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Los Angeles

Teacher-driven Change:

Developing an Intervention for Street-life Oriented Youth

through Action Research

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Manuel Victor Rustin

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Teacher-driven Change:

Developing an Intervention for Street-life Oriented Youth

through Action Research

by

Manuel Victor Rustin

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Diane Durkin, Co-Chair

Professor Tyrone C. Howard, Co-Chair

This action research study investigated the collaborative process of teachers developing a single-sex intervention for street-life oriented Black and Latino males. Traditional schooling efforts have largely failed to address the needs of Black and Latino males who are street-life oriented, thus this population remains among the most underserved and over-disciplined in our school system (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). Although a litany of national and local efforts have been enacted to close the achievement gap, they have failed to boost the educational outcomes of street-life oriented Black and Latino boys. This study examined the process by which a diverse set of teachers collaborated as a community of practice to address this difficult problem at their own school site.

The action research team collected survey and interview data to explore the challenges and successes of existing support systems at their urban public high school. Their aim was to discover any gaps in support that could be filled with a new intervention. The team was surprised to discover that none of the intervention systems at their site are specifically designed for street-life oriented youth despite a widespread belief that at least one of the available interventions is. In lieu of developing a new intervention that would address the school's areas of weakness, the team recommended that school leaders explore ways to partner with existing interventions to strategically support their population of street-life oriented youth that was being overlooked.

The process by which the team conducted its action research was reliant on an essential element of freedom for teachers to direct and mutually engage in their own collaboration. Participants reported feeling a sense of community and trust that allowed them to work through disagreements and share accountability. As compared to other teacher collaboration at their site, participants felt that this collaboration was more effective and that it better reflected their ideal of what teacher collaboration should look like. The study ultimately demonstrates that if given space to drive their own collaboration, a team of teachers can purposefully address a problem at their own site as engaged agents of change.

The dissertation of Manuel Victor Rustin is approved.

Robert Cooper

Alfreda Iglehart

Diane Durkin, Committee Co-Chair

Tyrone C. Howard, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

DEDICATION PAGE

To my lovely wife, Monica.

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Finally, I must thank Dr. Robert Cooper, Dr. Alfreda Iglehart, and Dr. Tyrone Howard for helping me shape my study into something that can be relevant and useful to schools across the country. Please count me among the many, many students and practitioners who have benefitted deeply from your work.

VITA

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CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem

This action research study investigated the collaborative process of teachers developing a single-sex intervention for street-life oriented Black and Latino males. Traditional schooling efforts have largely failed to address the needs of Black and Latino males who are street-life oriented, thus this population remains among the most underserved and over-disciplined in our school system. Although a litany of national and local efforts have been enacted to close the achievement gap, they have failed to boost the educational outcomes of street-life oriented Black and Latino boys. This study examined how a diverse set of teachers could collaborate as a community of practice to address this difficult problem at their own school site. Research shows that the teaching profession can be both isolating and alienating and that collaboration is needed to overcome teacher isolation (Mawhinney, 2008). The collaboration in this study involved entrenched beliefs regarding street-orientation, race, gender, and class. By examining a group of teachers focused on addressing the needs of street-life oriented boys, this study seeks to inform our understanding of the process by which teachers can come together and overcome differences to initiate change.

Background

Despite multiple attempts to close the achievement gap, Black and Latino students in U.S. schools still lag behind their peers on most measures of academic achievement (Jeynes, 2015; Shirvani, 2009; Stedman, 2010). A closer look at the data reveals that Black and Latino females outperform their male counterparts on these same measures (Rogers & Freelon, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Only 59% of Black males and 65% of Latino males graduate from high school while 80% of White males graduate, thus it is clear that a

particularly troubling problem exists (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Assessment, discipline, and degree-attainment data suggest that of all subgroups, Black and Latino males fare the worst in American public schools.

Within this demographic, males who participate in gang, criminal, or other street-life oriented activity fall even further behind in their academic achievement. Gang-involved youth are 30% less likely than their non-gang involved peers to graduate from high school and 58% less likely to ever earn a four-year degree (Pyrooz, 2014). Street-life oriented Black and Latino males in today's public school system are arguably the most severely "at risk" of all subgroups.

Many reforms have attempted to close the achievement gap but none has paid particular attention to street-life oriented males. This study examined how a diverse set of teachers could develop into a community of practice to address this problem at their own school site and work through the challenging issues of race, gender, and class to enact change. In doing so, this study aimed to inform our understanding of the process by which teachers can come together around a difficult problem in order to initiate change at their own school site.

The Achievement Gap

The academic achievement gap between races has persisted in the United States for decades (Jeynes, 2015; Burchinal, McCartney, Steinberg, Crosnoe, Friedman, McLoyd, & Pianta, 2011). The gap exists along most measures of academic achievement and begins as early as age three (Burchinal et al., 2011). Among all racial subgroups, Black and Latino students consistently lag behind their peers in academic achievement (Jeynes, 2015). Within this subgroup, males lag behind their female counterparts (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015).

The figures are troubling. Of the 48 states assessed in the latest Schott Foundation report

on the state of Black and Latino male achievement, Black males remain at the bottom of four-year graduation rates in 35 states and Latino males are at the bottom in the other 13 states (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Assessment data show that White males pass at triple the rates of Black males on both reading and math tests (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Furthermore, Black and Latino males are the most likely to miss school for disciplinary reasons and the most likely to be placed in special education courses (Rogers & Freelon, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). This data looks at Black and Latino males generally, however those who identify as being street-life oriented fall even further behind and are the focus of this investigation.

Street Life Orientation

Payne, Starks, and Gibson (2009) describe street-life-orientation as an ideology centered on personal and economic survival. This orientation is viewed as "a spectrum of networking behaviors that manifest through bonding and illegal activities" (p. 36) and is adopted by students who come from urban areas that are so impoverished that street life activities are seen as a primary means of survival (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). Males who are street-life-oriented "participate in a street culture that includes a variety of illicit activities like gang involvement, interpersonal violence, and selling narcotics" (Payne & Brown, 2010, p.316). In regards to gang involvement, Blacks and Latinos are overwhelmingly overrepresented in large-city street gangs and students who join gangs are 30% less likely to graduate from high school and 58% less likely to ever earn a four-year degree than peers with similar risk factors (Gilman et al., 2014; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010; Pyrooz, 2014). The achievement gap places Black and Latino males behind their White and Asian peers, but street-life orientation places particular Black and Latino males even further behind.

Existing School-based Interventions

Schools cannot do much about the economic strife that impacts urban youth, but many national and local school-based interventions have been developed to boost the educational outcomes of Black and Latino students generally and close the achievement gap.

National Interventions

Passed in 2001, No Child Left Behind was billed as a bipartisan effort to close the achievement gap and boost academic performance across all subgroups (Blackford & Khojasteh, 2013; Shirvani, 2009; Ametepee, Tchinsala, & Agbeh, 2014; Stedman, 2010). This national legislation called for states to test all students and institute adequate yearly progress goals to ensure that all students became proficient in core subjects within twelve years (Kirst, 2010; Ravitch, 2014). By requiring states to move all students to proficiency by 2014, NCLB envisioned a closure of the achievement gap by way of high stakes accountability measures (Kirst, 2010; Ravitch, 2014; Stedman, 2010).

This intervention has failed. The achievement gap persisted throughout the era of NCLB and continues to exist today (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015; Shirvani, 2009; Stedman, 2010). Stedman (2010) points out that although the achievement gap is narrower than it had been decades ago, progress in closing the gap appears to have ended before NCLB took effect.

Local School-based Interventions

Many local attempts have been made to close the achievement gap. The range of interventions includes utilizing more culturally-relevant curriculum, implementing mentoring and after-school programs, soliciting greater parental involvement, forging community partnerships, and more (Jeynes, 2015). Jeynes conducted a meta-analysis of 30 studies that

examined various attempts to narrow the achievement gap. He found that, by and large, none of the attempts produced statistically significant effects. Thus, schools and districts continue searching for promising new approaches, one being single-sex schooling.

Single Sex Schooling as an Intervention

Although a blanket solution to the persistent achievement gap may not be in sight, a growing number of schools are attempting to bridge the gap in their own locale by turning to all-boy or all-girl schools as an intervention. Research on single-sex schooling is quite limited and often focuses on single-sex core content courses in which boys are taught subjects like math or English separately from girls. These studies reveal mixed results in terms of boosting students' core academic achievement (Bigler & Signorella, 2011; Else-Quest & Peterca, 2015; Goodkind, 2012; Goodkind et al., 2013; Noguera, 2012; Patterson, 2012).

Despite the lack of apparent benefits to core academic gains, several researchers have found that single-sex schooling benefits students in other ways including graduation, suspension, and college acceptance rates. Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, and Howard (2014) conducted a two-year qualitative study of two single-sex education programs in Los Angeles County that are aimed at boosting the achievement of teenage Black males. Participants reported that these interventions helped them overcome the academic and social challenges of schooling and promoted positive engagement in school. Mitchell and Stewart's (2013) review of literature on single-sex schooling for Black males similarly concluded that this model of schooling is beneficial for marginalized students. The authors write that in these settings, teachers, students, and community members are able to forge "relationships that make developing resiliency more possible and academic success more achievable" (p. 389). These relationships appear to support the growing body of literature that suggests care and support are more effective approaches to

boosting achievement than discipline and suppression.

Care as an Intervention for Street-life Oriented Youth

Despite the abundance of negative imagery and deficit-based notions of students of color, research shows that even the most disengaged youth can find success if given the proper support. Black and Latino boys are not the monolithic groups that traditional narratives describe them as, but rather diverse and complex populations (Howard, 2013; Vigil, 2002). Those who are street-life oriented deserve careful attention since they often represent the most culturally conflicted, economically disadvantaged, and emotionally vulnerable youth in our schools (Conchas & Vigil, 2010).

Research supports the idea that pedagogy embedded in authentic care and concern contributes to the academic success of Black and Latino males in general and street-life oriented youth specifically (Alder, 2002; Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003; Howard, 2013; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009; Woolley, Kol & Bowen, 2009). In a study examining the schooling of 848 Latino middle school students, Woolley, Kol, and Bowen (2009) found that teacher support was positively associated with school behavior and students' satisfaction with school. The teacher-student relationship was at the center of the social context of school success for Latino students, a finding that echoes much of the research on successful strategies for schooling Black students (Delpit, 2006). By merging the promise of care-embedded pedagogy with the model of single-sex schooling, the participants in this study sought to develop an intervention to boost the academic success of street-life oriented Black and Latino boys.

Implementing Change through Teacher Collaboration

Interventions for closing the achievement gap have largely been driven by local and national measures. This study situated classroom teachers as initiators for closing the gap in that

it examined how a diverse set of classroom teachers could come together as a community of practice to develop an intervention for street-life oriented boys. Popularized by Wenger (1998), communities of practice are groups of people who share a common concern, passion, or set of problems and deepen their knowledge about this commonality through collective learning. In coming together to develop an intervention through action research, participants in this study functioned as a community of practice and informed our understanding of the process by which teachers can come together to address a difficult problem at their school site.

Studying Care and Single-Sex Schooling for Street-life Oriented Boys

Little research exists on improving the trajectories of street-life oriented males in public school settings. Nor is research available concerning the process by which teachers can overcome professional and ideological differences and together become a community of practice to initiate change at their school site. This study examined the process that unfolded as teachers became a community of practice and tried to create a care-embedded single-sex intervention for street-life oriented Black and Latino males.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the process by which a group of teachers comes together as a community of practice to design an intervention program for street-life oriented boys?
2. What do participants identify as the key principles and components of an intervention program for supporting the success of street-life oriented boys?

