilities.

These kids, at this school, accept every kids that comes into this class. If it is a new kid they want to be their best friend. Once that student is here for a little while they start to learn if the kids is cool or weird, but they always accept them. (Morgan)

These students are at an advantage because they accept everyone. They get along well. We have the greatest group of kids here. They take care of each other. They are good to each other. They are good with us as teachers. They are willing to help us, and each other. I think that is their greatest advantage- there is nothing in their minds that tells them that they are better than someone else or that they are less than someone else. (Anna)

Teachers admired their student’s ability to accept others, and felt it was a strength.

Teachers expressed LSES students had an advantage because their struggles made them stronger.

Students here are street smart. They know the real world. They have a lot of disappointments. Having all of those disappointments makes it so that when they have successes they seem to enjoy them more. Even small successes. Bad things happen to these kids. Their homes are smaller, but that could be an advantage. This makes people close. When they have struggles they lean on each other more. (Judy)

Those attributes or characteristics were not mentioned by HSES teachers.

The teachers at the LSES school noticed their students “sometimes had the appearance of being poor” (Morgan). This was never said with disdain. Some of the comments were made jokingly, others were made in distressed tones because they felt their students might be teased by kids, and still others were because teachers were shocked at the clothes they came in. None of the teachers at the LSES school mentioned if students were teased for their appearance; it was the teachers who noticed how the students looked.
I have a little girl who wears the dirtiest, torn and ripped “fancy-Nancy” clothes. She has a cute little personality and looks like she dresses in crazy clothes. The other kids don’t notice it, but I do. I am like, “Really? You are wearing your fancy little velvet dress with your polka-dotted pants underneath?” I would think kids would notice that she is poor, but they don’t. They don’t ever see it, or say anything. I notice it, but they don’t. (Morgan)

Teachers did not believe LSES parents and students placed an importance on their appearance, oftentimes to the point of neglect.

The appearance of their students was sometimes distracting to the teachers because they felt it might impact their student’s self-esteem (Judy, Kristine, Morgan).

Anna, who grew up LSES, did everything within in her power to try and keep up with the personal hygiene requirements of her 45 kindergarten students.

You have to be ready with combs, clothes, and t-shirts. We dress them, we comb their hair. I buy those supplies, or when my kids were little I would bring clothes my kids had out grown, so that these kids could use them. Kids would come in early so I could do their hair, I would hope they didn’t have lice, but I kept doing it. (Anna)

Anna felt this was one of the toughest parts of teaching to witness, but one of the easiest problems to temporarily fix at school.

Morgan felt her students should not consider their lives to be “normal.” She wished they could see the difference between what they knew home and school life to be, and what “other” kids were able to have:

I know what it is like to go to a school with “normal” kids who have “normal parents.” I also know that these normal kids and parents go through a lot. But sometimes it is very hard working here because you can feel so discouraged. I also feel that you can feel that way at any school, and I am not trying to take away from other schools the hard work they are doing. It is just that hard times here are what is normal. (Morgan)

Other teachers felt the definition of normal depended on whether they came from a
“good” home or a “poor” home. Good homes were seen as promoting middle class school values, and poor homes were seen as contributing to skewed societal structures. They felt their LSES students had more similarities than differences. One of those similarities was the lack of academic success which was usually thought to be caused by students not showing up to school.

**Role Models**

Another attribute students from LSES homes shared was that of being without adequate role models. LSES teachers felt role models had the potential of having a positive or negative impact on a child, therefore role models were not always looked upon as favorable in the eyes of the LSES teachers. None of the teachers at the LSES school mentioned students as possible role models for other students, and LSES parents were typically perceived by teachers as negative role models. Teachers felt one of the functions of the school was to provide things for students they did not have access to at home, and having a “good” role model was one of those things. All of the teachers mentioned other educators, or perhaps themselves, as positive role models for their students. Teachers wished students could be exposed to more role models and opportunities in order to have loftier goals in life. For example:

> The biggest disadvantage these students have because of their SES is that they look at their parents and think that is as good as they can be. They don’t realize that they could do more. They look at their parents as a role model. They look at what their parents do and think that is what they will do when they grow up. They don’t have big dreams because they haven’t seen these things in their lives. (Judy)

Teachers mentioned that many of their students’ parents did not graduate from high school, so they lacked the ability to be a good academic role model for their students.
(Morgan, Anna, Kristine, Mark). For example:

I think a lot of these parents are just happy their kids are leaving the house for a little while. I don’t think they have a lot of expectations. When I see that kids don’t even return homework it means they aren’t expected to move on in life. School is seen as a place to learn to read and that is all. I don’t think there is as much drive here for kids to succeed as in other places. (Morgan)

Judy, who had taught at the school the longest, felt parents tried their hardest, and she felt success was not always determined by the job someone worked after they graduated. Judy felt success could be measured by personal attributes such as kindness.

**Student Absenteeism**

Teacher’s perceived LSES students missed school for a variety of reasons, but most of them were believed to be due to their parent’s lack of responsibility. Morgan felt students missed school, “because they didn’t get up, they didn’t want to go, or they just didn’t care.” Mark felt it was usually due to the fact their “parents couldn’t get them to school, or needed them to babysit, or their parents were working two or more jobs so they needed the child’s help at home with basic home care stuff.”

One little girl comes and goes. You never know when she will be here. She is living with her aunt, and her cousin. She is also in second grade. So I think it is more the lack of stable environment that keeps her home, even though the mother is in jail. (Judy)

These perceptions placed blame on the parents, and were shadowed by the belief LSES families were not parenting responsibly. Teachers sensed that parents at the LSES school did not view absence as a problem that needed to be addressed. Mark stated, “The difference is that if students in the low SES school missed work from being absent it was just thought to be par for the course.”
LSES students had the opportunity to eat breakfast for free at the school if they qualified for free or reduced lunch status. Teachers felt many of their students came to school because they were hungry. Teachers also mentioned if a student was going to be late, and miss the free breakfast, they would sometimes not bother to show up for the rest of the day. The LSES school switched from providing breakfast at the beginning of school, to offering it before school started. “But those that need it the most are the ones that arrive late, so they just don’t get breakfast” (Morgan).

Teachers worried about their students when they were absent. They worried they were hungry, had moved, or that they were not being cared for properly. They believed their students needed to be at school for both academic learning and emotional support.

**Bullying and Teasing**

When students interacted inappropriately towards one another, the teachers at the LSES school referred to this as bullying. Students from LSES homes were perceived to be bullied by their older siblings (Morgan), foster care siblings (Judy), and even students in their classes (Kristine, Mark, Morgan). Teachers at LSES schools tried extrinsic rewards such as the “Be a Buddy Not a Bully” tags, and handed positive notes to students who were being “peacemakers.” Some of this work had a positive impact. For example, one of the teachers at the LSES school had a student with anger issues, and she referred to him as a “known bully” (Kristine). She tried to teach him coping habits when he felt the need to bully others. One day he had been crying outside because another student had taken his school supplies and thrown them on top of the roof.

We talked about it and he calmed down. He stopped and said [to me] “You know
it makes me wonder why he did that. I wonder if something upset him to make him act that way. I wonder if he needs a friend.” It amazed me he could think of that instead of being mad and lashing out at him. When we first got him he would bully the other students and yell and get mad, and now he is able to take a step back and not get as mad. (Kristine)

Kristine had a student who was also involved in bullying, both as a recipient and a perpetrator. These types of dual behaviors were not uncommon in her classroom. For example:

I have one right now who is breaking my heart. There was a lot of bullying in their last school and they were being bullied. Now that they have moved here he and his brother are the biggest boys in their grade; and now they have become the bullies. Their home life is rough because they didn’t have a place to live for a while. Dad goes to work right before they get home from school. He gets home when they are leaving for school so they don’t have that support at night. Mom is not in the picture. Now they feel they have the power.

Other teachers mentioned they had students who would act tough because they were afraid that if they did not then other students would hurt them. Parents usually did not complain about bullying. Instead, they would say, “If someone hits you, you hit them back” (Melissa).

Some students were perceived as defiant, bullied their peers, or acted out “strange behaviors” (Morgan). While the HSES teachers had felt they could concentrate on helping students find coping strategies to manage their behavior, the LSES teachers felt they had so many needs that these behaviors were the “tipping point” (Judy). These students were referred to behavior units in order to get them the targeted help it was perceived they needed.

Morgan shared that she had two students in her class who exhibited “overwhelming” behaviors. The first student, a girl, exhibited “strange” behaviors.
The class couldn’t function because of one of the students who would roam around the class or throw books on the floor. It was awful. I would tell the other students, “Just ignore her. Please put your eyes on me instead. Here we go, we are moving on.” It is a lot to ask of these little ones when they are wondering why their classmate is crawling around on the floor acting like a cat. They are wondering why that person doesn’t have to do the work like they do. That caused a lot of struggles with kids. Other kids would start imitating the bad behavior, they would “meow” like a cat too try and get attention because they saw that it worked for this girl. That was definitely a non-functioning class. Once she went into the resource classroom I had a normal functioning class, and then she would come back and it was hard again. (Morgan)

Another student in her class was eventually moved into a behavior unit because he became so uncontrollable that he began tipping over desks. Eventually his behavior came to a head when the student physically assaulted Morgan by “slugging her in the face.” She wished she could help these students better, but felt helpless when her only alternative to protect the other students was to “fast track them to a behavior unit” (Morgan).

Teachers felt they had not been adequately trained to work with students who had been diagnosed with behavior disorders. In addition to the two students who were perceived to be defiant, Morgan also had students with undiagnosed disorders she felt contributed to their actions which were due to conditions beyond their control.

I have another one who may be autistic, I am not sure because it is new to me, but he does exhibit some of the characteristics of his brother. This little guy is tough because if he doesn’t want to do something he just won’t. He is defiant. Sometimes he will yell back at me, other [times] he will put his head down at his desk. I feel bad because I am not trained how to address those type of issues. There is something different with this child that stands out from other kids.

Teachers all wished their students could achieve at high levels, but felt bullying and behavior disorders got in the way of academics.
Teaching Practices

Teachers expressed frustration at what they referred to as “LSES problems” that interfered with teaching and learning. One of these issues was the belief that LSES parents needed to be convinced their children should be pushed academically. Teachers strove to teach students they needed to persevere. “Don’t try to just be average. The kids need to know that we will push them to try and be the best they can be. We need to constantly remind them that they can do hard things” (Morgan). Teachers shared the belief students would not excel unless they intervened in their life.

Teachers felt their greatest teaching strategy to motivate their students was to show them love and encouragement. Examples of this ranged from purchasing items for them like “Band-Aids” (Judy) to buying “shoes and clothes for a student who didn’t have any that fit. This lets them know that I care” (Anna). These actions were common occurrences and it was felt the extra support paid off, whether physical or emotional.

Teachers felt if they provided emotional support for their students, then their academic success rates increased. For example:

If the kids know that I love them and that I care about them and that they are my kids, right from day one that is when I get success. The kids that come back to see me are those that gave me the most problems. They need someone in their lives, and they know that I care about them and that I love them. They are one of my kids. I think that helps them. (Anna)

I love my kids. They are really good kids. They like to be here and they like learning. I have taken time to get to know them so that they are enthusiastic when they come to learn. One day I had a kid literally jumping out of his chair wanting to answer a math question. That is what makes my day, when they are so enthusiastic with everything, and that makes it exciting to teach. (Kristine)

This success was what kept the committed teachers at the LSES schools (Anna, Judy,
The LSES teachers who stayed at the LSES school had little respect for teachers who left. In fact, the LSES teachers felt they could identify within the first week those teachers who were not strong enough to last. For example:

What makes a teacher succeed here is a certain type. They are committed. They are here for the right reasons. After being here 19 years I can tell, and so can the other teachers, if the teacher is going to stay or be gone. Many teachers come here just to get their foot in the door of the district, then they leave as fast as they can.

(Anna)

The teachers who left the LSES school were perceived as either lacking the ability to manage students, or as not having the appropriate strategies needed to teach the LSES students.

Teachers at the LSES school recognized they had “fewer parent volunteers but more outside help from district paid tutors and aides” (Melissa). Whereas HSES schools were able to utilize parent volunteers for tutoring, small group instruction, or individualized learning experiences, the LSES schools had to rely more on tutors or other students to fulfill the same tasks. Teachers felt they still needed even more help in order for their students’ needs to adequately be addressed.

When I was at a low SES school teachers would have to utilize their quick finishers, or use peer tutoring more in order to make up for the lack of as many parent volunteers. Teachers train students better at helping each other at the low SES schools. (Sharon)

Regardless of student scores on a test, or whether a teacher was a novice or a veteran, they felt fulfilled most days they were in the classroom. Kristine stated: “I come back every single day for the kids. I was teaching the other day and I was thinking, ‘I get to do this every day.’ The kids keep me coming back” (Kristine).
I love what I do. That is what I bring to the classroom. I listen to my husband get up and go to work every day and complain about his job. I have never once thought about me having a “job”- this is just what I do. I am happy to come here. I am happy to see their faces. We were here last night until 7:30 and it was not a big deal. I love being here. My love for wanting kids to learn informs all of the work that I do. (Anna)

The love of teaching and the love of students, was expressed by teachers from both the LSES and the HSES schools.

Collaboration

At the LSES school teachers perceived their students responded best to teaching practices where the students were able to talk and process things with other students. The apparent difference in the interviews was HSES called these practices “collaboration” and LSES schools called it “talking” or “sharing.” For example, when it came to students being able to talk:

I like watching them when they are able to talk and work together on projects. It is interesting to see the different dynamics going on with them. Some will argue with each other. Others will immediately try to solve the problems and work through things. (Kristine)

Collaboration at the LSES school was used as a tool to understand the spoken word, increase student fluency, vocabulary, and academic language (Anna, Kristine, Morgan). At the HSES school it had been used to increase higher order level thinking skills in analyzing and synthesizing information (Sharon, Trisha). Teachers felt they were using collaboration effectively, and had attended professional development on brain research in order to provide more tools for student collaboration.

In the past couple of years we have tried to implement whole brain teaching into our classrooms. We try and encourage students to work with their partners and help teach each other. We try attention getting things where they incorporate body
movement with learning. I think that helps because they get to talk more. (Morgan)

Some of the teachers felt collaboration should not always be a quiet, controlled classroom activity. Instead students were allowed to use “conversational voices” which were not always quiet.

If someone were to come in here they might think it was a zoo. It is noisy in here. I don’t expect my kids to be quiet. I also feel that my kids need to talk. They need to have that time because they are already so far behind. By talking they are building vocabulary. (Anna)

Teachers admitted they constantly tried to find new classroom strategies which incorporated speaking and listening.

Due to student’s lack of academic readiness, teachers planned their lessons at primer levels to provide the necessary foundational skills before they moved on to grade level concepts. Teachers found ways to try to differentiate instruction when they noticed students further behind or ahead. For example:

In classrooms, everyone will have high, middle and low incomes. Our span is a little more on the low side. Sometimes you can’t always do what the curriculum asks you to do. Sometimes you have to slow it down or dummy it down a little bit to reach the level the kids need it at. The kids need to be able to grasp the concepts at a starting point. (Judy)

Judy used the word “income” as the student differentiation trait. The rest of her statement dealt with curriculum.

Anna differentiated her kindergarten classroom by student pre-test information at the beginning of the year.

Before I came here the classes were divided by what city you live in. I stopped that and have divided the classes by the kids who need the most help are in the morning and those that are higher are the afternoon. This has helped. (Anna)
She felt she was better able to teach her students if their “abilities” were more similar.

**Extracurricular**

In the HSES section there were a lot of teacher comments about the extracurricular opportunities and outside of school experiences that were available to HSES students. The opposite of this came through as a theme for LSES students.

> When I teach a lesson I try to incorporate things that provide background knowledge. I have to start each lesson thinking that the students probably haven’t been exposed to what I am going to talk to them about. I have to constantly think about background knowledge or they can never move forward. If we are talking about gardens and what grows in gardens I bring in carrots or celery, or we plant seeds to make a garden; just little examples to try and expose them to all of it. (Anna)

Teachers felt they were so busy trying to provide background knowledge or practice in basic skills that it seemed impossible to find time to provide enrichment opportunities.

> I think students come already behind at a low SES school. They come without having exposure to the world. They also haven’t been spoken to a lot. They are behind in their vocabulary. I can hand them a book and if it is upside down they don’t even know that it is upside down. I can hand them scissors or pencils and they don’t know what to do with them because they haven’t been exposed. (Anna)

They spoke of how LSES students rode buses, fixed meals and organize complex schedules (Cathy, Judy, Mark, Morgan), but did not bring those skills up when recognizing useful background knowledge.

> Teachers felt their students did not have access to activities outside of the regular school curriculum. They had not “been to the zoo, or been to a museum, or gone to places and experienced the world. Yes, they have gone to amusement parks and carnivals, but they have not had much exposure to academic things” (Anna). Anna had written grants for her students to attend field trips, but they were not usually funded. She could not
figure out why “people” did not understand her students needed to experience things, not just read about them.

Teachers believed their LSES students usually went home at the end of the day to help babysit, watch television, or play video games. They did not feel there were many structured opportunities being provided, or time spent talking with adults. Kristine mentioned how she would teach them how to play “regular, simple” games at recess like kick ball or four-square. She wanted them to be able to learn things they could do outside of school for fun to take their minds off the tragic things which happened in their homes.

**Emotionally Draining**

It was hard for teachers to give so much of themselves, and still see students mistreated, scores lying flat or decreasing, or families disconnected from the academics of school. Morgan stated “I need to go home and get my sanity back. Every day we go non-stop to get the work done, but it never gets done. I need the break because this job takes a lot out of you.” Anna confirmed this feeling.

Sometimes we don’t feel like we are being successful. Sometimes I go home exhausted wondering if I have done everything I could. At the same time the assessments are constantly ongoing. It is constantly increasing. There are little steps that have to be made every day, and each day we have to make that gain. I only have these kids approximately 180 days and I look at the end to see where we need to be, and I look at where each student is and we start the race to the finish.

Teachers felt the race would never be finished, let alone won; but it had not kept the teachers at the LSES school from believing the next day could bring success:

They can learn. They can try. They can be successful just like the kids at an affluent school. All of us in this building know it and that is what keeps us here. There are other teachers who come and start looking at test scores and start trying
to find ways to move out of our school. Those are the teachers that need to go. Even though the results can’t be seen on an end of level test, they can be seen in the individual success stories that happen daily. (Anna)

Teachers at the LSES school felt their students were constantly being measured against a mark that was not relevant to their lives. Testing and accountability mandates placed stress on the teachers, but they felt their first priority was to address their students’ needs as they perceived them.

Four of the five LSES teachers mentioned they liked the feeling of being needed. “What makes a teacher stay here is maybe a need in us that we need to feel needed. We like to feel needed and maybe other teachers don’t” (Anna). Some of the teachers likened this desire to a spiritual calling. They felt they may not have been rewarded for their efforts with a large salary, or high test scores, but they would be rewarded in a different way. This idea was also threaded throughout the interviews when teachers described the many acts of service they provided as a caregiver to their students. The teachers who expressed the idea of “teaching as a calling” also mentioned in their interviews their religious or spiritual beliefs (Anna, Judy, Morgan).

Predictable Routines

Teachers believed predictable routines helped students focus and stay on task. Morgan expressed the belief most of her students came from homes lacking discipline or structure. She felt classroom disruptions could be minimized if parents provided stable routines for children while they were at home. Teachers provided lessons on appropriate school behaviors and they felt this time could have been better spent on identifying the academic needs of their students.
Teachers gathered data at the beginning of the year to help them plan their lessons. Data sources included reading fluency, reading comprehension, and district mandated tests. These scores were used to identify students who needed enrichment or remediation.

I look at [reading comprehension] scores to show me which kids need enrichment. I also look at reading levels. I read with them to see what level they are on at the first of the year. Then I can just judge through the work they are doing that week. If I am not seeing them improve I talk to resource to start the intervention process to see if they can improve and go. Since I have started teaching here I have put a lot of kids in resource. You just start to know what kids are going to need resource. I have also referred kids to resource that didn’t need it, but figuring it out is a part of the process (Morgan).

There was a resolute effort to look at academic data at the beginning of the school year, but there was not a school wide system for tracking student formative data. Anna tracked the number of letters, numbers, and sounds her students could recognize and state. Morgan tracked her student’s ability to stay on task for a certain amount of time. Yet, unlike the HSES school, teachers did not state that tracking student data was a part of their routine. Even though teachers had been provided additional software programs and technology to track student data at the LSES school, they felt they could not give up their teaching time to collect and input the data.

LSES teachers tried to individualize the instructional needs of their students. Melissa made a concerted effort to make sure she paid as much attention to areas of success as well as areas of needs. She felt LSES students were either overlooked if they excelled in an area, or they were asked to spend their time helping other students instead of enriching their own learning. This was a continual frustration for her.

The teachers felt the day-to-day teaching needs put their students behind “even
after the first day” (Anna). There were not school and grade level priority skills mentioned by LSES teachers, as there had been at the HSES school. For example, Judy stated: We have interventions in reading. If they haven’t learned to read in kindergarten and first grade, and they are struggling, then we focus on it.”

Morgan felt predictable routines helped students manage themselves more effectively.

My class this year is my best. It is very well-functioning. Yesterday I got home from work and thought to myself, “I don’t think I got on anyone to sit down and be quiet today.” I didn’t have to repeatedly ask for their attention. A well-behaved class gives me their attention quickly, focuses on their work, they talk to their partners when asked, and they follow directions. It is when they do what is expected of them.

Her statement emphasized observable physical and behavioral attributes to determine if the class was well-functioning; learning outcomes were not mentioned.

In the LSES classroom’s routines were perceived to provide students a sense of comfortable and stability. By not interrupting the day for “extra’s” that weren’t a part of daily schedules, the students were believed to be better behaved. Morgan stated:

When I first started teaching there was a lot of extra things we would do. We would have Apple Day for Johnny Appleseed. We would bring in apple cider and they would do work that went along with apples. These kids don’t handle things outside the routine well. We talk as a second grade team about when we will do some of the traditional fun things, and I don’t want to do it because it makes the kids out of control.

Even though there may not have been time for “extra” fun things, students were rewarded academically, socially and behaviorally.

**Rewards and Discipline**

**Rewards.** Teachers mentioned two types of rewards at school: rewards for
students, and rewarding experiences for themselves. LSES teachers loved being able to find ways to reward their students for both behaviors and accomplishments. An emphasis was placed on extrinsic rewards, but intrinsic opportunities were also given. The LSES teachers felt a need to reward student follow through on expectations or routine behaviors such as turning in homework, coming to school on time, and not being absent. LSES students were rewarded for reading 20 minutes each night. They received flashlights, bookmarks or stickers so that they would read more (Anna, Morgan, Judy). For example:

I give out Brag Tags (necklaces that awards are attached to) to students for kids who are doing good things academically. For example, if they are doing a lot of reading I give them beads that can go on the necklaces. The Brag Tags say things like, “Be a buddy not a bully,” “You are caught doing something good,” “Bucket Filler,” and other tags. They get beads to change things up so that more kids can get more rewards. I try to do it every week but we don’t always have time. They get one every month for not missing any school days or by not being late. (Morgan)

Students were perceived to need a lot of additional encouragement to complete daily tasks.

Melissa was the only teacher who spoke of ways students were intrinsically rewarded. She designed lessons where the students would be able to “feel” the difference between receiving an extrinsic reward and an intrinsic reward.

At the beginning of the year we talk about intrinsic motivation. We set a goal to beat our [own] times. We do a group juggle that is hard. We have to keep trying over and over and we time ourselves. We set a goal to beat that time. It takes a few trials. When we finally achieve our goal and are able to yell and scream I ask them, “didn’t that feel great?” I tell them, “That feeling is not something I can pull out of my drawer and give to you.” I ask them what it would have felt like in achieving the goal if it had been too easy. Would we have cheered? Would we have felt that great if it were that easy? They recognize that by setting challenging goals and working towards them, the feeling in achieving them in the end is what you want.
Melissa continually expressed the need to challenge her students, and she felt students needed to learn to persevere through their struggles.