Research Design

A major goal of this study was to learn about the process by which a group of teachers studied a problem and developed an intervention. Thus, a qualitative action research design was

appropriate. Action research, as a participatory, democratic process aimed at fostering practical knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), lended itself well to the development of a school-supported single-sex intervention. Through action research, teachers were able to learn more about street-life orientation at their school site while also working deliberately to effect positive change for this population of students.

An action research team sought to create a care-based single-sex intervention in order to add to the literature on street-life oriented males and support the academic success of this population within their own school site. This team was composed of a social science teacher, two science teachers, three English teachers, and two elective teachers. Together, this team reflected the professional, demographic, and ideological diversity of the site's teaching staff.

Data Collection

I collected data through pre- and post-interviews with participants of the action research team, observations of team meetings, participant journals, and document analysis of artifacts created by the action research team. Pre- and post-interviews were required to answer my first research question regarding how the action research process unfolded. Observations, journaling, and document analysis were required to answer my first two research questions regarding the process and the outcomes of the participants' action research. The combination of these methods helped me create a rich description of the team's process and findings.

Site Selection

The study required an urban public school since street-life oriented youth engage in street-life behaviors primarily as a means of surviving impoverished urban conditions (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). By conducting the study at an urban public high school, I was able to produce findings that are relevant to other urban public school sites. The site required a

population of street-life oriented Black and Latino males as well as teachers who were interested in studying this population. Because this study focused on the process by which a diverse group of teachers sought to create an intervention, the site also needed to have a diverse staff of teachers who were willing to collaborate.

Walt Whitman High School (pseudonym), an urban public high school in southern California, reflected these criteria. Whitman has the greatest proportion of low-income Black and Latino students in its district. With an enrollment of 900 students, Hispanic students make up 65% of the population with African Americans being the second-largest group at 29%. Thirty five percent of Whitman's students are English learners and 85.6% of the student body is socioeconomically disadvantaged. Whitman is the only district high school located within gang territory and as a result has a considerable population of street-life oriented males. The attendance zone of Whitman includes multiple Section 8 and subsidized housing communities as well as several group homes and foster homes. These economically challenged conditions fit the parameters of those areas likely to produce street-life oriented youth.

Whitman has a staff of 55 teachers who reflect a diversity of age, experience, race, gender, class, and content expertise. Its academy structure and block scheduling have contributed to a climate conducive to collaboration. Furthermore, the principal of Whitman High has initiated several professional learning activities—including collective reading of education research and piloting of faculty instructional rounds—that reflect his openness to collaboration and continued growth. The combination of its urban public school characteristics and acceptance of collaboration makes Whitman an appropriate site for this study.

Public Engagement and Significance

This study was not intended to be directly reproducible or generalizable since qualitative

action research, by nature, cannot be generalized. However, the characteristics of the site and the population are found in many public schools across the country. By studying the process for developing of an intervention for street-life oriented youth, my study provides suggestions for other sites looking to address the problem of low achievement among this population. The challenge of street-life orientation, however, is not the only problem found in schools. By examining how teachers can gather around a difficult problem and overcome their own entrenched beliefs to produce change, my study provides insight for teacher leaders looking to address problems unique to their own school site through collaborative action research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The academic achievement gap has persisted in the United States for decades (Jeynes, 2015). This gap exists along most measures of academic achievement and begins as early as age three (Burchinal et al., 2011). Among all racial subgroups, Black and Latino students consistently trail behind their peers in academic achievement (Jeynes, 2015). Within this subgroup, males lag behind their female counterparts (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Further, Black and Latino males who are street-life orientated are even further behind, making them perhaps the most academically at-risk of all subgroups. Despite representing some of the highest-need students in our public school system, these street-socialized boys are by and large removed from the learning environment and left to navigate adolescence on their own.

In this chapter I explore the current state of the academic achievement gap and detail how street-life oriented Black and Latino boys are often overlooked in efforts to close the gap. Although much of the discussion around the achievement gap treats African American and Latino students as monolithic groups, street-life oriented males within this demographic are particularly underserved and are in need of new, care-centered interventions to support their achievement. In this study I situate teachers as agents of change within their own school site to develop these interventions.

I will first synthesize research that shows the magnitude of the achievement gap and how it has persisted over time. Next, I survey the scant research available on street-life oriented males and how they figure into the national achievement gap picture. I then assess the tradition of removal and exclusion of street-life oriented boys and present research that supports care and support as a more viable approach to educating these boys. This is followed by a look at how

national and local interventions to close the achievement gap have failed to support street-life oriented boys. I follow this with a review of research on single-sex schooling as an emerging approach towards boosting the achievement of Black and Latino males. Finally, I present research on teacher communities of practice and how diverse groups can come together to initiate change through action research.

My study examined how teachers could collaborate to develop an intervention for supporting street-life oriented Black and Latino high school boys. In order to frame the context of this study, this chapter reviews literature on our nation's achievement gap and the extent to which street-life oriented boys have been excluded from discussions on how to close this gap.

The Persistent Achievement Gap

Gaps in academic achievement have existed between subgroups for decades. Most of the conversation about the achievement gap centers on race, but a closer look at the data shows that a gap also exists between genders and social classes. This study is concerned with street-life oriented Black and Latino males, who represent an especially at-risk population whose achievement lies at the intersection of all three gaps. As such, the following section takes a closer look at the data on achievement from the overlapping lenses of race, gender, and class.

How Race and Gender Affect the Achievement Gap

The racial achievement gap has persisted in the United States for decades (Jeynes, 2015; Burchinal, McCartney, Steinberg, Crosnoe, Friedman, McLoyd, & Pianta, 2011). The gap exists along most measures of academic achievement and begins as early as age three (Burchinal et al., 2011). Among all racial subgroups, Black and Latino students consistently trail their peers in academic achievement (Jeynes, 2015). Males within this subgroup are the most behind, being outperformed by their female counterparts on multiple measures of achievement (Schott

Foundation for Public Education, 2015).

Data show a major disparity in graduation rates. Black males remain at the bottom of four-year graduation rates in 35 states and Latino males are at the bottom in the other 13 states assessed in the latest Schott Foundation report on the condition of Black and Latino male achievement (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). While the 2012-2013 graduation rate for White males was 80%, it was only 65% for Latino males and 59% for Black males. This 21-point gap between White and Black graduation rates represents a two-point increase from the 2009-2010 school year. California graduates 62% of its Black males, 67% of its Latino males, and 82% of its White males, mirroring the national trend (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015).

Assessment data also reveal a disparity. Data from the 2013 8th grade NAEP show that White males pass at triple the rates of Black males on both reading and math tests (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). In California, only 9.9% of Black males and 14.7% of Latino males score proficient or higher in reading as compared to 40.4% of White males. In math, White males pass at nearly five times the rate of Black males and four times the rate of Latino males (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Additionally, Black and Latino males in California are less likely to enroll in Advanced Placement classes or take the SAT's, and only 10% graduate with A-G requirements for college eligibility met as compared to 28% of White males (Rogers & Freelon, 2012).

A clear gap exists in data beyond academic achievement. School suspensions and expulsions reveal a gap wherein Black and Latino males are the most likely to miss school for disciplinary reasons (Rogers & Freelon, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Nationally, 15% of Black males experience an out-of-school suspension, which is more than

double the rate of Latino male suspensions and triple the rate of White male suspensions (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). California suspension rates are higher across the board with nearly a quarter of Black males experiencing a suspension as compared to 11% of Latino males and 9% of White males (Rogers & Freelon, 2012). Other measures, including special education designation, expulsion rates, Advanced Placement enrollment, and college entrance further illustrate the persistence of an achievement gap following racial lines.

Despite the abundance of data on the racial achievement gap, some scholars argue that the achievement gap is more a product of income than of race. Since students from more affluent families outperform students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, it is important to examine the role that income plays in America's achievement gap (Reardon, 2013).

How Income Affects the Achievement Gap

Many researchers contend that the achievement gap is best viewed by income rather than race. Reardon (2013) argues that the racial achievement gap has lessened over the last three decades while the achievement gap between high- and low-income students has widened. The income achievement gap between children from high-income families (90th percentile of income distribution) and children from low-income families (10th percentile) is visible as early as kindergarten and is twice the size of the Black-White achievement gap (Reardon, 2013).

Black and Latino males are still largely at the bottom of the academic performance hierarchy no matter whether one examines the achievement gap by race or by income. Black and Latino students are more likely to be born into low-income families, live in concentrated poverty, and attend high-poverty schools (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The poverty rate for Black children is currently 37%--nearly triple the rate for White children. For Hispanic children the rate is 34% (Ravitch, 2014). Furthermore, the racial achievement gap

exists even after accounting for income (Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012).

Data highlights the role that race, gender, and income play in the achievement gap picture. Overlooked are the effects of street-life orientation. My study is concerned with the population of students who exist at the intersection of these three gaps--Black and Latino street-life oriented males. The racial achievement gap, the gender achievement gap, and the income achievement gap each place this population behind their peers by most measures of educational achievement. Although they are in serious need of care and support in our schools, these street-life oriented Black and Latino boys are often positioned as "troublemakers" who need to be removed and excluded (Conchas & Vigil, 2010). This study is an attempt to examine an alternate approach to closing the achievement gap between this population and their peers.

Our Street-Life Orientated Students

Black and Latino males are not monolithic groups—they are complex, diverse, and representative of a full range of achievement (Howard, 2013; Vigil, 2002). Placed at the fringe of this range are boys who are street-life oriented. Street-life-orientation is an ideology centered on personal and economic survival (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). This orientation is viewed as "a spectrum of networking behaviors that manifest through bonding and illegal activities" (p. 36) and is adopted by students who come from urban areas that are so impoverished that street life activities are seen as a primary means of survival (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). Conchas and Vigil (2010) describe this population as street-socialized youth who represent the poorest of the poor and the most culturally conflicted individuals found in U.S. schools (Conchas & Vigil, 2010). Males who are street-life-oriented "participate in a street culture that includes a variety of illicit activities like gang involvement, interpersonal violence, and selling narcotics" (Payne & Brown, 2010, p.316). The achievement gap places Black and Latino males behind their White

and Asian peers, but street-life orientation places particular Black and Latino males even further behind.

Gangs and Street Life Orientation

Gang membership or affiliation is one indicator of street-life orientation (Payne & Brown, 2010). Street-life oriented youth are the most prone to becoming disconnected with school and eventually joining street gangs (Conchas & Vigil, 2010). These youth, by and large, come from poorer homes and face unstable economic situations. Becoming affiliated with a gang is seen as a means of survival that provides protection, security, friendship, emotional support, affection, and guidance to deal with this economic challenge (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Payne & Brown, 2010). As such, the street gang becomes a competitor with other sources of identity formation including school and family (Conchas & Vigil, 2010).

Blacks and Latinos are overwhelmingly overrepresented in large-city street gangs. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 39% of all large-city gang members are Black and 45.5% are Latino (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2010). A Seattle study found that 42% of the city's gang members were Black and the average age of joining a gang was 14.9 years old (Gilman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2014). Although the criminal impact of gang involvement is well documented, the impact on one's education is less discussed.