Teachers of LSES students were not always able to see the long term results of the work they did with students. They saw results throughout the school year, and even saw students in the following elementary grades, but they always wondered about their students once they had left the elementary school. Whenever a teacher mentioned a student returned to visit them, it seemed like one of the greatest “Thank You” gifts they could have received. For example, Judy felt the connections she made with students lasted forever because she “was able to spend that one on one time with them in their homes.” Another example was when Anna had the daughter of one of her former students in her class and

During parent teacher conferences, the mom tells me that she hated to read as a kid, but it was me taking the time to help her find books of interest in the library and bringing her different books that has now made her a reader. She wants to plant this love of reading into her little girl. That made me smile.

This seemed to validate the time they had invested, and the relationships and connections which were formed and valued. Most of the teachers who mentioned students who returned to reconnect, felt the students who remembered them the most were those who had required extra attention or discipline.

**Discipline.** The LSES school had a school wide discipline plan in place. The administrator was perceived as very supportive, and helped teachers when behavioral situations became severe. Teachers used different forms of a clip chart or “turn cards” for students to be able to recognize and track their behavior throughout the day. Teachers had used the charts for many years as a system to warn students of inappropriate behavior.
Each teacher was required to find a method to support the plan, and the consequences for
the infractions were supposed to be consistent.

The teacher next door has students turn cards for discipline. I didn’t like that
because students can only move down. I tell them they move up when their
behavior is improving and down when their behavior gets worse. I have trouble
with kids when they are asked to move their clips down. They will cry. They
move to the corner and sit for a few moments and then I go over and talk to them.
(Morgan)

Teachers felt the charts helped students recognize the level of their behavior, and to
immediately know the accompanying consequence.

The LSES teachers (Anna, Judy, Melissa, Morgan) found student’s behaviors
were better when they constantly received reminders about expectations. For example:

Every day we go over the rules and what we do to treat each other nicely. These
are good kids. One of the things we have to work on is how to not be quick to
anger, to not tattle and to give each other a break. This classroom is supposed to
be a safe place. (Judy)

Teachers felt students were exposed to relationships at home where they experienced
violence, or inappropriate discipline measures. They wanted to be able to model a
different structure in the school.

Behaviors mentioned at the LSES school which required discipline measures
seemed much more severe than those mentioned at the HSES school. A few of the
behaviors or situations mentioned were:

I had six suspensions in one year at my LSES school. Full suspension; three due
to sexual assault in the class. One child was being sexually abused by his father
and we found out that year. And he would soil himself to have people avoid him.
That is the way he avoided contact. He was in fifth grade. That was his way
warding off predators essentially. (Mark)

I had one student a month ago get suspended for giving another student drugs.
When I was in fifth grade I didn’t even know what drugs were, but it is a real
thing for them. These kids should just be allowed to be kids, and be able to play. The hardest thing they should have to worry about is who they are playing with at recess, and that is not the case at times. (Kristine)

I kept trying to help a boy in my classroom manage his behavior. He was out of control, and it seemed like we were just waiting out the time it took for the referral to go through for him to be accepted in a Behavior Unit. In the meantime he ended up going into a rage and started destroying everything in the classroom. He ended up throwing a punch and hitting me in the face. That is when he was put on the fast track to the Behavior Unit. (Morgan)

Even though these situations were extreme, teachers felt they learned the basics of classroom management from being in a LSES school.

Not all of the discipline problems at the LSES school were dangerous. Some of the misbehaviors dealt with students using bad language (Kristine, Melissa), and telling on each other (Anna, Judy, Melissa, Morgan). These were things the teachers felt all schools dealt with, but perhaps not as frequently as at their school.
CHAPTER VI
ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This section analyzed the emergent themes of teacher perceptions according to the findings; comparing and contrasting them with the previous literature findings on LSES and HSES students. The findings were developed around the pattern of teacher’s backgrounds, values, and beliefs impacting their day to day interactions with their students. The three central study questions were: (1) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding students from high and low socioeconomic status in their classrooms? (2) How do teacher perceptions regarding students’ socioeconomic status influence their teaching? and (3) What personal life experiences and understandings do teachers draw on when making sense of students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds?

My positionality played a role in the interpretation of the results in this study. Prominent to the examination of qualitative work the researcher must first analyze their own epistemological groundings. This process aided me in understanding how my own lived experiences influenced the overall research design, research process and the analysis. By having engaged in the epistemological reflection of “the relationship between what we know and what we see [and] the truths we seek and believe as researchers” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 103), it assisted me throughout the study in interviewing the participants and analyzing the findings.

I utilized three categories to represent all teacher participants: practicing, middle-class, and educators. Eight of the 10 teachers could be described as current, White, female, middle-class, and educators. One participant could be described as African-
American, female, middle-class, educator; another could be described as White, male, middle-class educator. After I identified the emergent themes, I cross checked the analysis making sure it centered on lived experiences of individuals and examined individual and group identities (Collins, 2007, 2009; Dill, 2009; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Jones et al., 2012; McLaughlin & Nieves, 2007).

Not all teachers in this study were of color; however, they were all racialized people. This study centered on the teacher perceptions of LSES and HSES students. Of the 10 teacher participants, four had only taught at LSES schools, four had previously taught at LSES schools and were currently teaching at HSES schools, one had taught at a HSES school and was now teaching at a LSES, and one had taught only at a HSES school. All participants were asked about their LSES and HSES students regardless of which school they taught.

The analysis of the findings was written from the combined webs in which they developed within the data. For example, when looking at the overarching theme of the perceived impact parents had on their student’s education, these findings could also be found in the sections Family, Role-Models, HSES Parents, and LSES Parents.

**Answering Question One**

1. *What are the perceptions of teachers regarding students from high and low socioeconomic status in their classrooms?*

The experiences and ideas of teachers revealed their lived experience in a racist, classist, gender-biased society. This study did not answer the question as to how these
perceptions impacted the students, but previous studies (Tyler & Boelter, 2008) claim a teacher’s perception of a student influence the perception the student has of themselves. Overall, students’ problems or achievements were not seen as stemming from socioeconomic conditions; instead, they were seen as rooted in the hard work, or lack thereof, of their parents or themselves. This coincides with the work of Liu et al. (2007) who found that White teachers did not recognize that the privileges they were afforded were not experienced by all. Teachers expressed a sense of resignation and sadness when referring to their students of LSES. Their affirmations of “these students can,” had the shadowing impression of both great hope and desperation.

**Deficit and Additive Thinking**

Teachers expressed the belief parents were instrumental in impacting their child’s academic success. This mindset became either negative or positive, depending on the SES of the parent. Although the “culture of poverty” had been discredited by scholars (i.e., Ladson-Billings, 2009), it still remained a part of the teachers’ explanatory framework when they spoke of their LSES students and families. Teachers in this study believed LSES parents lacked economic stability (Jensen, 2009), did not provide loving family support (Gorski, 2008), and were deficient in the area of academic intelligence (Bradshaw, 2006; Collins, 2007; Payne, 1996). Teachers also felt parents appeared unhappy (Peterson et al., 1995), unskilled (Milner, 2013), untalented (Payne, 2009), and unhopeful (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Peterson et al., 1995). Even those teachers who had grown up in LSES homes seemed to “blame the victim” and expressed frustration that LSES parents were not doing enough for their children.
Teachers spoke more kindly of LSES parents who they perceived to be actively trying to reverse the cycle of poverty. This supported the relative poverty belief that impoverished people remain poor because they were unwilling to work hard enough to provide a better life for their family (Fischer et al., 1996). Blame was placed on the LSES parents and they were perceived as not being willing to give up short term rewards for long term success (Fischer et al., 1996). Families who were new to LSES were perceived to have more tools to help themselves or their children to increase their SES, these parents were viewed as “visitors” to the LSES world and were perceived to be “good” parents. Teachers felt parents who were new to LSES felt more comfortable interacting with them, while those who had been in poverty longer seemed to have demonstrated a sense of powerlessness. When LSES parents felt their child needed something, or felt something was not fair for their child, they usually would not take their needs to the school administration.

Parents of HSES students were believed to possess additive values such as being more stable, with better parenting techniques. Replicating the finding of Suniya Luthar (2003, 2013) the findings within this study suggested teachers were not aware of negative impacts of affluence. Students at HSES schools were perceived to be leaders, well-dressed, supported by families, and in constant need of enrichment (Barton, 2004; Carey, 2005; Gorski, 2003, 2007; Lareau, 2000).

Conflicting paradigms of teacher perceptions regarding their HSES students centered on the length of time a student had lived in a HSES environment. Supporting the findings of Zhu (2009), students who had newly acquired HSES were not perceived to
value education as much as their HSES peers who had lived in generational affluence. The word choices the teachers used when describing these students developed into a pattern of thought indicating that if a parent did not need education to become rich, then they would not value education for their children. Yet parents of HSES students, both new to the status or not, generally felt comfortable going directly to the school administrator first if they had a need. This response was congruent to the research on how parents interact at LSES and HSES schools (Lareau, 2000). The HSES parents felt they could inform the school and have an equal say in the education of their child.

**Bullying Versus Teasing**

It was also found when similar behaviors were exhibited by students of varying SES they were classified differently. Interestingly, the LSES teachers referred to these negative student behaviors as bullying, and the HSES teachers referred to similar behaviors as either teasing or behavior disorders. These perceptions led to different discipline measures. HSES students were talked to and advised on their behavior, and LSES students were given the consequence of breaking a rule. Unfortunately, these teacher perceptions perpetuated biased behavior.

It was mentioned by two LSES teachers that students who had been bullied later became the bullies. A meta-analysis conducted on bullying (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010, p. 66) found it was not uncommon for a bully to become the perpetrator, known as “bully victims.” Bully victims were identified as more likely than either bullies or victims to risk greater adversity later on in life, including carrying weapons, incarceration, and continued hostility and violence toward others. Further
research indicates 77% of all students have been verbally bullied by the time they graduate (Stop Bullying, Harassment, and Anti-Bully in School/Work, 2013). There was a noted distinction between being bullied and being teased. If name calling occurred at the school in a joking manner without the intent to hurt someone, it was perceived by the teachers to be teasing. If the recipient was offended or asked the person to stop and they did not, then it was raised to the level of being considered bullying.

The tendency for teachers to use “softer” terms to describe inappropriate behavior for HSES students and harsher terms for their LSES counterparts may contribute to the student’s perceptions of themselves. In revisiting the work on perceptions, it was found that teacher attitudes and behaviors did impact student learning (Milner & Williams, 2008). The words teachers use to describe their students also influenced their behaviors when working with them (Hilliard, 1991; Schein, 1992).

**Emotional Needs**

HSES students and parents were perceived to have more anxiety than their LSES counterparts. Students openly spoke of being medicated for it, and parents were perceived as trying to make their children’s lives perfect in both their experiences and their accomplishments. This supported the findings of Luthar (2013) who stated “…the offspring of the affluent today are more distressed than other youth” (p. 62). The emotional impact the anxiety had on the HSES students was often demonstrated in physical ways such as students wetting their pants or easily crying.

An example of a teaching practice that produced high anxiety in HSES students was math timings. Contrary to researcher findings (Anyon, 1980; Doob, 2013) that
indicated LSES students were given drill and practice assignments to prepare them for labor or factory work, the HSES school was the only school that indicated they used timings on a daily basis. The belief was that if they could get students to memorize basic facts then their minds would be freed up to engage in more meaningful learning. This practice was found to increase student anxiety, but it was deemed to be necessary for their academic growth.

Many of the teacher’s comments relegated the real struggles LSES students faced to merely a lack of perseverance or an affliction of “learned helplessness” (Peterson et al., 1995, p. 8). They constantly strove to find ways their students would value education. This perception had been validated in studies in which early elementary students had thoughts and behaviors indicative of learned helplessness (Peterson et al., 1995) and “disillusionment regarding school excellence” (Lyman & Luthar, 2014, p. 913). Teachers of LSES students tried to find ways to motivate their students with extrinsic rewards, and to begin to create “good study habits” they felt were missing. Anna was the only teacher of LSES students who felt her student’s basic needs were being met through federal money, welfare systems, and the help of religious organizations. She was familiar with these things on a personal level, therefore, her expectations of herself centered on filling in the missing gap of academic teaching, and empowering her students to learn.

Answering Question Two

2. How do teacher perceptions regarding students’ socioeconomic status influence their teaching?
Central to this question was identifying the themes in the findings when comparing the LSES and HSES transcripts to see if varying SES impacted the methods of teaching or expectations of performance teachers had for their students. Previous research (Anyon, 1980; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Lareau, 2000) indicated there was a distinct difference. The importance of this question correlates to the belief that teachers hold a position of power, and within that role they decide “what they pay attention to and reward, the ways they allocate resources, role modeling, how they deal with critical events” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 41). In order to frame this section of the analysis, the following scenarios have been compiled from teacher transcripts to describe a “regular” school day in the life of a student at a HSES or LSES school. These scenarios were provided to the school administrator for review to ensure the accuracy of the accounts.

A “Regular” High Socioeconomic Status School Day

After analyzing the teacher interviews a “regular” school day experience for a HSES student would usually progressed in this way:

*Parents lovingly dropped their child off at school or perhaps entered the school to either volunteer or connect with the teacher. The HSES students were usually prepared, and teachers provided opportunities to spring board their learning experiences with the idea they could enrich, promote, and strengthen talents. Students who had been absent returned their completed homework and were prepared to engage in the daily lesson. HSES students experienced collaboration opportunities with their peers to increase their critical thinking and creativity.*

*While the students worked the HSES teachers tracked student data in all content and behavior areas in order to have each child demonstrate growth. Sometimes the students teased each other for various reasons, but there was an overall pleasant atmosphere in the school. From the data, HSES teachers rewarded creativity, personal bests and student leadership. HSES students were given*
rewards to develop more leadership experiences.

As the day progressed the HSES students were offered extra enrichment opportunities to help them become well-rounded. Powerful predictable practices helped the lessons transition smoothly. As teachers worked with their students they strived to provide for their students’ basic physiological needs, especially in the area of personal safety. Many of their students were highly anxious due to the stress and pressures at home or within school.

Parents could be seen in the hallways, office, and classrooms, volunteering and being an important part of the school structure. There were many opportunities for students to either see or be a positive role model throughout the day. At the end of the day the students hurried out the door for their extended learning opportunities in dance, sports, music lessons, and even drama practice. At the end of the day the HSES teachers felt emotionally drained due to high parent expectations and their personal expectations of providing for the needs of each individual student while maintaining high academic scores. They also felt fulfilled because they had served their community and positively impacted the lives of their students.

The scenario above validates research studies that found teachers tended to assume students from HSES had a firm educational background, sound work habits, and a familiarity with the schooling system (Ehrenreich, 1989; Davis-Kean, 2005; Luthar, 2003). It also gives credence to the study of Anyon (1980) in which HSES students were typically provided critical thinking tasks, praise for leadership, and opportunities to develop their creativity in the classroom.

A “Regular” Low Socioeconomic Status School Day

According to the combined teacher interviews a “regular” school day experience progressed according to this pattern:

The LSES student enters the school after either walking to school or arriving early before school as their parents dropped them off before work. Students who were absent were given the homework they had missed while they were gone. The students would have opportunities to speak with each other (collaboration) with the goal of increasing speaking fluency. At times student bullying occurred, but
there were school wide consequences that were met if this occurred.

While the students worked, teachers tracked data from homework, reading fluency, and summative testing. From the data LSES teachers rewarded returned homework, home reading, and student kindness with stickers, beads, and pencils. As the day progressed the students were provided learning experiences to build the background knowledge deemed necessary for them to succeed in an academic setting.

As teachers worked with their students they strived to provide the basic needs of safety, food, love and belonging, and they constantly tried to be a positive role model for their students. They believed many of their students were anxious about where they were going to live, when food was going to be provided, and where they would find clothes that were suitable to the elements. Students were actively seen helping each other by being kind and accepting of all.

District hired tutors could be seen in the hallways, office, and classrooms, working with students and being an important part of the school structure. At the end of the day the LSES teachers were drained due to trying to provide the structure and support parents were not giving their children at home and their personal expectations of providing for the needs of each individual student while trying to increase student academic scores. Teachers also felt fulfilled because they had both served their community and given their students hope for a better life.

The LSES scenario substantiates findings from previous research where students were provided with teaching practices that involved low level thinking tasks and lower expectations (Gilbert, 2008; Hilliard, 1991; Jensen, 2009).

The HSES and LSES scenarios were not meant to be all inclusive or promote a stereotype; rather, their purpose was to create a framework of the stated teacher perceptions and the actions and situations that led to these beliefs. The following analysis takes the stories and further delineates the analysis of how teacher perceptions influence their thinking into the subsequent sections: (1) Teaching Standards, (2) Parents, (3) Consequences and Rewards, (4) Role Models, (5) Race and Colorblindness, and (6) Efforts for Equitable Teaching.
Teaching Standards

When teachers felt students came into their classrooms unprepared for the grade level curriculum, they referred to these students as “low” (Anna, Megan, Morgan, Trisha). They had been charged with teaching standards that were set by the district and measured by state level tests. LSES teachers felt their students needed more background knowledge in order to be successful at school instead of questioning what knowledge was held as important or worth knowing. They did not question whose background was being valued, as the current system was wrapped in White norms and values. The book *Waiting for Superman* (K. Weber, 2010) alluded that LSES schools consciously made an effort to compensate for things students had not received thus far in their lives. Teachers in this study referred to this deficit as “background knowledge.” Teachers recognized LSES students rode buses, fixed meals and organized complex schedules (Cathy, Judy, Mark, Morgan), but they were unable to link those skills to an academic setting. They wanted to lift their students above their impoverished situation and give them hope for a better future, but they did not recognize the height of the platform the students were already on. They did not recognize the additive value of the lived experiences their students already possessed (Cassidy, 2006; Gorski, 2008; Kenyatta 2012).

There have been schools that adopted a “standards-plus” approach wherein they recognized the academic, social, and cultural knowledge and expertise students brought to the classroom (Pollock, 2008). More concretely, schools could create new measures that “give credit for the skills students need to negotiate bilingual or bicultural terrains” (p. 100). Instead of devaluing LSES students’ past experiences, and trying to replace
them with middle class normative academic experiences valued for testing results, there should be a focus on identifying, valuing, and building upon student’s strengths.

**Parents**

How teachers perceived parents influenced the expectations they had for their students, the type of work that was assigned, and the type of support that was expected from home. Researchers (Lareau, 2000) found that parents of LSES students felt unwelcome at schools; however, this was not found in this study. Parents were an active part of the school setting as evidenced by their participation in parent teacher conferences, assemblies, plays, and other school events. Parents came to their children’s conferences, plays, and events. This study did support previous research where parents of low SES students felt educating students was the responsibility of the teacher (Lareau, 2000).

The largest difference in teacher perceptions was how they felt a lack of volunteer support from LSES parents in the classroom, and an abundance of support from HSES parents. This perception further affirmed the belief that HSES parents cared more about their children’s education. Teachers did not reflect metacognitively about the type of support being asked for or offered by both classes of parents. Teachers asked for parents to volunteer in the classroom during school hours, or to teach lessons according to the district standards to enrich the classroom experience. Teachers did not appear to have any depth of knowledge of what parents had to offer outside of those parameters.

Morgan, an LSES teacher, felt supportive homes made the greatest impact on student success. She stated, “If you can have family support at home [I] think it could
solve a lot of the problems.” Although not to the same extreme, all teachers who had mentioned they had grown up with a stay at home mom, also expressed this structure to be in the best interest of their students. The term “supportive” parent was based on White, middle-class beliefs.

A first step to bridging the deficit views teachers held towards LSES parents with the additive views of HSES parents, is for teachers to get to know and trust their students’ parents, regardless of SES. Beverly Tatum stated, “Parents must be partners with teachers in developing and implementing an appropriate education plan. Otherwise, an overt or covert battle between parents and teachers is likely to ensue” (Pollock, 2008, p. 311). The next step is to be open to discussions about racism or classism so that conversations can begin that rectify misconceptions or bias.

**Consequences and Rewards**

Both schools had created a school wide discipline plan. The HSES school felt this structure was one of the most important first steps in learning, and every teacher utilized the same rules, consequences and rewards system. The HSES students were recognized for perfect scores, finished programs and personal bests. They were rewarded with leadership and event opportunities in order to encourage students to be strong leaders. The behaviors students were disciplined for, such as being sneaky, cheating, using racial slurs, or being violent in the classroom, were referred to by teachers as “nonrisk.” The belief that these actions were not egregious attested to their own White privilege, or their own perception of what was normal or acceptable.

The LSES school had a school wide plan, but individualized consequences as
determined by the teacher. Students were rewarded for returning homework, completing home reading assignments, coming to school on time, and for not being absent. They were rewarded with beads, books, stickers, and pencils. LSES students were also disciplined for exhibiting the same behaviors as their HSES peers, but they were given much more severe consequences such as being referred to the office for bullying or given safe-school violations.

It appeared that HSES students, who were perceived to have access to material things, were given rewards that were not concrete, instead they were provided with opportunities or experiences. LSES students were perceived by teachers as needing material trinkets and were rewarded for following the scheduled daily expectations. These diametrically opposing expectations and beliefs may contribute to the inequity found in schools, as HSES students are given access to social structures and experiences that LSES students are not.

Schools should begin to look into their practices of rewards and consequences. They should look to see if there is a disproportionate amount of students of color or LSES, that are being identified in disciplinary actions (Noguera, 2001). Second, they need to decide if their philosophy in providing consequences is to humiliate, punish, or teach, and then they should determine if the consequence aligns with their philosophy. Last, they should examine their system of rewarding students. Teachers should find ways to reward students through leadership opportunities through both independent and interdependence models. This is a proactive model built on the belief that “taking leadership roles and collaborating in teams increases student responsibility and helps
students become more confident” (Jensen, 2013, p. 140). This confidence will allow them to feel more of a control in their learning, and will help them feel more engaged in the learning process.

**Role Models**

Teachers addressed the impact of role models in different ways. Interestingly, the HSES teachers used role models as part of their daily structure. They felt parents, students, and community members, were possible role models for their students, and they utilized this belief to maximize their teaching. The affluence of parents was seen as a success marker that students should attain. Students who achieved great things or showed signs of leadership were applauded and recognized. Community members who held positions of leadership and power, such as the city mayor, recognized students with fire truck rides, lunches and awards. Teachers were seen as filling in the gap of a role model for high attainment in academics.

Conversely to this, teachers of LSES students did not feel parents of LSES students were possible role models. LSES parents were perceived as not graduating from high school or college; therefore, teachers did not feel they could be an adequate role model for academic perseverance. This was also demonstrated with the fact that LSES parents were not given the opportunity to come in and teach lessons to their students. They did feel that other educators, or perhaps themselves, were positive role models for their students. Unlike the HSES school, the LSES teachers did not mention the possibility of students as role models to other students.

Noticeably, neither the HSES nor the LSES teachers mentioned historical or
famous role models. Both groups of teachers looked at their immediate resources, and
delved into their own limited backgrounds to decide who students should look to for role
models. For example, teachers did not mention that African sailors had used the stars to
navigate the oceans, nor did they mention that in mathematics the first confirmed use of
the number 0 in base 10 counting occurred in 896 C.E in India. This lack of looking
outside their community dismissed the possibility of learning from the experiences of,
and looking upon, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Helen Keller, Harriet Tubman,
Marie Curie, or Benjamin Franklin, as possible role models. Students need to see people
who resemble themselves, or who have been in similar circumstances, persevere,
overcome, and achieve.

**Race and Colorblindness**

As the teachers and I talked more, their complicated, often times contradictory,
feelings about their work with impoverished children were also revealed when they
ignored the race and ethnicity of the children in their care. Given that we live in a
colorblind era (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Marx, 2006), it was not surprising teachers did not
mention the race of students in their classroom. Only one of the teachers, who was of
African American heritage, believed that race was a salient factor in her own life and the
lives of her students. There was an overall avoidance of the subject of race for all other
participants. They did not question their basic assumptions that if they taught all students
with the same methods they would achieve the same outcomes. In doing this, teachers
were able to avoid their own Whiteness and the real issues of social injustice.