How gang membership impacts achievement. Gang involvement negatively impacts school achievement (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Pyrooz, 2014; Gilman et al., 2014). Pyrooz (2014) found that students who joined gangs were 30% less likely to graduate from high school and 58% less likely to ever earn a four-year degree. Observable effects on academic achievement were visible within one year of joining a gang and accumulated every year thereafter (Pyrooz, 2014). Gilman et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study that followed 808 fifth graders from

age ten through the age of thirty-three. They found that gang members were half as likely to graduate from high school despite similar risk factors as other participants. This finding shows that gang involvement negatively impacts academic achievement above and beyond the previously discussed effects of race, gender, and income.

Impact beyond achievement. Examining street-life orientation is important not only because of its effect on the achievement gap, but also because of its impact on the life outcomes of our students. Gilman et al. (2014) found that youth who joined gangs had poorer outcomes in adult functioning that included increased criminal behavior, increased reliance on illegal income, increased rates of incarceration, increased rates of substance abuse, increased rates of welfare participation, and decreased overall physical health. Augustyn, Thornberry, and Krohn (2014) found that gang members not only commit a disproportionate share of crimes, but they are also more likely to become parents of maltreated children. Even when a gang member leaves a gang, the effects persist. Melde and Esbensen (2014) found that no matter how brief, gang membership impacts adolescent development and has an enduring impact on one's involvement in delinquent activities, attitudes, and emotions.

Black and Latino youth, who make up the majority of our urban students of color (Orfield, 2009), are especially at-risk for street-life-orientation and gang involvement. These youth are more likely to live in communities with high crime rates (Piquero, 2008) and more than twice as likely as White youth to report that gangs are present at their schools (Toldson, 2011). The race, gender, and income achievement gap already situates Black and Latino males as the most at-risk of not graduating from high school. A closer look is needed at the added impact of street-life orientation, which places an overlooked subset of Black and Latino males even further behind.

Street-Life Oriented Youth Left Behind

Pressure to close the achievement gap and raise test scores has led to many schools adopting a suppressive, zero-tolerance approach towards dealing with street-life oriented youth (Noguera, 2003). Rather than work towards suppressing the influence of gangs and supporting street-life oriented youth, schools have in fact exacerbated the problem of gangs by hardening their discipline policy and removing street-life oriented students from the classroom (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Noguera, 2003). Although removal of these students has not shown to produce any gains in achievement for the students who remain in the classroom, schools continue to utilize isolation and removal as the primary course of action in dealing with students whose behavior does not comply with school rules (Noguera, 2003).

Street-life oriented students often have the greatest academic, social, economic, and emotional needs yet they are the most frequently punished in our schools (Conchas & Vigil, 2010). Conchas and Vigil (2010) write that street-socialized students often cannot catch up to their classmates given their educational shortcomings, therefore many find sanctuary in gangs and use this group orientation to help legitimize their anti-authority behavior in schools. The schools' inability to meet these students' needs causes the students to be repeatedly disciplined to the point of them realizing that the rewards of education are not available to them (Noguera, 2003). Once students realize that they have been labeled as troublemakers and that school is not working for them, they have little incentive to comply with school authorities and they then internalize the negative labels placed on them (Noguera, 2003).

Street-life oriented students who have been labeled as trouble are left with, as described by Conchas & Vigil (2010), an "inner rage imbued with a heightened antiauthority edge, an attitude that the streets help forge and bolster" (p. 58). This attitude of resistance to school

authority results in discipline that leaves these youth removed and isolated from the general school population. In urban school settings, this disproportionately affects Black and Latino males and produces a discipline gap that influences racial patterns in achievement (Noguera, 2010). The confluence of historically negative views of Black males, negative social imagery concerning boys of color, and schools' inability to meet the needs of street-socialized youth produces a perception among school personnel that boys of color, especially Black boys, are unsalvageable (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Howard, 2013; Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012).

Schools often give up on this population of boys. Ferguson (2003), in her examination of how serving in-school suspension impacts the identity formation of Black boys, observed that school employees considered a particular set of Black boys as "unsalvageable" and perhaps unworthy of special programs, support, or resources (p. 96). This belief that the most difficult to engage students are unworthy of targeted support speaks to the traditional practice of removal and isolation of street-life oriented Black and Latino males. In this sense, schools mirror what Conchas and Vigil (2010) describe as "the visceral sentiments of a society at large that supports suppression as the sole solution to a complicated problem" (p. 60). As the next section illustrates, the abundance of efforts to close the achievement gap have generally failed. In addition, these interventions have largely ignored the particular challenges of street-life oriented youth who continue to be suppressed and removed from the learning environment.

Traditional Attempts to Close the Achievement Gap

National Interventions

The achievement gap has been the focus of sweeping interventions initiated by the federal government, the largest in recent memory being No Child Left Behind (NCLB). When it was passed in 2001, NCLB was billed as a bipartisan effort to close the achievement gap and

boost academic performance across all subgroups (Blackford & Khojasteh, 2013; Shirvani, 2009; Ametepee, Tchinsala, & Agbeh, 2014; Stedman, 2010). This national legislation called for states to test all students and institute adequate yearly progress goals to ensure that all students became proficient in core subjects within twelve years (Kirst, 2010; Ravitch, 2014). Schools that consistently failed to meet achievement goals faced the prospect of closure or state takeover. Of particular importance here was NCLB's requirement that states make progress with all subgroups and provide data about the progress of ethnic minority students, low-income students, and English language learners (Stedman, 2010). By requiring states to move all students to proficiency by 2014, NCLB envisioned a closure of the achievement gap by way of high stakes accountability measures (Kirst, 2010; Ravitch, 2014; Stedman, 2010).

This intervention has failed. The target year for proficiency for all subgroups was 2014 and this goal was not met (Jeynes, 2015). The achievement gap persisted throughout the era of NCLB and continues to exist today (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015; Shirvani, 2009; Stedman, 2010). Stedman (2010) points out that although the achievement gap is narrower than it had been decades ago, progress in closing the gap appears to have ended before NCLB took effect. Jeynes (2015) echoes this idea and contends that government policy actually appears to have hurt progress in narrowing the gap. The current gaps in NAEP scores are similar to those that existed in the late 1980s, meaning that the accountability movement as an intervention has failed (Stedman, 2010).

Local School-based Interventions

Many smaller-scale attempts have been made to close the achievement gap. The range of interventions includes utilizing more culturally-relevant curriculum, implementing mentoring and after-school programs, soliciting greater parental involvement, forging community

partnerships, and more (Jeynes, 2015). Jeynes conducted a meta-analysis of 30 studies that examined various attempts to narrow the achievement gap. He found that, by and large, none of the attempts produced statistically significant effects. He concludes, "although the attempts to bridge this gap have been generally well meaning and have been more aggressive than any other educational effort over a similar time frame, the result has been that the gap has only been made marginally lower than it was before" (p. 543). Faced with this finding, schools and districts are searching for promising new approaches, one being single-sex schooling.

Lost in the conversation is whether achievement gap interventions specifically account for street-life oriented youth at all. Although research on street-life oriented students is still limited, there are emerging ideas for how this population can be supported within the overall mission to close the achievement gap. Two of the most promising ideas are replacing suppression with an ethos of care and developing single-sex public school settings.

Emerging Ideas for Closing the Gap for Street-life Oriented Youth

My study focuses on how two emerging ideas for schooling youth of color can be used to support the academic engagement of street-life oriented Black and Latino males. Since this population is often overlooked in the national achievement gap conversation, research on how to best support them is scant. Two themes that have emerged thus far are centering pedagogy around an ethos of care and developing single-sex educational settings.

Care as an Intervention for Street-life Oriented Youth

Despite the abundance of negative imagery and deficit-based notions of students of color, research shows that even the most disengaged youth can find success if given the proper support. Black and Latino boys are not the monolithic groups that traditional narratives describe them as, but rather diverse and complex populations (Howard, 2013; Vigil, 2002). Those who are street-

life oriented deserve careful attention since they often represent the most culturally conflicted, economically disadvantaged, and emotionally vulnerable youth in our schools (Conchas & Vigil, 2010).

Research supports the idea that pedagogy embedded in authentic care and concern contributes to the academic success of Black and Latino males in general and street-life oriented youth specifically (Alder, 2002; Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003; Howard, 2013; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009; Woolley, Kol & Bowen, 2009). In a study examining the schooling of 848 Latino middle school students, Woolley, Kol, and Bowen (2009) found that teacher support was positively associated with school behavior and students' satisfaction with school. The teacher-student relationship was at the center of the social context of school success for Latino students, a finding that echoes much of the research on successful strategies for schooling Black students (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

Teachers and care. Rather than removing street-socialized youth from classrooms and exacerbating the gang problem, teachers and school personnel should embrace and care for these youth. Conchas and Vigil (2010) argue that street-socialized youth can be ushered towards school success through institutional support systems and new pedagogies that celebrate students' differences and establish strong collaborative relationships between students and teachers. Alder's (2002) qualitative study on the meaning of care found that students perceive teachers as caring when they know their students well, provide personal leadership opportunities, and teach to understanding. Delpit and White-Bradley (2003) add that in developing such a relationship with students as individuals and as a group, teachers enable the building of a family within the classroom that supports even the most marginalized students.

Empirical research supports these findings on the importance of teacher-student relationships. Brewster and Bowen (2004) analyzed survey data from 633 Latino middle and high school students deemed at risk of school failure. Their regression analysis revealed that social support from teachers is an important factor in student engagement. They found that teacher support significantly decreased problem behavior and increased students' perception of school meaningfulness. Of particular interest to the authors was their finding that perceived teacher support significantly increased the degree to which students "liked" school, even beyond the level that parent support did. Brewster and Bowen use their findings to advocate for greater focus on social processes of schooling and helping teachers learn more about how to support Latino students who are at risk of failure.

Other studies contribute to these findings on the impact of teacher support. Rey, Smith, Yoon, Somers, and Barnett (2007) conducted a quantitative study of 89 urban African American students and their teachers. Through survey methods they found that positive teacher-student relationships predicted several school outcome variables. Teachers' support, care, and sensitivity to students' needs resulted in students feeling more interested and connected to school. Students also demonstrated improved rule compliance and involvement in school activities. Riconscente's (2014) yearlong quantitative study of 326 Latino 9th and 10th graders produced similar results. Riconscente analyzed surveys from three different points in the school year as well as math achievement scores to find that student perceptions of teacher caring were significant predictors of students' sense of self-efficacy. Teacher caring was positively linked to Latino students' math achievement as well. Together, these studies offer empirical evidence of the important role that teacher support and care can play in student engagement and achievement.

The effects of teacher support and care go beyond student engagement and achievement.

Rey et al.'s (2007) findings on positive teacher-student relationships included increased rule compliance as one of the outcomes. This outcome is supported by Gregory and Thompson's (2010) study of the school experiences of African American students. They observed 35 students across multiple classrooms who had a history of low achievement. Survey data and interviews with the students and their core content teachers revealed that reports of student cooperation and defiance varied based on teacher. Another finding was that students whose previous year GPA was lower than that of other participants saw a greater number of discipline referrals. Gregory and Thompson conclude that positive teacher-student relationships, such as those seen in classrooms where fewer discipline referrals were written, may facilitate "pockets of protection" for students. These pockets of protection are particularly important for students with challenged academic histories as they face a greater likelihood of being disciplined than more academically successful students.