In a previous study conducted in the same Intermountain West school district
(Norman & Marx, 2013) teachers estimated the student body to be about 10% of color, when in actuality it was 29%. At the same time, they overestimated the number of children from low SES backgrounds, assessing the number at about 80%, when the school average was 61%. This tendency to underestimate the population of students of color, spoke to the inclination of teachers to not acknowledge the race of their students. Complicating this was the propensity of educators to overestimate the number of LSES students in their Title One school. Many times during the Norman and Marx study teachers spoke of LSES students and students of color as thought they were synonymous or mutually inclusive of each other. They believed students of color were most likely to be LSES.

**English language learners.** Teachers seemed to complicate poverty and color in our conversations, though, given their hesitancy to call attention to color, they highlighted children’s race and ethnicity covertly. Many times the teachers used the term English Language Learner to speak about students of other races, steering clear of an overt conversation addressing racial issues. Teachers mentioned complicating factors ELL students brought to the classroom, such as needing modified assignments or instructions, or the belief ELL parents were not supportive in the classroom. They mentioned that ELL students were “apartment kids” (Pauline) or highly mobile. As Buendia, Ares, Juarez, and Peercy (2004) noted, geographic areas are euphemisms for race, ethnicity, and economic status “and allow those who invoke them to denote meanings about race and class without using politically charged markers” (p. 835). In this case the “geographic markers” were instead “language markers.” ELLs were perceived to
largely to be students of color and lower income, while their English-only counterparts denoted higher income.

Teachers need to begin to examine their own habits of mind and personal belief structures (Jensen, 2013; Marx, 2006). They need to recognize if their perceptions regarding race or class inhibit or expand a child’s learning. For example, by not addressing race or class, a student may feel that a teacher has not “seen” them or does not “know” them, this instills in students a sense of shame. We need to know our students, and they need to know they are valued, in order to teach them (Howard, 2006).

**Efforts for Equitable Teaching**

According to research, teachers and teaching can be one of the most important school factors contributing to a student’s academic success (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Hattie, 2008; Howard, 2006). Teachers’ interactions with students shaped and guided their access to educational opportunities. Teacher beliefs lead to actions, and if those perceptions were biased by race, gender, or class, then students would suffer. Teachers in this study recognized there were experiences they needed to help them understand themselves and their students better. Even though teacher perceptions were distinctly different, they expressed common beliefs on methods to “even the playing field” for the LSES students so they could have a better chance for success in school. They knew disparities existed and they tried to plan ways to ensure students in their class were successful regardless of SES. Teachers wanted their students to have a loving, supportive family, and they believed this was something they could not compensate for this in the classroom.
Teachers tried to think of student SES when planning lessons and events in order to be equitable. One teacher made sure students had costumes for their wax museum project (Cheryl), and she had also stopped allowing students to bring treats in for the class “estimation jar,” so that students wouldn’t need to compete, and situations would not arise that made students feel uncomfortable (Cheryl). Teachers knew they should plan for student differences, but there were few examples given that demonstrated the complexity of what this differentiation meant to teachers.

Teachers felt they might be able to promote more equitable teaching practices if they were required to rotate between schools of varying SES. For example:

We need to switch people around to promote equity. Teachers need to rotate through schools. They need to have some kind of compensation to do that because the low SES schools are harder. Otherwise you will get stuck. You will start to think that where they are at is normal. People in LSES schools think their school is normal and like every other school. Middle SES schools think their schools are what is normal. One school doesn’t have a “normal” for everyone, they have things that are happening in that school that they begin to expect and accept. (Mark)

Interestingly, it was only the teachers at HSES schools who had previously taught at LSES schools who expressed the need for teachers to rotate through schools of varying SES. LSES teachers felt HSES teachers should have the experience of teaching at a LSES school so that they knew what “hard work” (Morgan) really was. LSES teachers did not feel they needed to be a part of this rotation because their perception was the HSES students were easier to teach, therefore their experiences at their LSES school would prepare them for anything.

In checking back with this district, it was a part of their negotiated teacher agreement that administrators should move teachers around every six years. This was a
recommendation, but the district representative said that the movement was usually by teacher choice, and did not occur regularly. We, as part of an educational team, should be open to new experiences that help us increase our own background knowledge. Perhaps it is us that has the background deficit, not our students.

Answering Question Three

3. What personal life experiences and understandings do teachers draw on when making sense of students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds?

Perceptions were oftentimes guided by the teacher’s race, class, gender, and lived experiences as they both identified with, or felt different from their students. For example, teachers who had grown up in an LSES home felt they could understand their students, and their students’ parents. Other teachers recognized there were many experiences their students had they could not fully understand Middle class teachers of HSES students sometimes judged the HSES parents harshly, feeling they were materialistic. The concerns they felt for their students stemmed from their own lived experiences of what was appropriate or normal.

Perception Disparities

If we return to the beginning of this research project, “oppression” was referred to as a system of disadvantages placed upon a group “defined by a power elite as different or inferior on the basis of certain perceived characteristics and is consequently treated in a negative fashion” (Kinloch, 1979, p. 7). If we do not pay attention to the stereotypical perceptions educators have of low and high SES students, then we will continue to
narrow their life-choice opportunities. There are “significant structural disparities” (May, 2015, p. 227) which exist including HSES student’s access to academic language, extracurricular opportunities, and parental support. These inequalities give the HSES students an advantage in school. In the same respect, by not recognizing that HSES students have higher substance abuse, anxiety, parental pressures, suicide rates, and feelings of being disconnected emotionally from the world in which they live than their LSES peers (Ansary, McMahon, & Luthar, 2011; Luthar, 2003, 2013; Lyman & Luthar, 2014), then we are potentially fostering an emotionally unstable population. Why does this matter?

Because no child should be left behind, regardless of parental education or income…Today’s highly educated [affluent] youths will disproportionately hold positions of power in the next generation. Their values will disproportionately shape norms in education, politics, and business. (Luthar, 2013, p. 87)

Educational policies are not the only perpetrator of oppression; instead it may be those who have direct contact with students on a daily basis: the teacher. Teachers must be vigilant in setting aside “norm emulation” (May, 2015, p. 229), by first recognizing their own perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. As this study recognized, a person’s lived experiences influenced their idea of “normal.” This means if we ignore the oppression of our LSES students, and continue to pressure our HSES students to compete and be perfect, then we will continue to not only replicate the world in which we live today, but we will also create a greater chasm of the privileged and the oppressed. The next statement must be made: These teachers expressed a love for their students, and if they were made aware of these subtle, or blatant, teaching differences, I believe they would strive to find a way to provide more equivalent opportunities to their LSES students.

Teachers did not easily recognize that their normative beliefs of race, class, and
gender contributed largely to their perceptions of student abilities. They had perceptions of students based on their own upbringing and belief system, and many felt their role as teacher was to have provided for basic needs (LSES teachers) or to have provided enrichment and leadership opportunities (HSES teachers).

Normal

Overall it was found that teacher’s race, class, gender, and experiences led them to a belief of what was “normal.” When teachers reflected on what students needed in their classrooms they usually expressed a statement parallel to their own personal belief system of normalcy (e.g., mother at home, values about money, and focus on education). If they had a family member with a disability, then they cared deeply about the rights and experiences of students with a disability. If they came from a two parent home, they felt their students should experience the same.

It was also found through the interviews teachers perpetuate what and how they had been taught. The teachers who had lived in an LSES home felt that their students may be disadvantaged because they were unaware of the social structures in HSES homes. They felt they could not teach what they did not know. The complicating factor in this perception was teachers’ felt their students’ behaviors were connected to their backgrounds, role models, and advantages or disadvantages; rarely did LSES or HSES teachers feel that students could attribute success or failure to their own actions.

Both HSES and LSES teachers expressed they felt incapable of fully understanding student who came from a different socioeconomic background from their own. Therefore, if teachers admitted they could not identify with students of different
SES, and attributed the actions of their students to be out of the student’s control, this left the teacher either trying to find someone or something to blame. It also led to teachers feeling frustrated.

The largest influence for all teachers in the study was their view of the roles of mothers and fathers, as influenced by their own race, class, gender and lived experiences. They believed in students having two parent homes, and mothers who were able to stay home while fathers worked. Teachers who were divorced believed the mother still had the responsibility to care for the child by bringing them to school.

Teachers who came from families they believed valued education, also felt education was important for students. This might seem like a common statement, but this belief placed judgments on parents if their child struggled in school. These middle class beliefs became prejudices in the form of “preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information about others” (Tatum, 1999, p. 5). For example, if a child struggled in reading, and the parent was not able to read with the child at home, the parent was perceived to be deficient.

As teachers shared their stories, it was clear that their perceptions of poverty were complicated by their perceptions of race, language, ethnicity, and their own Whiteness. The White teachers did not feel they experienced race on an everyday basis because they were in the majority group, and being white was the norm. This in itself contributed to their perceptions of the children with whom they worked.
Discussion

As the teachers voiced their personal stories, and their perceptions of their students, they held fast to the belief that the biggest influence on their current belief system was how they were raised, and who they interacted with on a daily basis. They did not recognize their biased perceptions based on race, class and gender. This coincided with both Erikson’s (1950) work in which he stated the ego (self) was developed through social interaction, and with Deaux and Burke’s (2010) research of how individuals develop a sense of self by connecting and identifying with significant others or groups of others, in this case White hegemony. Their responses ranged from what they believed individually, to how this impacted their actions as a faculty in a school setting.

Teachers stated beliefs and expectations during the interviews had a tendency to separate the poor, and rich into distinct groups of capable and incapable (Gilbert, 2008), which solidified the structure in which social injustice occurs. This was an affirmation of the work of Jean Anyon (1980) in which students were taught according to their social class, and the teacher’s belief of what type of job the student would have in the future. The beliefs of the middle-class educators held that most students within a certain class category shared similar characteristics, and if a student did not fit into the preconceived categories, they were an exception.

Previous research has found that White teachers working with children of color from low-income backgrounds shared the common view that they were champions, making immense personal sacrifices with little reward (Marx, 2006). This is commonly understood as a “savior” mentality and has been much studied in the case of White
teachers working with children of color (e.g., Marx 2006).

Education, as a system, has been the gateway for controlling access to opportunity and knowledge. I approached this by “exploring identity salience as influenced by systems of power and privilege” (Jones et al., 2012, p. 702). I looked at the power structures embedded within teaching strategies, classroom discipline, and student opportunities to see if themes emerged that affirmed systems of power were still in place.

The majority of teachers in the study did not question the power relationship of the current educational system; for example, LSES schools received Title I funds, HSES schools received more parent support. Both schools felt their situation (either receiving more federal funding, or having more parent support) actually put them at a disadvantage. The LSES school lamented the fact they did not have more parent volunteers, and the HSES school felt neglected because they received less federal funding. Even though teachers at the HSES school admitted they did not have any needs that their parents would not provide for, they did not understand the difference between equity and equality. They felt that all schools should receive the same federal and district support, and that if their community could provide more, that should not be “held against them” (Pauline).

Social Justice

A goal of this study was to determine themes in teacher perceptions that might be identified in order to advance “a larger goal of promoting social justice and social change” (Jones et al., 2012, p. 702). Collecting the stories that led to the teacher perceptions of LSES and HSES students centered on adding to the collective body of
literature and study on SES and education. As this was a beginning step, it was at least hopeful when teachers looked back at their interviews, read their transcripts, and then journaled back responses such as, “I can’t believe I actually said those words” (Sharon, HSES School Participant). When thoughts were put into writing they became visible for the person who had only held a perception in their mind. Many sentences on transcripts were asked to be softened because the printed words seemed too harsh for participants to identify with. This did not change the overall data as the emergent theme were still evident, but the way in which the newly worded statements were formed lacked some of the initial social injustice impact the researcher experienced after the initial interviews. Statements such as “poor kids,” became “students in LSES homes” and “hopeless parents” became “parents in challenging situations.” All participants left with a spoken desire to learn more about how they could promote social justice in their classrooms and at their school.

**Colorblind Ideology and Socioeconomic-Blind Ideology**

When teachers spoke of their ideas to increase equity for their students, some teachers made a point to state that they did not notice the SES of their students, even if “other” teachers might. The following section provides ideas supporting a theme referred to as “SES-blind.” Colorblind ideology states differences according to race are:

Non-existent, such that all Americans are subject to equal opportunity. Accordingly this ideology interprets failure to achieve equal status on the part of the minority persons as an individual (not structural) failure. The idea of colorblindness denies racial difference, thereby masking uneven opportunity relative to racial difference, and precluding policy towards developing equal opportunity. (Riley & Ettlinger, 2010, p. 1261)
By taking a great liberty, and writing this same paragraph differently, and the words “colorblind” and “race” were replaced with “SES-blind” and “SES,” then SES-blind ideology would state there are no differences according to SES. SES-blind ideology would state differences according to socioeconomics are:

Non-existent, such that all Americans are subject to equal opportunity. Accordingly this ideology interprets failure to achieve equal status on the part of the minority persons as an individual (not structural) failure. The idea of SES-blindness denies SES difference, thereby masking uneven opportunity relative to socioeconomic difference, and precluding policy towards developing equal opportunity.

There was no intent to make light of the negative impacts of colorblind ideology, but instead to implore the reader to begin to understand the devastating impacts of not recognizing many forms of social injustice.

There were layers of assumptions, beliefs, and actions that kept the oppression of LSES students cemented in place. LSES students did not have role models at school who looked like them or that came from similar situations as them. This cemented the feeling that only “others” could be role models. LSES students were more harshly disciplined for breaking rules, and they were rewarded for meeting minimal daily expectations (come to school on time and turning in work).

LSES parents were seen as deficient in academic, social, and behavioral areas, therefore their possible contributions were not valued as they sat outside the middle class White norms. As Tatum (1999, p. 11) stated, “Because racism is so ingrained in the fabric of American institutions, it is easily self-perpetuating. All that is required to maintain it is business as usual.” For example, only two teachers mentioned race within
their interviews: Melissa, the African American teacher, and a White HSES teacher who commented, “I haven’t had too many [students] teased about their color.” The White teacher felt discriminatory comments made about a student’s race were just a part of the teasing children experience, and she compared it to the same as when students poked fun at each other’s clothing. The teacher was oblivious to her own role in maintaining social injustice. The avoidance of nine of the ten teachers to even recognize race within discussions further mirrored the colorblind, SES-blind ideology.

**Limitations**

Qualitative research creates the opportunity to listen to, watch, and learn from others. This research recognized background experiences participants had which influenced them, yet, as I looked for “evidence of layers of suppressed meaning” (Code, 2011, p. 206) after reviewing teacher transcripts, the end coding was through my own perceptions. As a White researcher working with mostly White participants, and as a person growing up in an impoverished environment, I strived to make sure my interpretations of teacher comments were broader than my own perspective. I did this through in depth research of multiple studies, articles, and investigations. I included HSES teachers with the purpose of expanding my own knowledge base to see the strengths, weaknesses, trials, and triumphs of HSES schools. I was better able to compare and contrast the results to add to my own knowledge and the larger research community.

Due to strict guidelines with the participating district, the interviews were limited to the teachers. Access to observe the students was not given. This study examined teachers in two schools in one district. These teachers did not represent everyone who has
worked with low and high socioeconomic class students. Schools with similar populations may have differing results due to other school factors, and therefore results are not generalizable to all subgroups and subpopulations.

**Recommendations, Further Research, and Conclusion**

The final step in this research, after exploring, documenting, and identifying themes, was to provide possible solutions to the identified issues. The first recommendation is to have teachers become aware of who they are, and what their internal belief structure is. The second recommendation is to have teachers identify their own perceptions. Next is to provide a way for teachers to decide how their perceptions influenced their teaching, and their students. The final recommendation is to identify what changes are needed to take place in teacher’s thinking or actions. The recommendation listed above, having teachers become aware and then do something about their new awareness, could be completed through professional development offerings for teachers.

**Preservice Teachers**

Children of multicultural complexity, like my own nieces, nephews, and grandchildren, will be enrolling in our schools at an ever-increasing rate (Howard, 2006). Students of color make up more than 40% of the school-age population, yet teachers of color make up only 17% of the teaching force (Boser, 2014). The number of children from impoverished backgrounds has also been steadily increasing. More than 23% of children live below the line of poverty (NCES, 2013). As evidenced from the research
conducted in this study, public schools are dealing with levels of diversity teachers are unfamiliar with and untrained for. The first step to begin to address this is to attract teachers of diverse backgrounds into the teaching field. This is not an easy task as the achievement gap amongst students of color and impoverished students indicates that fewer of these students graduate as compared to their White, middle class peers (Boser, 2014).

Next, curriculum must be developed and implemented for teachers to begin to identify their own perceptions. Preservice teachers could study the works of Marx (2006) to begin to recognize and confront passive racism in schools. The acknowledgement of their own racism may empower them to change their behaviors to become the change they wanted to see. They could then further study the works of Gorski (2013) to understand the myths of poverty and the associated belief systems that have been generated due to these misconceptions. The next step would be to analyze the complex power relationships that occur in school settings with the writings of Howard (2006). Howard stated, “If we as White educators merely turn inward and deal only with our own needs for cultural awareness and racial identity development, we are in danger of perpetuating” (p. 7) the status quo. We must have actions that coincide with new beliefs. Preservice education must provide an understanding of the disadvantaged student populations served along with providing strategies to maximize the learning of diverse students utilizing various resources and methods.

**Professional Development**

During this writing process I began to be more vocal about the literature I had
researched, and the impact the findings had on student education. I began speaking to local schools, and districts throughout the state. The most important piece that I had been missing was the research on HSES students. By comparing and contrasting the perceptions of LSES and HSES teachers, more teachers were eager to learn about student needs and differences. If I noted a finding with perceptions or beliefs of LSES students and contrasted it with a perception of HSES students, the teachers more aptly realized the discussion was not going to be one sided. It added a level of complexity they could think about.

I created and implemented professional development, which started with my story, and wove it into the teacher professional development (Appendix H). I noted that my story was not unique, nor was it something I had shared to get either sympathy or admiration. Instead, the story was a view of my past experiences, and what led me to be the person I am today. By opening up to these teachers, they began to trust me, and were more able to look inward at their own self. The goal was not for them to “see” me, but instead to situate themselves within their positionality.

They began to recognize their own perceptions, and in doing so they were left with choices: Did they want to grow? Did they want to learn more? Were they comfortable with the belief that their job was to teach middle class, White standards to students so that they could do well on a standardized test? The first step of recognition, followed by the second step of a call to action, was then followed by the third step of “how.” How could they change their teaching to meet the individualized needs of each student, including cultural and social recognition and respect for all races and classes?
Educators and administrators, myself included, need to look deeply and critically at the changes we ourselves must first achieve in order to teach the diverse populations of students that enter our door on a daily basis.

**Further Research**

Part of the work of qualitative research places an importance on “residues” (May, 2015, p. 240), which do not immediately have broad reaching themes, or known impacts. Researchers should “recognize residues and treat them as meaningful: do not dismiss the meanings at hand as irrelevant or insignificant if they do not mesh with what is readily known or easily understood” (p. 240). This paper detailed out the major findings within the research but there were several smaller scale beliefs shared or statements made that the larger research community could benefit from knowing. For example, the over-identification of HSES students in gifted programs and the over-identification of LSES students in remediation programs. Each of the findings, could be further researched on a larger scale. Another example, the idea of SES-blind ideology, could be researched in more schools, with more teachers interviewed to gain a more thorough understanding of this belief system or behavior. The idea that teachers felt they could either ignore or chose not to address a disadvantage, and in doing so their student’s classroom experience would be more equitable, is one which needs further research.

**High socioeconomic status stressors.** More work needs to be completed on the role of parents in education regarding HSES students. To date, the majority of the work has focused on student’s emotional stressors which led to substance abuse or feelings of self-doubt, including low body image, perfectionism, competition, and feelings of
emptiness (Luthar, 2003, 2013; Lyman & Luthar, 2014). Whereas, one of the goals of Title I was to “enhance parents’ abilities to help their children succeed through quality parental involvement activities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b, p. 48), there are not similar goals for HSES parents. It has been left for these parents to decide on their own what “quality” activities are, and according to the little research that has been conducted, many of the activities chosen to date are creating students who are emotionally unstable (Luthar, 2003, 2013; Lyman & Luthar, 2014).

This study affirmed that these stressors are indeed occurring, and the consequences are visible physically and mentally. A qualitative study needs to be conducted with HSES parents on their perceptions of their role or duty as a parent raising a child in an HSES community. Another angle would be to interview the HSES students to determine the expectations they have for themselves, and how they feel they will be able to attain them; what will happen if they do, and what might happen if they do not?

**Parent involvement.** Utilizing the same theme as above, more work needs to be conducted on “quality parental involvement activities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b, p. 48). Within the research conducted for this study, activities that have been identified to date are those the school has created and implemented. Further research should be conducted to identify more community opportunities where the school could go to the community and learn from them. The school could also endorse a standards-plus approach and recognize the “nonstandard” skills diverse students have developed in order to navigate, between and within, their own world and the academic world of school.

As I shared the results of this research with others, many school and district
administrators wanted to know if there was a survey that could be created and administered to teachers to help them identify their own perception biases. Further work should be conducted on creating an instrument that could generate a starting point for teachers to begin their journey towards identifying their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. There also needs to be more work done on the impact of teacher professional development involving SES which could lead towards social justice.

Observations of teachers in their classroom should also be conducted and added to the data of surveys, interviews and journals. This data point could compare teacher statements to actions to see if they coincide. Data could also be gathered from students about their perceptions of their own SES.

Conclusion

As a child growing up in poverty, I never wanted anyone to know I was poor. I felt that my family had many rich traditions. I was not ashamed of my socioeconomic status; I just did not want people to give me “that look”—the one that shouted, “You poor thing!” However, as the teachers told their stories, sometimes I, too, wanted to reach in and rescue the children from the environments described. Other times, I felt that I had a deficit view of the teachers. They could not understand the children, I thought, because their backgrounds were so different than their students. For me, the most personally revealing moment came when I realized that my identity as someone raised in poverty did not leave me immune to deficit feelings of my own, both of HSES and LSES environments. The complicated and contrary thoughts and emotions that teachers revealed allowed me to briefly experience their roller coaster feelings of pride, love,
shame and disbelief. They also led me to reflect on and to relive my own experiences being labeled a “broken” child from a “broken” family. Like the teachers I interviewed, and like those reading this manuscript, I am a complex person with varied background experiences. Better understanding how these experiences influence perceptions, and actions can illuminate the complex, contradictory spaces educators and the children in their charge share every day.

Social class and SES should not be a barrier to, or an accelerator of, the learning occurring in a classroom (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Domhoff & Hoyt, 2006; Gorski, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Understanding teacher perceptions towards students from low- and high-SES backgrounds will have an important impact on understanding student achievement and students’ opportunities. Teachers need to see the multi-faceted characteristics of themselves, and know that their identities influence their behaviors and actions. This study may offer a way past those feelings, and perceptions, but first they must be recognized. A teacher’s identity and their attitudes towards teaching and learning are invisibly connected. This link must become transparent to teachers if they are to educate students that are different from themselves (Jones et al., 2012; King & Baxter, 2005). Perceptions are influenced by identity, both in the way we perceive others, and how we think others perceive us. Teachers changed the wording in their interviews because their bias became apparent and they were leery of others viewing them as either racist or classist. The hope is that this new awareness will begin to “deactivate legacies of dominance” (May, 2015, p. 233).
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Letter of Permission to Conduct Research:
Utah State University
Institutional Review Board
U.S.U Assurance: FWA#00003308
Exemption #2
Certificate of Exemption

FROM: Melanie Domenech Rodriguez, IRB Chair
        True M. Rubal, IRB Administrator

To: Sherry Marx, Patricia Norman

Date: February 02, 2015

Protocol #: 6353

Title: Teacher Attitudes And Perceptions Of Low And High Socioeconomic Class Students

The Institutional Review Board has determined that the above-referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2:

Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through the identifiers linked to the subjects: and (b) any disclosure of human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

This exemption is valid for three years from the date of this correspondence, after which the study will be closed. If the research will extend beyond three years, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to notify the IRB before the study’s expiration date and submit a new application to continue the research. Research activities that continue beyond the expiration date without new certification of exempt status will be in violation of those federal guidelines which permit the exempt status.