Care in other school contexts. Other studies have examined the importance of care and support above and beyond the teacher-student relationship. In one such study, Johnson, Simon, and Mun (2014) conducted a randomized control trial of a peer-led high school transition program. The program trains seniors to provide support and guidance for incoming freshmen. One hundred and thirty-five low-income Latino males participated in the study and those who were assigned a peer mentor graduated at a higher rate (81%) than those who were in the control group (63%). In their analysis, the authors argue that the supportive environment created through the use of peer leaders improved the educational outlook of these low-income youth.

Supportive environments, whether in the form of positive teacher-student relations or peer support programs, can be viewed as communities of care that positively support students' transition into high school and improve the educational outcomes of students (Ellerbrock &

Kiefer, 2014). Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014) define a community of care as a school culture in which students and teachers care about each other and support each other. Such supportive environments enable a sense of belonging that has been shown to play a positive role in students' academic motivation, effort, and sense of self-efficacy (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Sánchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005).

In fostering care, hope, and empowerment, educators can disrupt the tradition of removing and giving up on street-life oriented youth in order to help them find success in school (Alder, 2002; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2010). With this in mind, some schools have utilized single-sex schooling as a structure within which to embed this ethos of care in the schooling of Black and Latino boys. Single-sex schooling is gaining momentum and prominence across the United States, but its viability as an intervention for street-life oriented males has yet to be examined.

Single Sex Schooling as an Intervention

A growing number of schools are attempting to bridge the achievement gap in their own locale by turning to Single Sex Schooling (SSS) as an intervention. The limited available research on SSS shows that separating boys from girls for content instruction does not produce verifiable gains in achievement; however, this model does appear to benefit students in other ways such as graduation, suspension, and college acceptance rates.

A proliferation of Single-Sex Schools since NCLB. The number of publicly funded single-sex schools has increased dramatically since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB provided amendments to Title IX that have relaxed restrictions to single sex schooling and now allow for schools and districts to establish programs, courses, and schools along gender lines (Bigler & Signorella, 2011; Dwarte, 2014; Eckes & McCall, 2015; Noguera,

2012). As a result of this change, the number of public single-sex schools has increased from two in 1995 to 540 in 2010 (Brown, 2011). Supporters argue that these schools can address differences in learning styles and social needs between boys and girls (Brown, 2011). Others believe that these schools represent an innovative remedy to the persistent achievement gap (Brown, 2011; Else-Quest & Peterca, 2015; Goodkind et al., 2013).

To establish a public single-sex school, current policy stipulates that single sex settings must meet certain criteria, including that they must be "substantially related" to the achievement of an important governmental or educational objective (Noguera, 2012). This might include, for example, improving girls' interest and engagement in STEM courses (Eckes & McCall, 2015). Additionally, schools offering single-sex education must avoid gender stereotypes, allow all students access, offer a coed option for those who wish to opt out of the single-sex setting, and conduct an evaluation every two years to ensure Title IX compliance (Eckes & McCall, 2015).

The relative newness of public single-sex schooling means that research on this intervention is still quite sparse. However, the available studies thus far indicate that single-sex schooling may not boost test scores but might help boost school engagement for Black and Latino youth.

Limited evidence of SSS boosting academic achievement. Research on single sex schooling is limited and often focuses on single-sex core content courses. These studies reveal mixed results in terms of boosting students' core academic achievement (Bigler & Signorella, 2011; Else-Quest & Peterca, 2015; Goodkind, 2012; Goodkind et al., 2013; Noguera, 2012; Patterson, 2012). The studies described below show that, as a means of narrowing the test-score achievement gap, research has yet to provide convincing data that single-sex education works.

Some researchers have argued that single-sex schooling shows little or no significant

impact on student academic achievement. Pahlke, Hyde, and Allison (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that tested students of SSS compared to students in coeducational settings. They concluded that SSS produces modest advantages that, in the most rigorous of studies, are trivial at best. The authors collected 454 studies on SSS and analyzed a total of 184 that met their criteria of being quantitative and centered on K-12 student outcomes. This meta analysis failed to find any compelling evidence that SSS in advantageous in regards to student outcomes. This finding is consistent with Goodkind (2012), whose critical theoretical review of empirical findings on SSS failed to find any documented benefits of SSS for low-income youth of color.

These studies are markedly limited, especially with respect to how single-sex schooling can benefit street-life oriented Black and Latino boys. The schools in these studies fail to address the particular academic needs of the students in these schools. Instead, they appear to focus merely on delivering existing pedagogy in gender-specific classrooms. Delivering traditional pedagogy is not enough to improve the trajectory of Black and Latino boys regardless of whether the boys are separated from the girls.

Additionally, these studies are biased in favor of quantitative methods that measure traditional indicators of academic achievement such as test scores and grade point averages. Pahlke, Hyde, and Allison's (2014) meta-analysis only considered studies that used quantitative methods. These methods are not suitable for capturing many of the effects that single-sex school may have on the students at the heart of my study. Street-life oriented youth have social and emotional needs above and beyond their academic needs. Qualitative methods that examine how and why single-sex settings impact the educational experiences of such students are required if we are to accurately assess the value of this model. The impact that a community of care embedded within single-sex schooling may have on street-life oriented youth cannot be captured

through quantifiable test scores alone, thus the bulk of existing studies on single-sex schooling is limited.

Signs that SSS supports students beyond test scores. Lacking quantitative evidence of core academic gains, several researchers have found that single sex schooling benefits students in other ways including graduation, suspension, and college acceptance rates. Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, and Howard (2014) conducted a two-year qualitative study of two single-sex education programs in Los Angeles County that are aimed at boosting the achievement of teenage Black males. Participants reported that these interventions helped them overcome the academic and social challenges of schooling and promoted positive involvement in school. These findings were self-reported in this qualitative study, leaving absent many specifics about the impact of single-sex programs. Nonetheless, the researchers conclude that this approach positively impacts the schooling experiences of Black males as measured by graduation, suspension, and college entrance rates.

Other research that specifically looks at single-sex schooling for boys of color, although limited, indicates promise in this model. Mitchell and Stewart's (2013) review of literature on single-sex schooling for Black male achievement concludes that this form of schooling is beneficial for marginalized students. These authors surveyed the existing literature on single-sex schooling, which included case studies on two prominent single-sex schools that serve African American boys—Chicago's Urban Prep Academy and Hartford's Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI). The authors write that in these settings, teachers, students, and community members are able to forge "relationships that make developing resiliency more possible and academic success more achievable" (p. 389). These qualitative case studies, unlike most quantitative studies of single-sex schools, are able to take an in-depth look at the relationships and meaning making

between students and staff at these schools. These relationships account for Urban Prep achieving a 100% college enrollment rate for their 2010 class and BEMI achieving increased academic performance from 100 middle school boys enrolled in single-sex classes paired with adult mentoring. The sites examined in the various articles surveyed by Mitchell and Stewart, like those examined by Terry et al. (2014), are able to positively impact the schooling experiences of students and prime them for academic success.

There is still much to learn about how single sex schooling can support the academic success of Black and Latino boys. In an attempt to develop a theory of change for single-sex schools, Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2014) studied seven single-sex schools serving Black and Latino boys in a three-year longitudinal study. Data were collected from interviews and focus groups with nearly 300 students, parents, and school staff. Additional data came from document analysis, observations, and almost 2,500 student surveys. Among their findings was that successful single-sex schooling included social and emotional programming that reflected the schools' understanding of the social and emotional needs of its students. This finding appears to support the idea that what Black and Latino boys need is authentic care and support, not discipline and removal (Alder, 2002; Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003; Howard, 2013).

Fergus, Noguera, and Martin's primary conclusion from this in-depth study was that although several of these schools showed signs of positively improving the trajectory of the Black and Latino boys they served, not all of the schools were successful and there remains a great deal about single-sex schooling that we do not yet know. They comment that the schools doing the most to create a focused and orderly learning environment are doing "a far better job in meeting the needs of the young men they serve than traditional schools in the same

neighborhoods" (p. 201). However, a lack of empirical achievement data and the fact that some of the schools in the study were shut down shows that there is still much to be learned. In the words of the authors, "good intentions and heroic efforts to create good schools will not be enough" (p. 201). This highlights the fact that although these interventions reflect genuine concern for the educational outcomes of students, more data are needed to truly understand how to best utilize single-sex schooling as an approach to closing the nation's achievement gap.

Focused, strategic development of single sex schools can perhaps benefit Black and Latino boys. However, the combination of a separate learning space and "heroic efforts," in and of themselves, are not enough. This study combines what is known about effective single sex schooling with what is known about teaching through an ethos of care and support. It then uses these findings to drive teacher collaboration that will construct an intervention within a traditional coeducational public school.

Initiating Change through Teacher Collaboration

Communities of Practice

As discussed in the previous section, interventions for closing the achievement gap have largely been driven by local and national measures. This study situated classroom teachers as initiators for closing the gap by examining how a diverse set of classroom teachers could become a community of practice to develop an intervention for street-life oriented boys. Popularized by Wenger (1998), communities of practice are groups of people who share a common concern, passion, or set of problems and deepen their knowledge about this commonality through collective learning. Participants in this study functioned as a community of practice by coming together to explore an intervention through action research. In doing so, they helped us learn more about the process by which teachers can together address a difficult problem at their school

site.

According to Wenger, a community of practice is composed of three elements—a domain, a community, and a practice (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice have an identity defined by a shared domain of interest and their members share a commitment to this domain. Community is forged between members through engaging in joint activities and discussions, helping each other, and sharing information as they pursue their interest in their domain. Through sustained interaction, members develop a shared practice that includes a repertoire of resources including experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing problems (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of Practice and Action Research

Communities of practice can be formed through a variety of activities, one of which is collaborative problem solving by way of action research. Several studies have found that educators engaged in action research become communities of practice and that effective communities of practice are conducive to successful action research. Goodnaugh (2014) studied an action research project involving teachers, a university professor, and high school students and found that the members of the team credited the development of a community of practice for their feelings of empowerment and for the development of new understandings. The difficult conversations and tensions observed in the team's action research cycles were found to drive the development of a community of practice and push the team's work forward. Capobianco and Feldman (2006) examined three different teacher action research projects to determine what conditions are necessary to produce quality action research. They found that forging an effective community of practice is a necessary condition for high quality action research in that it gives members a sense of joint enterprise and identity. Cooper (2006) examined a form of action research called collaborative inquiry in which faculty and leaders of a university teacher

education program collaborated to study their own teaching practice in order to produce new tools and approaches for preparing and mentoring teaching candidates. She found that their collaborative work led to the formation of a stronger community of practice by way of the transformative relationships forged by working through challenges and tension.

Functioning as a Community of Practice

This study examined how a diverse set of teachers could together study and address a challenging problem at their site. In lieu of relying on district, state, or national measures to boost the educational outcomes of street-life oriented boys, the participants of this study conducted action research in an effort to develop their own site-specific intervention. Capobianco and Feldman (2006) describe this as collaborative action research that positions teachers in the roles of collaborators and researchers of their own work, with emphasis on their own lived experiences. Through collaboration, participants form democratic research communities where they co-construct the entire research process as a community of practice (Cooper, 2006).

The democratic functioning of a community of practice helps participants co-construct knowledge and work through challenges inherent in action research. Successful action research teams develop into communities of practice that emphasize trust and confidentiality, value others' experiences, needs and emotions as knowledge; and establish respect for and recognition of others (Capobianco & Feldman, 2006). Zygouris-Coe et al. (2001) argue that this is not an easy task but one that requires mutual co-laboring and shared construction of social knowledge. Goodnough (2013) found in her study that decisions about what to do and how to interpret data and outcomes were democratically negotiated through mutual engagement. She writes that this engagement and learning within the community are enhanced by diversity, with each member

bringing unique ideas and perspectives.