As part of the IRB’s quality assurance procedures, this research may be randomly selected for continuing review during the three year period of exemption. If so, you will
receive a request for completion of a Protocol Status Report during the month of the anniversary date of this certification.

In all cases, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB prior to making any changes to the study by submitting an Amendment/Modification request. This will document whether or not the study still meets the requirements for exempt status under federal regulations.

Upon receipt of this memo, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (435) 797-1821 or email to irb@usu.edu.

The IRB wishes you success with your research.
Appendix B

Letter of Permission to Conduct Research:
Intermountain West School District
December 12, 2014

Patty Norman

Dear Ms. Norman,

The application for expansion/continuation of your research project entitled “Teacher Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions that Impact Academic Achievement of Low Socio-Economic Status Students” is approved.

As a researcher you are responsible for all aspects of the study. District resources may not be used to conduct the study. All costs associated with the study are paid by the researcher.

Approval at the district level allows each site to then determine whether to participate in your proposed research study or project. District approval, therefore, is not a guarantee that you will be able to conduct the study at the locations, with the employees, or with the students you wish to include in the study or project.

Please remember that any anticipated changes to the study and approved procedures must be submitted to this office prior to implementation. It is our understanding that you will protect the anonymity of individuals involved in the research.

We hope your research proves insightful and fulfilling.

Sincerely,

Logan T. Toone
Assessment, Research & Evaluation Director
Appendix C

Survey
Web-Based Teacher Pre-Survey

1. School:

2. Name:

3. Race/Ethnicity:

4. Gender:

5. Number of Years Teaching:

6. Number of Years in Intermountain West School District:

7. Number of years at current school:

8. Do you live in the school boundaries?

9. Do your children attend, or have they attended, the school you teach at?

10. How would you define low-socioeconomic status?

11. How do you define high-socioeconomic status?

12. What do you consider the socioeconomic status of your household growing up as a child?

13. What do you consider to be the socioeconomic status of your current household?

14. If you answered yes to question 15; what was the situation?

15. If you answered yes to question 15; what were your feelings at the time?

16. Is SES apparent to students?

17. What was your greatest success when working with a low socioeconomic student?

18. How did you measure it?

19. What was your greatest success when working with a high socioeconomic student?

20. How did you measure it?

21. Do you feel socioeconomic status impacts a student’s education?

22. Describe the different identities you have or roles you play as a person:

23. Would you be willing to be contacted for further information?
Appendix D

Interview Questions #1
Interview Questions #1

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about your students.
- Guiding Questions:
  - Tell me their stories or your stories of them.
  - Tell me about parent support.
  - What makes you come to work every day?
  - Do you live in the community?
  - What are the similarities or differences you might have with your students?
  - What is the greatest stumbling block for your students?
  - What is easiest for your students?
  - How do you connect with your students?
Appendix E

Interview Questions #2
Interview Questions #2

- How does the socioeconomic status of your students guide your teaching practices?
- How do perceptions regarding your students’ socioeconomic class influence your teaching?
- How does the SES of your students impact your teaching?
- Guiding Questions:
  - How does your background help you develop lessons for your students?
  - How does your background guide your assessing of your students?
  - How do your students life stories connect with your own life experiences?
  - How do your life stories connect with other teachers lives?
  - What expectations do parents have of their students?
  - What expectations do you have for your students?
  - What thoughts about the SES of your students do you have that you think may be different than that of your colleagues?
  - What advantages do your students have because of their SES?
  - What disadvantages do your students have due to their SES?
  - Do you feel that the current curriculum is useful to your students? Does it reflect who they are as students? Does it show their background and experiences?
  - What do you wish you had more of in your background to help you connect with and teach your students better?
  - What do you bring to the classroom that is unique to you?
Appendix F

Intersectionality Presentation
“Intersectionality” is such an intriguing word. It brings to mind maps and crossroads; the coming together of complexities too hard to describe in one word. Take for example the phrase: “A woman.” Now add to it: “A poor woman.” Add another word to include: “A poor, White woman;” and then: “A poor, old, white Woman;” until finally we reach the descriptors of: “A poor, old, educated, White woman.” Each of these descriptors begins to create a different picture in the mind of the recipient receiving them. The person described is very complex and multi-faceted, as is the person who is receiving the descriptions.

Take a moment to imagine intersectionality as I see it in describing a person. Without the complex matrix of descriptors a person is described with one characteristic; for example “a man.” If you were to describe yourself with one characteristic, one data point, what would it be? Would it truly be describing your being as a whole? This one descriptor is like the baker who rolls out dough and takes a cookie cutter to carefully cut out an exact shape that becomes the shape of a gingerbread man. This same cookie cutter is used over and over again as the baker fills his cookie sheet. Any deviance from this shape is discarded and goes back in the bowl to be reshaped until it comes out as the perfect shape of the gingerbread man. This shape is flat; two-dimensional.

Contrast this with the intricate sculpting of Leonardo da Vinci’s Michelangelo. This statue was made from mounds of clay shaped together with many details and feelings. There are sinews of flesh apparent and wrinkling of the skin. There are scars showing through and texture in the hair. The eyes hold shape and depth of the perceived inner-workings of the non-existent mind of the sculpture. This three-dimensional image still does not represent the complexities of the man the sculptor was trying to create with his clay. Perhaps this analogy should have included the statue of a woman as intersectionality is grounded in the studies of multiracial feminism (Ramirez, 2013).

Take this analogy back to the beginning works of Crenshaw (1989, 1991); as she reviewed the legal case of 5 Black women who had been a part of a “seniority-based” layoff. Crenshaw found injustices due to the legal system trying to force the women into being described one-dimensionally, as a “single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences” (1991, p. 139). The plaintiffs could not be seen as only “women,” because within this definition is the privileges afforded to “White women,” and she understood that “most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened, and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination” (1989, p. 140). These women had to choose whether or not they were being recognized by the courts as women, or as members of the African American race; gingerbread cutouts or a 3-dimensional Michelangelo. The courts stated there would be a case if it had been filed for Black people, or women, but not a “super-remedy” because the case was either “race discrimination or sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both” (141). Should the Black women align themselves with Black men, or White women? The courts felt that if they let the case of discrimination go
through as “Black women,” the women would have an unfair advantage due to the fact
that they have two disadvantaged traits describing them (Crenshaw, 1989; Valentine,
2007). They had to choose.

So stop and think about this for a moment. What should they choose? Are they women?
Are they African American’s? Does one of these traits mean more in the court of law if it
is the cause of discrimination? Put yourself in their place for a brief moment. What would
you choose? More importantly, why would the court system recognize the fact that these
women are doubly disadvantaged and not allow that complexity to enter into the decision
in a court room? The feeling of the courts at that time was that they could not be
rewarded for their multiple disadvantages because it would begin to skew the whole court
system (Crenshaw, 1989).

Race and gender were the initial two crossroads that Crenshaw talked about when
discussing the complex intersectionalities of a person (Crenshaw, 1989), and in
subsequent years (1991) class was added to the matrix. Andersen and Collins (2001)
noted: “At any moment, race, class, or gender may feel more salient or meaningful in a
given person’s life, but they are overlapping and cumulative in their effect on people’s
experience” (p. 3). They will never stand alone.

At this point you may be asking yourself: “What do the study of intersectionalities and
the matrix of oppression (e.g. race, class, and gender) have to do with education?” You
may be thinking that you are not going to be teaching your students about
intersectionality. My challenge for you today is to recognize that these intersectionalities
are a part of every study and are embedded in all of our educational practices. I address
you today as teachers who have a variety of experiences that span the realm of
commonalities and differences on both individual and group levels. In looking at these
foundations I want to instill in you the importance of always looking at the complexity of
a person or a situation (Choo & Ferree, 2010). This can be started by recording,
translating and beginning to find trends in your thoughts and perceptions.

I stand in front of you as a White woman who was born into poverty, educated in a
plethora of different schools, and who now has an advanced degree. Take a moment to let
that sink in. What pictures of my life are now floating in your head? Perhaps you are
asking yourself how long I lived in poverty? Which schools did I attend, and why so
many? What is my class status now, and how did I get there? What I want you to know is
that the intersectionalities that make up who I am are not discrete. Even though I no
longer live in an impoverished environment, those thoughts and lived experiences have
made me the person I am today. I cannot adequately describe myself with one variable
and neither can you, nor will you be able to do this with the students and educational
systems you will be studying.

As teachers, many of you have come from backgrounds of education. Picture with me a
group of students sitting in front of you. What intersectionalities do you bring to the
classroom? What intersectionalities do your students bring that cannot be “checked off”
on a demographic survey? Gutierrez (2007) stated: “Our beliefs, our lived experiences, our knowledge bases, and our agendas all influence how we ‘perform’ in a given setting” (p. 1). While in the classroom, your performance is teaching.

One aspect of teaching in the U.S. that needs to be mentioned is the demographic makeup of the workforce. According to the NCES (2013), White teachers compose 83% of the teaching profession, of which 76% are female. These White female teachers are also coming from rural or suburban environments. This is very different from the intersectionalities of the students they teach. One in five of our students live in poverty (NCES, 2013), and when those numbers are disaggregated by race/ethnic, there are more White students living in poverty, but students of color represent higher percentage based on their population. How will we as teachers, who have such a different complexity of intersectionalities, be able to connect and educate our students? How can we create ways of knowing that are not entrenched in middle class normative values?

Think back to the question I asked you in the beginning about what you would choose if you had to describe yourself with one characteristic, one data point, and one point on the axis. Knowing that you are complex and multifaceted, allow yourself the time to know the intersectionalities that make you into the person you are today; the Leonardo with clay and not the baker with a cookie cutter. I leave with you the wisdom of the Ancient Greek maxim “Know thyself.”

I also leave with you a copy of this presentation, and the works cited within, so that you may continue your studies on intersectionalities.
Appendix G

IRB Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent

Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions of Low and High SES Students

Introduction/Purpose Dr. Sherry Marx and Patty Norman in the Department of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University are conducting a research study to find out more about teacher perceptions regarding low and high socioeconomic class students. You have been asked to take part because your school has been identified as either a Title I school or a Non-Title I school, and you have worked with students for more than three years. The identified schools will each have 5 participants in this research, which is a sum total of approximately 10 participants.

Procedures If you agree to be in this research study, you will be interviewed approximately 60 minutes on a minimum of two separate occasions.

These interviews will take place at your school if you find that convenient. If not, you will be asked to choose a place to meet that is better for you. Participants will be asked to journal and journals will be submitted to and read by the researcher.

Risks Participation in this study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include a small risk of loss of confidentiality but we will take steps to reduce the risk. Students, teachers, and school will be kept confidential for the purpose of the study.

Benefits No direct benefits to the participants are expected, but teachers may have a heightened awareness of their perceptions after reading their transcripts and journals during or after the study. The research may benefit by finding common themes that can be utilized to create further questions to study.

Explanation & Offer to answer questions Patty Norman has explained this research study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Patty at (801) 402-5123 or pnorman@dsdmail.net or Sherry at (435) 797-2227 or sherry.marx@usu.edu

Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequences Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequences or loss of benefits. You may withdraw at any time by e-mailing Patty Norman at pnorman@dsdmail.net, or by calling her at (801) 402-5123. You may be withdrawn from this study without your consent by the investigators if you are unable to meet for interviews or keep a journal.

Confidentiality Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigators will have access to the data which will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer in a locked room. To protect privacy, personal, identifiable information will be removed from study documents and replaced with a study identifier. Identifying information will be stored separately from data and will be kept for three years and then destroyed. Audio-recordings will be
destroyed once they are transcribed.

**IRB Approval Statement** The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at Utah State University has approved this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury and would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email irb@usu.edu to obtain information or to offer input.

**Copy of Consent** You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and keep one for your files.

Investigator Statement “I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered”.

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________________________
Appendix H

School/District Presentations
Poverty, Perception, and Practice

In order to succeed as teachers, we must remain humble in our own journey as learners.

This I believe.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."
- George Bernard Shaw

What is your strength?

Say it in a sentence

Use one word to sum up your strength.
Who Am I?

- Where do you think I grew up?
- What might some of my life experiences have been?
- What socioeconomic class was I raised in?

Think

Write down everything about your students (one item per post-it note) that inhibits their learning.

Talk About It

Organize your post-it notes with your team, stacking similar or duplicate comments.