A difficulty inherent in any sort of collaboration is dealing with differences of opinion. Although a diversity of perspectives can enhance co-construction of knowledge, it can also lead to tense disagreements. Goodnaugh writes that within a community of practice, these tensions and challenges become a context for participants to develop shared perspectives and understandings that push their work forward (Goodnaugh, 2014). Cooper found that dialogue resulting from faculty members' tense confrontations in her study eventually led them to focus on reaffirming their shared beliefs in sociocultural and constructivist ways of learning (Cooper, 2006). Getting through these difficulties gives way to new growth, new possibilities, and shared knowledge (Zygouris-Coe et al., 2001).

Dealing with difficult conversations and differences in perspective or opinion is not easy. Since collaboration is relational and inherently problematic, conflict is a common feature of collaborative action research (Zygouris-Coe et al.,2001). Cooper's study of collaborative inquiry observed that buried tensions and controversial topics that had previously been kept private came to the fore during collaborative conversations. These conversations helped move the team's work forward and strengthen its community of practice, but Zygouris-Coe et al. warn that not all conflicts can or should be expected to be resolved. The important part is to establish a community of practice that is built on mutual trust and respect (Capobianco & Feldman, 2006). Nelson, Deuel, Slavit, and Kennedy (2010) offer guidelines for navigating difficult and honest conversations within collaborative groups, arguing that explicit attention to collaborative norms and adherence to agreed-upon protocols together help foster collegial conversations that neither avoid nor promote conflict.

Gaps in the Literature

A significant gap in the literature points to the need to study the issue of single-sex interventions further. Pahlke et al. (2014) concluded in their meta analysis of 184 studies on single-sex schooling that, due to an insufficient number of studies, they could not examine the effects of single-sex schooling on the general school achievement of US boys, the educational aspirations of US boys, or the interpersonal relations among US boys. Additionally, the authors cite a lack of controlled studies on the effects of single-sex schooling on Black and Latino boys. Further, studies on single-sex schooling for street-life oriented males are entirely nonexistent.

Existing studies that are most closely aligned to my study come from Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2014) and Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, and Howard (2014). The former studied seven standalone single-sex schools serving Black and Latino boys whereas my study is concerned with a single-sex intervention within a traditional coeducational public school. Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, and Howard studied two single-sex interventions, one that operated once per week after school and another that served students within an elective course. Neither was designed to target street-life oriented boys or to specifically support highly at-risk youth into positively engaging in high school.

My study helps address gaps in the literature by situating teachers as the initiators of developing care-based single-sex interventions for their own school site. Fergus, Noguera, and Martin clarify that creating standalone single-sex schools is not easy. My study explores the process by which a group of teachers can merge the potential benefits of single-sex schooling and care-embedded pedagogy through action research at their own school site to design a single-sex co-curricular intervention program. Many studies have examined teachers' use of action research to improve classroom instruction, but few have explored teachers' use of action research

to address significant non-curricular problems like street-life orientation. Terry, Flennaugh, Blackmon, and Howard offer several principles for developing a single-sex educational school or program, but again their study does not center on street-life oriented males.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Purpose of Study

The academic achievement gap has persisted in the United States for decades (Jeynes, 2015). Among all racial subgroups, Black and Latino students consistently lag behind their peers in academic achievement (Jeynes, 2015). Within this subgroup, males lag behind their female counterparts (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Furthermore, Black and Latino males who are street-life oriented are even further behind.

Many school-based reforms and interventions have attempted to close the achievement gap but none have paid particular attention to street-life oriented males. A litany of outside-of-school anti-gang and mentoring programs exist, but a concerted effort by the schools themselves to support this highly at-risk population is missing. My study aimed to investigate the process by which teachers could collaborate to develop a single-sex intervention built within the school day for at-risk Black and Latino males. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the process by which a group of teachers comes together as a community of practice to design an intervention program for street-life oriented boys?
2. What do participants identify as the key principles and components of an intervention program for supporting the success of street-life oriented boys?

Research Design

A major goal of this study was to examine teacher collaboration in the development a care-based intervention for street-life oriented students, thus a qualitative action research design was appropriate. Action research, as a participatory, democratic process aimed at fostering practical knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), lent itself well to the development of a school-supported single-sex intervention. Through action research, school leaders could learn more

about street-life orientation in schools while also working deliberately to effect positive change within their own school site.

Action research was appropriate here because traditional qualitative methods alone could not answer the research questions of this study. An aim of this study was to examine the process by which a diverse set of teachers could come together to develop an intervention for their school site. Qualitative methods alone could examine how school personnel view collaboration, but they could not engage participants in the collaborative process of inquiry and change. However, action research methods could. Shani and Pasmore (1985) define action research as an emergent inquiry process aimed at solving real organizational problems. Participants work to bring about real change in their organization while expanding the knowledge base about the problem. This collaboration allows members of a school site to work together on an issue of mutual concern through dialogue, conversation, and joint action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Interviews and focus groups alone could not bring about this collaborative inquiry and change.

Qualitative methods allowed me to explore *why* a particular phenomenon took place. In action research, these methods allowed me to study why the members of the team proceeded the way they did and why their beliefs about collaboration and supporting street-life oriented youth changed. Merriam (2009) writes that qualitative methods allow us to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives. As such, a qualitative approach enabled me to describe how participants interpreted what they experienced and how participants made meaning through the action research process (Merriam, 2009). Since action research is an iterative process, I used qualitative methods to explore how the work of school leaders unfolded over time and why it proceeded the way it did through the action research cycles.

This study did not lend itself well to quantitative methods. Quantitative methods could

have described what existed, but they could not have described why participants' views changed, why participants viewed their action step as the best course for supporting the students, or why participants engaged in the activities that they collectively decided upon in order to develop this action step.

Site and Participants

This study required an urban public school site since street-life oriented youth engage in street-life behaviors primarily as a means of surviving impoverished urban conditions (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). By conducting the study at an urban public school, the research team could produce findings that are relevant to other urban public school sites. The site needed to have a population of street-life oriented Black and Latino males as well as teachers who would be interested in studying this population. Because this study focused on the process by which a diverse group of teachers developed an intervention, the site also required a diverse staff of teachers who were willing to collaborate.

Walt Whitman High School (pseudonym), an urban public high school in southern California, met these criteria. Whitman has the greatest proportion of low-income Black and Latino students in its district. With an enrollment of 900 students, Hispanic students make up 65% of the population with African Americans being the second-largest group at 29%. Thirty five percent of Whitman's students are English learners and 85.6% of the student body is socioeconomically disadvantaged. Whitman is the only district high school located within gang territory and as a result has a considerable population of street-life oriented males. The attendance zone of Whitman includes multiple Section 8 and subsidized housing communities as well as several group homes and foster homes. These economically challenged conditions fit the parameters of those areas likely to produce street-life oriented youth.

Whitman has shown itself to be a site where innovation and reflection are welcomed, and would receive well an action research study. Whitman has a staff of 55 teachers who reflect a diversity of age, experience, race, gender, class, and content expertise. Its academy structure and block scheduling have contributed to a climate conducive to collaboration. The principal of Whitman High has introduced several professional learning activities—from initiating faculty instructional rounds to encouraging staff-wide reading of education research—that reflect his openness to collaboration and continued growth. His emphasis on building positive and supportive relationships with staff and students alike helped him earn recognition as the Principal of the Year for Whitman City's school district. The combination of Whitman's urban public school characteristics and acceptance of collaboration made it an appropriate site for this study.

Access

I have been a teacher at Walt Whitman High School for the past nine years and have worked with the principal and school leaders on several projects. The principal gave me the initial idea to study our most at-risk boys and he expressed continued interest in developing new interventions for them. Staff members often ask for my input and guidance on a range of matters that include working with reluctant learners such as the ones at the heart of this study. Consequently, I was confident that my study would be received well at Whitman.

The members of my action research team each expressed interest in being in this study. I met with them individually to make sure that they understood the study, the action research process, their commitment, and the steps that I would take to ensure confidentiality.

The school district has an institutional review board that required a brief application to conduct research. Since my study did not take place during the spring testing window and did not interrupt or interfere with the regular school program, it met the district's requirements to

conduct research.

Participants

The action research team needed to represent a diversity of experiences, backgrounds, and content areas in order to reflect the diversity found among staff at public high schools. It was important to avoid selecting a group of teachers who already worked closely together and got along well since that might skew the process that I intended to study. As such, I selected and invited participants who belonged to an array of academic departments and career academies. The team included two science teachers from two different career academies, two elective teachers from two different career academies, and three English teachers from two different career academies. The team featured a total of eight teachers including myself as a participant-researcher.

Table 1. *Overview of Action Research Team Participants*

Participant	Title	Yrs at Site	Sex	Ethnicity
Alyssa	Elective Teacher	11	F	Latina
Davin	English Teacher	10	M	Caucasian
George	Science Teacher	4	M	Caucasian
Jessie	English Teacher	2	F	Caucasian
Julie	English Teacher	3	F	Asian American
Phillip	Elective Teacher	7	M	African American
Travis	Science Teacher	5	M	Caucasian

Recruitment

My aim was to gather a team of teachers that reflected the diversity of Whitman's teaching staff. I started by informally sharing my action research ideas to Julie and Phillip, two

teachers from different departments and career academies. I have had prior conversations with each of them about particular gang-involved students. Our previous conversations gave me the impression that both Julie and Phillip utilize relationship-building and nurturing as two methods for engaging challenging students. I reasoned that both teachers would be interested in this project since they appear to have genuine interest in helping even the most challenged students. As such, I began informally sharing my action research ideas with them as I developed my study during the spring of 2016. Once my study was formally approved in August 2016 I sent an individual e-mail to Julie and to Phillip providing the particulars of the project as well as the consent forms. They each agreed to participate.

I aimed to fill out the action research team with teachers from other disciplines and backgrounds. I sent a participant recruitment letter (Appendix A) to a wide array of teachers across campus. Alyssa and Davin each responded right away that they were interested and wanted to participate. Alyssa is from Whitman City and would be an excellent resource to provide some local community context to our conversations. Davin is known for his "tough love" approach to discipline and classroom management. His perspective could be helpful in providing a contrast to Phillip and Julie's more nurturing management styles.

To achieve greater balance among the team's academic disciplines, I used our first school-wide staff meeting of the year to individually approach science and math teachers about the recruitment letter that I e-mailed. I used the opportunity to explain the project in more detail and to answer any questions that teachers might have. Two science teachers—George and Travis—agreed to participate after I verbally explained the scope of the project to them. Travis commented that he was going to withdraw from all of his extracurricular commitments at Whitman High because he was displeased with his experiences, particularly with his

collaboration experiences. This perspective would be helpful in my effort to avoid assembling a team that was predisposed to positive views and attitudes about collaboration.

With seven participants committed, I needed one more to reach my original aim of eight teachers. I hoped to find a newer teacher since everyone except Julie had been at Whitman for four years or longer. I approached a second-year math teacher who initially expressed interest but asked for time to get acclimated to the new school year before committing. I then re-sent the recruitment e-mail to another relatively new teacher—Jessie—who responded saying that she would agree to take part as long as it did not require much individual work outside of the team meetings.

My pre-interview protocol included an item that asked participants to explain their interest in being part of this study. It should be noted here that although a variety of responses were given, every participant gave some indication that they trusted or admired my work at Whitman. A few stated that they would not have agreed to take part if it had been some other teacher who approached them. The positive views that participants had towards me may help explain the relative ease with which the team was assembled.

Action Research Meetings

The team's action research followed the general pattern of planning, acting, evaluating, and further planning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The action research team conducted one full cycle of action research over the course of three months at Whitman High School. This took place through nine meetings of roughly 60 minutes each. Meetings were held after school hours and began approximately 30 minutes after the final class period ended. The team met in various classrooms belonging to participants. Meeting agendas are included in Appendix B.

What follows is a description of the team's action research process during the course of

these three months. This descriptive meeting-by-meeting summary of participants' process is necessary since my first research question concerns collaborative process.

Session #1 – Introduction. October 19, 2016. The first meeting served to reintroduce the purpose of the study, review the time commitments, and discuss the basic principles of research ethics and confidentiality. Although I had individual conversations during recruitment about logistics, ethics, and confidentiality, it was important to reemphasize these points with the entire group together. Action research is a messy process and although I could ensure that I would not share participants' identities or roles in the project, I could not ensure that participants themselves would not reveal this information to others. It was therefore important to spend the first session reviewing matters of confidentiality and ethics.

The session was held in my classroom and, unlike the remaining sessions, I led and dictated the entire meeting. I started by sharing my intent of the project—to learn about how teachers can use action research to study a problem at their site—and my hope that it would lead to useful information that may be of value to our site and others. I then presented participants with a visual model of action research and explained to them the similarities and differences between action research and more traditional forms of research. This included a preliminary roadmap of how we might spend the nine sessions as we progress from identifying the problem to taking action. I emphasized again that this would be a collaborative effort and that I myself would not dictate what is to take place at any session beyond this first one. The meeting concluded with logistical discussions regarding when and where to meet next.

Session #2 – Identifying the Problem, Part 1. October 24, 2016. We held our second meeting in Jessie's classroom and it served as the start of us collectively identifying the problem that we would examine through action research. This meeting represented the "pre-step," a stage

in which participants develop a common understanding of the context and purpose of the action research project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 10). Because not all of the participants knew each other, we started by first introducing ourselves and sharing our story of how we came to work at Whitman High. We also explained our individual reasons for taking part in this study. Afterwards, I again presented the team with the dual objectives of this project: (1) Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys, and (2) Examine the process by which a group of teachers comes together to collaborate around an issue at their school site.

At this point, I verbally recused myself from my assumed role as the group decision-maker. I advised the group to consider whether or not they wanted to create norms. I also suggested that we discuss our preliminary impressions about what we believe street-life orientation means at Whitman High. Davin initiated a conversation about norms by asserting that he did not think they were necessary but that he would not object to having norms. Alyssa and Jessie spoke in favor of establishing them, leading to a lengthy group discussion that produced three norms. These included *respect everyone's ideas*, *solicit everyone's ideas*, and *do your part*. Some guidelines for each norm were created, including one asking colleagues who speak to allow two different people to also speak before sharing again. I added the norms to the agenda handout for each successive session.

We then had a brief discussion about street-life orientation. Travis shared some statistics that he heard about graduation rates and the achievement gap, and I shared some preliminary data from my literature review regarding the discipline gap in California schools. With time running out, we ended the discussion and I showed participants how to access the online participant journals.

Session #3 – Identifying the Problem, Part 2. October 31, 2016. Coghlan & Brannick explain that after the pre-step comes the "constructing" step, where participants engage in constructing what the issues are and identifying the problem for which action will be taken (p. 11). The primary objective of session three was to continue our abbreviated discussion about street-life orientation from session two and to explicitly identify the problem for which our action would be taken.

In an effort to solicit honest input and perceptions from participants about what street-life orientation is, I created an online document that allows users to anonymously type into it. I showed them images of gang graffiti found on campus and then I played two videos from YouTube for participants to view and write anonymous comments and questions about. In doing so, I hoped that teachers would share their honest opinions about our street-life oriented boys without fearing judgement. Although the group developed norms to respect each other's ideas, we had not interacted enough yet to have established a true community of practice.

Both videos contained explicit language and several references to Whitman City gangs. The first video featured a Latino Whitman City teenager freestyle rapping from the passenger seat of a car while holding a can of beer. He is rapping directly toward the camera and displays his local gang affiliation through hand signals and verbal references. He aggressively raps about women, violence, and gangs nonstop for about three minutes. The second video features former Whitman High School students. It is a music video in which groups of Black male teenagers are shown smoking marijuana, pointing guns at the camera, flashing gang signals, and displaying cash. In the video, two males rap about their use of guns and their willingness to commit acts of violence on anyone who opposes them.

Participants wrote their reactions to the videos onto the anonymous online document. I

then read each comment out loud, initiating a discussion about what participants perceive street-life orientation to mean within the context of Whitman High. This discussion led to a debate about how to focus our action research—some participants wanted to know more about the causes of street-life orientation while others wanted to instead focus our efforts on studying how Whitman High could better support students similar to those portrayed in the two videos.

Following a lengthy back-and-forth debate only Travis still believed that the team should focus on the causes of street-life orientation. The majority of the team was in agreement to focus on Whitman's programs and interventions, so as a consolation I offered to bring Travis my findings from a previous action research study in which I interviewed former Whitman High School boys about their histories of gang involvement. He and the rest of the group then requested to read those findings at our next meeting.

Session #4 – Planning Research, Part 1. November 14, 2016. Session four marked the start of our planning phase. George was unable to continue participating in the project, leaving us with a team of seven (six participants plus myself as participant-researcher). George cited mounting scheduling conflicts and outside time commitments as his reasons for leaving. As requested by the group, I brought excerpts from a previous action research study in which I interviewed former students who were street-life oriented (Appendix C). The excerpts presented findings about the values and beliefs that these young men said influence their participation in street-life activities. They cited values regarding family, camaraderie, respect, and acceptance as factors guiding their behavior. For instance, one 17-year-old shared that his desire to support his younger sisters is what motivated him to participate in illicit activity. He stated, "I didn't want them to grow up how I grew up and go through the things I went through …We're on food stamps, so I [stole] to buy food. I bought food, and bought movies and stuff like that." The team

read these findings and then discussed their thoughts and reactions. Afterwards, we reviewed our discussion from session three about focusing our action research on Whitman's work with these youth as opposed to the various factors that cause one to adopt a street-life orientation.

I then handed out a graphic organizer to aid participants in the process of developing specific research questions. It contained three columns: *Wonder/Area of Concern, Draft RQ,* and *Data Collection Possibilities*. Since the team already decided to focus its research on the school's own support of these boys, I asked them to brainstorm some initial research questions that we could potentially answer through collecting and analyzing data. This reflects my ongoing role with the team—I provided basic guidance about how to conduct an action research project but I did not tell the group what specific direction to take or what specific questions to ask.

The meeting concluded with a sharing out of ideas as each participant shared the questions they drafted. Some similarities emerged—multiple participants had questions about the effectiveness of Whitman's current interventions and about what incentives these boys might be motivated by. I verbally restated some of these commonalities between questions as the meeting came to an end.

Session #5 – Planning Research, Part 2. November 29, 2016. The objective of session five was to finalize the research questions that participants began forming in the previous session. I launched the meeting by asking the group to think about the first four sessions and to discuss whether any adjustments to the norms or research process were in order. I initiated this discussion to remind the group that the process was theirs to determine, not mine. Participants shared positive reviews of their experience thus far and declined to change or add any norms.

We spent the majority of the session negotiating what the final research questions would be. Alyssa and I each tried to capture the wording of potential questions and ideas as participants

collectively discussed and constructed what became three overarching research questions. The meeting concluded with the following finalized team research questions:

(1) To what extent do current interventions and extracurricular offerings at Whitman support the success of street-life oriented boys?

    a. What do program staff identify as their major challenges and successes in supporting street-life oriented boys?

(2) What do street-life oriented students identify as potential services, programs, and opportunities that would support their engagement and success in school?

(3) How can Whitman collaborate with local organizations and programs that aim to support street-life oriented youth in order to increase the academic and personal success of street-life oriented boys?

Session #6 – Data Collection. December 8, 2016. With their research questions finalized, participants spent session six developing their data collection instruments. Coghlan and Brannick emphasize the need for this and other stages of action research to be collaborative, so as lead researcher I explained the basic data collection options and allowed the team to determine what methods to use. The team discussed each research question and its potential data collection methods, a process that took a substantial about of time. Almost all of the meeting time was centered on the team's first question that asked about Whitman's current offerings. Several participants had ideas for how to collect data about this but many of the ideas did not withstand the group's scrutiny. For example, the idea to survey street-life oriented students was rejected since there was no objective way to identify those students.

After a considerably long discussion, the team agreed to conduct interviews with school leaders and program staff regarding the effectiveness of Whitman's work with street-life oriented

boys. The team also agreed to conduct a student survey and a staff survey to collect data about which programs and services are perceived to be useful in the effort to support these boys. The third data collection method would be document analysis of the school's accreditation report and action plan.

The group developed a rough interview protocol which I agreed to type and send out. It was determined that the student and staff surveys would list all of Whitman's support systems and use a Likert scale to gauge participant's familiarity with them. I volunteered to administer the staff survey and participants each agreed to administer the student survey to their classes. The team collectively brainstormed who to interview and who would be accountable for conducting each interview. The team also agreed to conduct the interviews in time for our next meeting so that we could spend the final three sessions analyzing the data and planning our action.

The amount of time spent planning data collection to answer their first research question and sub-question left participants with no time left to plan data collection for their other two questions. However, the team acknowledged that we would not be able to objectively develop a new intervention without first identifying the strengths, weaknesses, or gaps within Whitman's existing offerings. Privately, I wondered whether the team would be able to accomplish its original objective of developing principles and components of a new intervention by spending so much time on assessing Whitman's existing efforts. However, in keeping with my study's intent to examine the process unfold on its own I chose not to redirect the team's work or change its research design.

Session #7 – Data Analysis, Part 1. December 21, 2016. Having collected their data between sessions six and seven, participants brought interview transcripts and notes to our seventh meeting. We began by talking about our individual experiences in collecting our data. I

then described how to conduct basic open coding of qualitative data. Davin suggested that all the interview transcripts be shared via GoogleDocs so that the team could collectively code for emergent themes. Together, the group skimmed the transcripts and began calling out preliminary themes that emerged from the data. When multiple participants agreed on a theme, such as *building relationships*, the team assigned a color to it. The first theme to emerge was *MMMP*, a non-profit male mentoring program housed on our campus. This program was referenced in several interviews and served as a useful example of how to begin the coding process. Each participant read their own interview transcripts closely and highlighted data that referenced MMMP. As the themes and highlight colors accumulated, Alyssa created a coding scheme for everyone to refer to. The rest of the meeting was spent collaboratively coding the transcripts according to the following themes: *MMMP*, *relationships*, *economic challenges*, *motivation*, *academics*, *discipline*, and *time*.

Participants finished coding and then reviewed each of the coded transcripts to get a visual sense of the data. We then briefly discussed the survey data before the meeting concluded. I volunteered to organize the data by code so that the next session could be spent analyzing data across sources in each category to develop findings.