Organize Thoughts

1. Organize your post-it notes into 3-4 categories.
2. Place a heading on each category.

Share
The effects of poverty are real.

Cumulative Exposure to Stressors
- Parenting
- Financial
- Violence
- Cognitive
- Environmental
- Pollutants

Stable Parenting
- More likely to be raised by single parent
- More likely to experience divorce
- Parents form new relationships, increase mobility
- Constant financial pressure stress relationships

Parental Responsiveness
- Higher stress
- Less responsive to children
- More harsh
- More coercive
- Physical Punishment
- More Excessive
- Emphasize on Obedience
- Less likely to explain their reasoning
Financial Stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Feeling a loss of control
- Social isolation
- Substance Abuse

Violence
- Higher levels of stress hormones-Cortisol which influence:
  - Learning
  - Memory
  - Immunity

Cognitive Stimulation
- Speaks less often and in less sophisticated ways
- Homes contain fewer books and toys
- More television exposure
- Less museum, zoo, park visits

Environmental Stressors
- Noise
- Crowding
- Housing
- Quality of day care
- Pollutants: Air, Food and spaces

Pollutants
- Lack of green spaces or parks
- Higher absenteeism
- Increased respiratory ailments
- Slower learning
- Increased Medical Costs

The educator must believe in the potential power of his pupil, and he must employ all his art in seeking to bring his pupil to experience this power. -Alfred Adler
Statement:

Parents of Low SES Students do Not Care as Much About their Children's Education

The power of education lies in building trust....

How do we make that happen?

Everyone who remembers his own education remembers teachers, not methods and techniques. The teacher is the heart of the educational system.

Sidney Hook

The best teachers are those who show you where to look, but don't tell you what to see.

Alexandra K. Steel

Shame Pride
How will you engage your students?

- We could design math games or games about how much frosting it would take to go around a pizza and, or how large the area needs the pizza yard is. They would see that math of the kids have understandings with them. It universal.
- My how SES kids come to school and have little shame, yet they get free lunches. With the parents they start their readiness. They lose in appearance but they spend their money on other things. I don’t know how to change that cycle.
- We came back after a vacation to write a story and I say, “Tell me what you did over the vacation.” Well, we wanted to go camping or we wanted to go to the movie. We just did more of the same thing. They don’t come up with the same suggestions as SES parents and the engagement level is very low.
- As far as being able to relate and were alone and engaged in what they don’t have a lot of experience, so they struggle with that.

Shame

- A couple of years ago a spelling word was “amended.” I was doing a spelling test, and an ESL kid raised his hand and asked if I had ever been amended. I was like, “What?” I was thinking, “No, I wouldn’t be a teacher if that were the case.” I said, “I never had.” He said, “My dad has for drinking.” In my mind, I was a first year teacher wondering how I could get this class back on track. Yes, they didn’t say a word. I thought, “Am I kidding me?” They just sat there, and I thought, “I’m glad I was amended.” That was fine.
- One kid came to school the second day of school. He said his mom just got on food assistance, and he mom just got like $5000 out of Iran. What? How could it be the case? They were struggling. Money! Good job! Way to go! Kansas. Thanks for the help. It all was as. I was thinking, “What? Why would you still struggle?” Not ashamed. Not embarrassed. They feel entitled.

Practice According to SES

- Rewards
- Expectations
- Patterns
- Anxiety
- Medication
- Friendships
- Community
- Family

Around You...

- Personally reflect (build relevance)
  - Make connections between literature and life
  - Writing reflection on themselves, their lives and their experiences

Students are not asked to learn separate facts and isolated skills, but rather to observe and understand how the skills and knowledge directly relate to their individual lives.

An emotional hook to engage students in the lesson.
Current Social Issue

- Relate text to life....

What is success?

Never let your expectations be limited by what you think is possible.

-Benjamin Bloom

Building Learner/Community Relationships: Wreck it Ralph

What Types of Questions Get Us There?
What is a good title for this picture and why?

Give the text an original title in 5-7 words. Write that title on the yellow index card.

Here is the answer:  
George Washington Carver  
Write the question on blue card.

There are not two worlds - education and work, there is one world - life.

Around You ...  
- Personally reflect (build relevance)  
- Make connections between literature and life  
- Writing reflection on themselves, their lives and their experiences

What is your need?
Create a Culture of Support

- Write down everything you want to change, implement, do, or get rid of now.
- Get with yourself and your team to see what needs to be changed.
- Place the pieces on a board and rank them in order according to what is most important.
- Now, decide if you need to choose just one, what would it be?
- Choose the top 3 pieces.
- Do they reflect your biggest identified need?

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I am not suggesting that going from good to great is easy...... I am asserting that those who strive to turn good into great find the process no more painful or exhausting than those who settle for just letting things wallow along in mind numbing mediocrity.

-Jim Collins
CURRICULUM VITAE

PATTY NORMAN

Professional Preparation

Utah State University  Curriculum & Instruction  2016, Ph.D.
Instructional Leadership

Weber State University  Curriculum and Instruction  2007 M.Ed.
Thesis: Misconception Mapping Using
Collective Wisdom

Weber State University  Elementary Education (K-8)  1992 B.S.

Appointments

Board Member, Utah Association for Supervisors of Curriculum Development, (2014-
Present)

Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Davis School District, Farmington, Utah (2013-
2014)

Northern Utah Curriculum Consortium Chair, Multi-District Consortium, (2013-2014)

Interim Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Davis School District, Farmington, Utah
(2012)

Responsibilities include K-12 curriculum creation, content area supervision, mentoring
supervision, professional development training, and technology training and
implementation for all Davis School District Schools.

Co-Chair and Co-Founder, Utah Students Connect, Multi-District Consortium, Utah
(2011-Present)

Responsibilities include creating a multi-district consortium of seven school districts to
create an online program complete with online curriculum for educating students
throughout northern Utah.

Assistant Director, Curriculum and Instruction, Davis School District, Farmington, Utah
(2011-2012)

Responsibilities include creating digital curriculum, generating the professional
development that will train teachers on implementing the curriculum, and creating the
program evaluation to analyze the effectiveness of the program, including budgeting and
personnel.

Responsibilities include coordinating a focused and prioritized digital, virtual, and physical curriculum developed from the Utah State Office of Education Core Curriculum for Davis School District Teachers; creating professional development for effective teaching strategies; and creating an online assessment reporting tool that aligns directly with the Davis Essential Skills and Knowledge (DESK) Standards.


Responsibilities included developing new program opportunities and courses for teachers, tracking district data for improvement, coordinating mathematics specialist’s courses and programs, textbook adoption and alignment, creating opportunities for teachers to increase their content knowledge of mathematics through professional development and endorsements.


Responsibilities included coordinating all educational programs and courses for five districts in Northern Utah enabling teachers to obtain an Elementary Mathematics Endorsement and a Level II Mathematics Endorsement; tracking data on achievement scores from Louisville Diagnostic Test, and student end of level test scores to determine effects of increasing teacher content knowledge in mathematics.


Responsibilities included designing and teaching professional development courses according to deficits in teacher content knowledge and low test scores on student end of level tests; administering pre- and post- tests to determine effects of a combined professional development that included increasing teacher content and pedagogical knowledge through coursework and coaching.

Coordinator, *4-6 Math Grant Professional Development Grant*, Roosevelt Middle School (2006 - 2007)

Responsibilities included designing and teaching courses that increase teacher content knowledge as well as knowledge of mathematical process standards; coursework centered on a concrete, to pictorial to abstract approach to teaching mathematics.


Responsibilities included designing and teaching courses that fill in gaps of student learning as identified by end of level test data; coursework centered on a combined approach of increasing teacher content knowledge while modeling correct pedagogical practices.

Responsibilities included designing professional development for teachers, schools, and the district; model teaching and co-teaching in classrooms throughout the district; and providing support and mentoring for new teachers.

Teaching Experience

1999-2003  Bluff Ridge Elementary; Sixth Grade
1998-2003  Davis District Mentor Leader
1992-1999  Columbia Elementary; Third, Fourth and Sixth Grades

Professional Development Experience in Davis School District

2011-Present  Rigor, Relevance and Relationships: Provided customized audiences including, new teachers, veteran teachers, content supervisors, professional development teams, school teams, and district administrators in teaching with depth and rigor.

2012-2013  Technology Safety and Policies: Created infrastructure for students and teachers to be safe in the new world of social media.

2009-Present  Technology Implementation in a 1:1 Environment: Supervised opportunities for teachers in grades K-12 to use move towards changes involving both digital curriculum and technology tools to be used for digital learning.

2009-2010  Rubrics, Assessment and Student Learning: Created and taught a course for elementary teachers focusing on creating a framework of understanding for developing rubrics as well as creating methods of formative and summative methods to assess student learning.

2009-2010  Standards Mastery Assessment Reporting Tool System: Helped facilitated a combined team collaboration in the creation of an assessment and reporting tool for elementary teachers to track and monitor student data and learning; created and taught the course necessary for teachers to be trained to implement the program with fidelity.

2003-2007  Math Core: Designed and taught courses specifically for teachers to learn how to implement the Utah State Mathematics Core effectively.

2003-2007  Math Survivor: Designed and taught courses specifically for first and second year teachers to help build both content and pedagogical knowledge.

2003-2007  Math Implementer: Designed to train one representative from each of the
54 elementary schools four times throughout the school year in order to keep open lines of communication and dispense the most current information regarding mathematics.


**Professional Development Experience as a Math Consultant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>Garfield K-12</td>
<td>Garfield School District</td>
<td>Problem Solving and Conceptual Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>Bonneville Elementary</td>
<td>Ogden School District</td>
<td>Math Core/ Using Manipulatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Fielding Elementary</td>
<td>Box Elder School District</td>
<td>Using Manipulatives to Teach Probability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>Elementary Schools</td>
<td>Escalante School District</td>
<td>Manipulatives in a Standards Based Mathematics Curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**University Guest Lecturer**

Weber State University, Dr. Shirley Leilei: *Elementary Math Education* course, focus on using and managing manipulatives in standards based instruction (2007-2009).

Weber State University, Dr. Kristin Hadley: *Curriculum Development* course, focus on assessing mastery learning (2009).

**Utah State Office of Education Committees and Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009- Present</td>
<td>State of Utah Curriculum Director Counsel, Utah State Office of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>Educational Technology Committee, Utah State Office of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Mathematics Response to Intervention Development Committee, Utah State Office of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Elementary Mathematics Endorsement Development Committee, Utah State Office of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2007</td>
<td>Title I Seminar: Presenting math strategies and curriculum alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2007</td>
<td>Mathematics Textbook and Materials Evaluation Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2008</td>
<td>Mathematics Assessment Pilot Stats Review Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2008</td>
<td>Mathematics Test Item Writing Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>Mathematics Assessment Bias Review Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentations


State and Regional Presentations


Core Academy: *Test Developer* for Utah State Office of Education, focus on content knowledge (2009)

Core Academy: *Facilitator* for Utah State Office of Education/ Utah State University; sixth grade focus (2008)

Core Academy: *Presenter* for Utah State Office of Education/Utah State University; elementary mathematics focus on geometry and measurement using manipulatives and the NCM process standards. (2005, 2006)

Local Presentations


**Reviewer**

2011-2014 National Council of Teachers of Mathematics  
2011-2014 Aims Publications  
2011-2014 Teaching Children Mathematics  
2012-2014 Codie Award Judge

**Awards and Recognitions**

2014 Northern Utah Curriculum Consortium Chair Recognition  
2013 Office of Research and Graduate Studies Symposium Oral Presentation Physical Sciences and Engineering Honorable Mention: A Loss to Explain: Temporary Dreams  
2009-2010 Northern Utah Curriculum Consortium Curriculum Development Leadership Award  
1999-2000 Davis School District Teacher of the Year  
1999-2000 Bluff Ridge Elementary Hall of Fame Teacher of the Year  
1997-1998 UCTM Karl Jones Award for Excellence in Teaching Elementary Mathematics

**Endorsements and Certificates**

2011 Administrative/Supervisory Certificate U.S.OE (Coursework from Utah State University)  
2005 English as a Second Language Endorsement (ESL), Utah State Office of Education

**Professional Growth Courses Taken**

2015 Dissertation Camp Completion