Session #8 – Data Analysis, Part 2. January 11, 2017. The eighth session of our project centered on completing our data analysis in order to develop our findings. This session was the first since winter recess and it came during the first week of the new semester. The momentum of our previous data analysis session seemed lost so I opened the meeting with a lengthy review of what the team had accomplished thus far. Notably, three participants were unable to attend this session. Two were asked by administration to attend an off-campus training and the third had to teach an after-school class.

Also of note is that I used this meeting as an opportunity to update the group about one of the young men featured in the videos we watched during session three. Several shootings took place across Whitman City during the winter recess. The community held a candlelight vigil for a young man who was killed in one of those shootings. During the vigil, a car drove by and fired several shots into the crowd. Two men were killed, one of whom was a former Whitman High student who rapped in the music video that our team watched. I showed a clip of the video to the team once again and informed them about what happened.

To complete our data analysis, I distributed physical copies of the coded data from session seven which was now organized into categories based on our themes. With only four participants present, we collectively read through the data and identified similarities that emerged across multiple sources, including the survey data. Within minutes it became quite clear that the most surprising finding was about the male mentoring program, MMMP. Six of the seven school leaders, 65.5% of the students, and 61% of the staff specifically identified MMMP as the intervention that provides support services for street-life oriented students. However, over half of the students and a third of the staff also indicated that they were unsure about what MMMP actually is or what it does. Additionally, an MMMP staff member who was interviewed shared that the program does not recruit street-life oriented students or have many of them in its ranks. Looking at the MMMP mission and description on its website, the team learned that the specific resources provided by MMMP are general career and academic readiness resources including tutoring, career exploration, and guest speakers.

We spent the majority of the meeting discussing the significance of the MMMP-related data. This represented the team's most surprising finding—the existence of a school-wide assumption that street-life oriented boys are supported through one particular intervention that in

reality does not really serve this population. The team had originally hoped to discover strengths and weaknesses in Whitman's intervention repertoire so as to develop a new intervention to fill any notable gaps. The team realized that rather than there being some gaps, there was instead a relative absence of any specific support for this population at all.

With only one session remaining, the team brainstormed ways to develop more findings in time to plan our final action. Travis suggested that each participant do "homework" before the next meeting and others agreed. I drafted and shared a chart to help team members organize their findings. The chart asked for participants to identify a potential finding and cite evidence from our coded data to support that finding. The team agreed to take some time before the next meeting to read through the categories and input any possible findings that emerge.

Session #9 – Taking Action. January 19, 2017. Between sessions eight and nine I examined the team's coded data and categories to draft several preliminary findings that I added to the shared findings chart created in session eight. The team spent session nine reviewing, discussing, and adding more to the findings chart. For each finding, the team discussed recommendations to deliver to Whitman's administration as action steps that the school can take to better serve its street-life oriented boys.

One recommendation was for Whitman to collaborate with MMMP to explore ways to ensure that the needs of street-life oriented boys are being met. A second recommendation was for administration to re-visit ways for teachers to build positive, supportive relationships with street-life oriented students. Most of the discussion during meeting nine focused on these two recommendations, although others were included on the team's findings document as well (see Appendix D).

With the project coming to an end, the team reflected on the fact that its work fell short of

creating principles and components for a new intervention at Whitman. Instead, the team's action step was an appeal for Whitman to first address the gaps that the team had uncovered between what students and staff believe is being done for this population and what actually is being done for them. The team decided to deliver its findings and recommendations to school administration as a sincere call to action for Whitman to critically assess its support for our most challenged young men. Although the team initially hoped to add to or enhance Whitman's many support systems and interventions, it instead discovered that none of those services actually addressed the needs of street-life oriented boys in the first place.

Research Methods

Data Collection

Interviews. I conducted interviews to learn about each participant's beliefs and experiences regarding teacher collaboration and to also learn about their general beliefs about supporting street-life oriented youth. To see how their thinking changed as a result of this action research process, I conducted pre-interviews before the action research team met for the first time and post-interviews after the team completed its work. These interviews allowed me to listen to each participant's perspective about how the process unfolded, thereby helping me answer RQ1.

I interviewed members of the action research team prior to the first team meeting and after the final team meeting for a total of thirteen individual meetings (George withdrew from the study after session three and did not participate in a post-interview). Eleven of these individual interviews were conducted after school hours so that they were not interrupted by the proceedings of a regular school day. Due to scheduling conflicts, two of these interviews were conducted in the morning prior to the start of the school day. Interviews lasted between 40 and

60 minutes and were audio recorded on a Samsung Galaxy 6 as well as on an iPhone 4 for backup. Interviews took place in the participant's own classrooms with the exception of three which took place in my classroom at the request of the participants. The interview protocols (Appendix E) were piloted with two former colleagues who teach at a comparable public school site in a different school district.

Observations. I observed each meeting of the action research team as a participant-observer. As the head researcher, I led the meetings and informed the action research cycles while conducting my own research of the process. The purpose of these observations was to produce firsthand data of the action research team's work and process so that I did not rely on only secondhand data gathered from interviews and participant journals. Observations allowed me to learn about how the action research team attempted to develop the principles and components of an intervention. Observations were pertinent to both research questions in that they provided data on how the team proceeded to create an intervention (RQ1) and what the team identified as key principles and components of the intervention (RQ2). Since it would be challenging to participate in a meeting and write observation notes at the same time, the meetings were audio recorded and transcribed.

Document Review. Document analysis took place throughout the action research team's work. I collected copies of all documents created by the team, which included meeting agendas, meeting notes, intervention outlines, data collection ideas, and more. These documents were pertinent to both research questions, which asked how the team engaged in this process and what the team identified as key principles and components of an intervention.

Journals. Each participant was asked to keep a journal for the duration of the study. These journals produced data for both research questions, which pertained to the process and the

outcomes of developing an intervention through action research. I provided writing prompts for participants (Appendix F) to help ensure that they understood what was to be written and I informed them before the study began that I alone would read these journals and that I would keep what they write confidential. The prompts posed questions about the action research process and about participants' beliefs regarding how the collaboration may inform their daily work with street-life oriented students.

It was important to establish trust and safety before journaling began. Before starting the journals we had a session that set ground rules, discussed the study in detail, and established familiarity with the action research process. To ensure that each participant had ample time and opportunity to write, I attempted to dedicate the last 15 minutes of each team meeting to writing. However, the majority of the sessions ran long thus participants were given the choice of staying late to complete the journals or going home to complete them later.

The journals themselves were online—participants each had a GoogleDoc shared with them from my personal email account that they typed into. Online journaling helped defend against a journal being lost or left behind in a room. Online journaling also permitted participants to add to their journal in between team meetings if they wished to do so. Since access to the shared document was password-protected, online journaling via a GoogleDoc also helped protect the confidentiality of the journal.

Data Analysis

Data analysis had two concurrent aims: (1) describing the action research team's process and collaborative work and (2) understanding how the content created by the team compares to existing research about supporting the achievement of Black and Latino males.

The research questions primarily concerned process and content. They asked how a team

of school leaders collaborates to develop an intervention program (process) and what that team creates (content). Data was analyzed for themes describing the collaborative process of developing the intervention as well as themes describing the content created by the team. Themes describing the process included group discussion, group decision-making, collective inquiry, compromise, management of roles and responsibilities, and sense of trust and community. Since qualitative data analysis is preferably done simultaneously with data collection, the exact themes that emerged were not possible to know at the outset of this study but developed over time (Merriam, 2009). Themes describing the content created by the team included perceptions of existing interventions, perceptions of street-life orientation, team action research findings, and team action research recommendations.

To aid in analysis, interview data was transcribed from audio recordings. Patterns and themes that appeared across participant interviews were coded and categorized using Quirkos data analysis software. Documents, meeting transcripts, and participant journals were coded and categorized in the same manner.

Trustworthiness

Two issues threatened the trustworthiness of my study. First was the threat of reactivity, particularly pertaining to research question two which asks about how to support street-life oriented youth. Participants could have told me what they thought I wanted to hear with respect to supporting street-life oriented students. Even though discipline and achievement data show that this population is often excluded from the learning environment and subjected to stringent disciplinary policies, participants may have felt a desire to paint a positive picture of how they viewed these students. Political correctness and my own work with these youth may have made it difficult for participants to reveal sincere opinions that may be negative.

To address the threat of reactivity I engaged in long-term involvement with participants through regular action research team meetings in which honesty and confidentiality were repeatedly emphasized. I will also triangulated data across data collection methods to find possible inconsistencies in what participants said. Additionally, I conducted an anonymous writing activity in our third meeting using a shared GoogleDoc as a preliminary inquest into participants' views of street-life oriented youth. Discussing the results of the anonymous writing activity was a useful starter for the team's early discussions about supporting street-life oriented youth and it helped break the ice on this topic.

Another threat to the trustworthiness of my study was my own bias in discussing these youth, interpreting the data, and drawing conclusions. My interest and experience in this topic could have skewed this study towards a direction that aligned with my own views. To address the threat of my own bias, I relied heavily on member checks and triangulation. Data collected by the action research team was interpreted by multiple individuals, which served as a check on my own bias. My methods allowed for triangulation between sources and data collection methods.

This was a unique study that took place under unique circumstances. In addition to the fact that qualitative studies cannot be generalized, this study focused only on Whitman High School with participants that are familiar with the specific qualities of the school and community. The study was therefore non-generalizable. However, it focused on process and the creation of content that can inform other urban public schools that wish to embark on creating an intervention for their own unique circumstance.

Ethical Issues

The democratic nature of action research and the gravity of the topic of youth street-life

orientation meant that there were considerable ethical considerations in this study. Participant consent and confidentiality were of utmost concern. Informed consent represented one ethical issue inherent in an action research study such as this one. No matter how much information I presented ahead of time, participants could not really know just what they are getting into since action research is a messy process. I addressed the unknowable path of action research by having discussions with each participant about the expectations and the unpredictable nature of the work that we would embark on. Confidentiality was also a concern. Although I could ensure that I would not reveal any identifying information, I could not ensure that other members of the team would keep information confidential. I addressed the possibility of broken confidentiality by clearly and repeatedly communicating the expectation that each participant kept the discussions that we had strictly confidential. For my part, I used codes for all participants and kept all of my data on my personal password-protected devices and deleted it after my dissertation had been completed.

Management of My Role

The members of the action research team were familiar with who I am as a teacher, but for this study I had to carefully manage my new role as a researcher. Participants were aware that I was in a doctoral program and that this study would serve as my dissertation study. As the lead researcher of this action research study I was clear with participants as well as site administrators that my role here was to help our school learn how to better serve our most challenged students. As a researcher I guided the team and collected data along the way. I helped keep this separate from my role as a teacher by hosting meetings outside of my own classroom and outside of scheduled teacher collaboration time. I also continued to remind participants that I was doing this as a researcher, not a teacher.

Although I had no positional power, participants on the action research team may have nonetheless deferred to my ideas and influence. I had to carefully manage my role as school leader and research team member. One way that I managed my school leader role was to emphasize that this was a team effort. As lead researcher I presented ideas but the team itself had to choose its direction and which ideas to accept or reject. Another way I addressed ethical concerns was to not have any participants on the team who were in my own department. Additionally, I did not arrange meetings during traditional school hours and I rarely hosted meetings in my own classroom. These actions helped steer the study away from my own physical space and influence and towards a more neutral, collaborative setting.

Summary

This action research study aimed to investigate the development of a single-sex intervention for street-life oriented Black and Latino males. By engaging a team of school leaders in examining street-life orientation at an urban public school, this study sought to contribute to literature on the use of care and support to boost academic engagement and achievement. Ultimately, this study can serve as a blueprint for school leaders seeking to develop care-based interventions for street-oriented males.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This study engaged seven teachers at Walt Whitman High School in a three-month action research project to address Whitman's work with street-life oriented boys. The action research team collaborated across nine after-school sessions to determine an area of focus, develop their research questions, conduct interviews and surveys, analyze their data, develop findings, and determine recommendations for improving Whitman's work with this population of students.

The primary aim of this study was to examine the process by which a diverse set of teachers came together to collaborate around a problem at their school site. The second aim was to determine what a team of teachers identified as key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys. The team's work showed that if given space to drive their own collaboration, a team of teachers can purposefully address a problem at their own site despite the many logistical challenges and demands associated with teaching in a high-need school. The research conducted by the team shifted participants' thinking about street-life orientation and revealed a school-wide laxity in strategic support for this population.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the process by which a group of teachers comes together as a community of practice to design an intervention program for street-life oriented boys?
2. What do participants identify as the key principles and components of an intervention program for supporting the success of street-life oriented boys?

To address these questions, I analyzed qualitative data from the three-month action research project. This data included pre- and post-interviews with each of the seven participants,

audio transcriptions from each of the nine collaboration sessions, observation notes, participant journals, session agendas, and documents created by the action research team. As data were analyzed, two complementary themes emerged mirroring the two research questions: *content* and *process*. The content that was created by the team—including its own findings and recommendations to the school site—produced two findings pertaining to research question two. Analysis of the process by which participants became a community of practice and worked together to investigate a problem produced three findings pertaining to research question one. In total, analysis of the data yielded the following five findings:

1. Participants identified an unanticipated and disquieting absence of support for the school's street-life oriented boys.

2. Participants grew in their understanding of street-life oriented boys and the challenges they face in their pursuit of education.

3. Freedom to direct their own collaboration led participants to create a teacher-driven collaborative process that necessitated the mutual engagement of all participants.

4. Establishing a sense of community and trust enabled participants to work through disagreements and share accountability.

5. Participants felt that this action research project was more effective than other Whitman collaboration and that it more closely reflected their ideas about what ideal teacher collaboration should look like.

This chapter begins with a brief review of the action research process. I then present findings aligned with the two major aspects of this study—content and process. "Acknowledging the façade" explains the core content produced by the team's three months of action research. This content includes the identification of a worrying limitation in the school's promise to support street-life oriented boys as well as a revealing misperception among participants about the challenges faced by street-life oriented boys. "Leading together" describes the process by which this group of teachers became a community of practice that explored the difficult topic of

street-life orientation at their school site. With minimal guidance or direction, the participants developed their own teacher-driven process of inquiry and grew into a community whose collaboration was reported to be more worthwhile and effective than the other forms of collaboration at their school site.

The Action Research Process

The participants engaged in a traditional action research cycle over the course of three months. The team's steps included identifying the problem, planning research, collecting data, analyzing data, developing findings, and producing recommendations for their school site. We met after school once per week from late October 2016 through January 2017 for approximately one hour at a time. The data and focus of each meeting is presented on the following table. Refer to chapter three for more detail regarding the content and procedures of each meeting.

Table 2. *Overview of Action Research Meetings*

Session	Date	Focus	Action Research Phase
1	10/19/16	Introduction to the study; overview of action research	Introduction
2	10/24/16	Team introductions; framing the problem	Identifying the problem
3	10/31/16	Examining street-life orientation at Whitman; developing an area of focus	Identifying the problem
4	11/14/16	Developing research questions and preliminary data collection methods	Planning research
5	11/29/16	Finalize research design	Planning research
6	12/8/16	Data collection instruments	Data collection
7	12/21/16	Initial data analysis; codes and themes	Data analysis
8	1/11/17	Reviewing themes, developing findings	Data analysis
9	1/19/17	Final findings and recommendations	Share and take action

The team interviewed six school leaders (three counselors, two administrators, one classified staff member) and surveyed students and teachers to collect data on Whitman High School's support of street-life oriented boys. The team collaboratively coded the data to identify themes and develop findings. A key finding was that despite support programs and recent professional development focused on African American achievement and positive classroom communities, the school lacked strategic support for street-life oriented students. Students, teachers, and school leaders collectively misidentified and misunderstood the aims of existing extracurricular offerings. The team identified no strategic support system for Whitman's most high-need youth.

In planning its research design, the team intended to evaluate the strengths and limitations of existing interventions. Their hope was to determine how a new intervention could "fill the gaps" needed to more effectively support street-life oriented boys. After finding that existing interventions by and large fail to support this population at all, the team ultimately developed recommendations for school leaders to address this campus-wide shortfall in lieu of the team creating principles and components of a new intervention.

This process resulted in a shift in participants' perspectives of street-life orientation and a newfound appreciation among participants for democratic, teacher-driven collaboration and leadership. The following section describes my findings regarding the content that was produced by the team as well as the process that took shape.

Findings

This section is organized by two complementary ideas stemming from my two research questions—*content* and *process*. Two key findings about street-life orientation at Whitman emerged through analysis of the content that was created by the team. Three key findings related

to the team's process emerged through analysis of the team's action research collaboration.

Category One: Acknowledging the Façade (*Content*)

Participants began this study with a belief that Whitman already provided substantial amounts of resources and interventions to support the educational success of street-life oriented boys. For instance, multiple participants mentioned campus mentoring services and teacher professional development sessions as examples of Whitman's multiple approaches to helping this population be successful in school. The team's own research found that school leaders believed the same, as multiple school leaders pointed to many of those same resources and interventions as evidence of Whitman's efforts to support this population. However, as the process unfolded the team discovered that Whitman's support systems were tantamount to a façade—behind the school's tiers of support and intervention (see Appendix G) was a glaring absence of any academic or socio-emotional support or intervention that addresses the specific needs of street-life oriented students. For instance, there is nothing in place to teach street-life oriented students how to effectively overcome trauma, conflict, substance abuse, or the negative influences of gang membership. The team's research revealed that none of the existing services listed on the school's Tiers of Support and Intervention document actively and specifically recruit this population and that participation in these services by street-life oriented boys is virtually nonexistent.

The content produced by the team did not culminate in a list of principles and components for a new intervention, which was the team's initial goal. Instead, the team produced recommendations for how Whitman can begin the tough task of exploring why street-life oriented students are not presently offered any targeted support at our school by any of the services encompassed in Whitman's tiers of support and intervention. As detailed in the next two

sections, participants reported being surprised by this realization and similarly surprised by their own individual misperceptions regarding the severity of challenges faced by this population of students.

Finding #1 (RQ2 – Content): Participants identified an unanticipated and disquieting absence of support for the school's street-life oriented boys.

Prior to engaging in this study participants perceived Whitman to be a site that already provided substantial amounts of resources and interventions to support the educational success of street-life oriented boys. By the conclusion of this study participants were surprised to discover that they had overestimated Whitman's support of street-life oriented youth. For instance, they discovered that of the dozens of academic and socio-emotional support resources listed on Whitman's "Tiers of Support and Intervention" chart (Appendix G), none of them addressed the specific needs of street-life oriented boys. The particular needs of this population—which include learning how to effectively overcome trauma, conflict, substance abuse, or the negative influences of gang membership—are not addressed by any of Whitman's interventions. This discovery left some participants questioning whether Whitman cares at all about the success of this population.

In pre-interviews nearly every participant reported that Whitman was engaged in efforts to support this population but that more needed to be done. Alyssa explained that "we've made strides and pretty big ones" (Pre-Interview), a sentiment mirrored by Jessie, who stated, "I think we're making progress, but I don't think we're doing them justice yet" (Pre-Interview). Participants referenced existing mentoring programs, tutoring offerings, and professional development sessions about race and about relationship building as signs of progress in supporting this population.

The only participant skeptical of Whitman's commitment to supporting street-life

oriented boys was Travis, who reported that the school is failing to address the internal needs of these students and is instead overly focused on the staff's own policies and procedures. Travis did, however, acknowledge the school's litany of support services, saying, "School wide, I know they have a plan and they have an outline of all these interventions that we do, classroom level on all the way up to disciplinary action" (Pre-Interview). All participants reported that Whitman was at least attempting to support this population; however, they also admitted that existing efforts have not yet seemed to eliminate campus gang activity or significantly improve the graduation rates of this population. Phillip's pre-interview explanation was symbolic of the group's general agreement: "Whitman tries its hardest…which is the most important thing. The bottom line is love; you show them love and show them that you care about them then basically that improves everything. I feel like our school does a good job of trying to do that" (Pre-Interview). These preliminary perceptions about Whitman's support of street-life oriented youth drastically changed by the end of the study.

As is typical in action research cycles, the first two collaboration sessions focused on identifying the specific problem that the group wished to study. Participants explored their thoughts, beliefs, and impressions of street-life orientation during these meetings and ultimately encountered a need to decide what to focus their research on. The choice was between researching the root causes of street-life orientation or instead researching what more Whitman could do to better support students who have already internalized this orientation. The group chose the latter. Its action research process (described in detail in chapter three) primarily centered on the following research question: "To what extent do current interventions and extracurricular offerings at Whitman support the success of street-life oriented boys?" and the sub-question, "What do program staff identify as their major challenges and successes in

supporting street-life oriented boys?" The team's hope was that answers to these questions would help identify areas of weakness that could inform its own creation of a new intervention.

As it turned out, the group's overarching finding was largely unanticipated and shifted the group's expectations about planning out a new intervention. A two-week data collection period included interviews with seven school leaders, a survey of thirty-five teachers, and a survey of 178 students. Through analysis of this data the team found that while most staff at Whitman believe there are support systems and interventions in place for this population such as mentoring and tutoring, there are actually no programs, interventions, or offerings that are operating with a mission to support street-life oriented boys at Whitman.

"Everyone thinks MMMP is the solution and it's not designed for that" (Alyssa, Session 7). The team's data indicated a widely held belief among students and staff that a non-profit male mentoring program called MMMP is the school's solution to the problem of low educational attainment for street-life oriented boys. MMMP program staff, however, do not view their program as being designed for street-life oriented youth and it is unclear how many boys in the program are street-life oriented. Participants found that two-thirds of staff and students consider MMMP to be the primary support system for street-life oriented boys, but MMMP staff reported that the program does not recruit or target this population nor does it offer services specific to the needs of this group. The conflicting ideas about MMMP's role at Whitman points to a sizeable misunderstanding across the campus that may be leaving street-life oriented youth behind.

A survey administered by participants asked students and staff questions regarding their familiarity and experience with each of the thirteen programs and interventions operating on campus. When asked which of these offerings, if any, they would refer a street-life oriented boy

to for help, 61% of staff and 65.5% of students indicated MMMP. Additionally, six of the seven school leaders interviewed reported that MMMP is a key resource in working with street-life oriented boys. The action research team discovered, however, that MMMP does not view itself as an intervention for street-life oriented boys. In the words of one MMMP staffer, "We don't really target them, but we target those students classified 'at risk'" who are struggling academically. This general objective means that program staff do not address the topic of street-life orientation but instead prioritize broad-spectrum academic tutoring and motivation. Another source who once volunteered in the program observed that few street-life oriented boys participate in the program and that the program itself does not recruit this population. Additionally, the team discovered that over half of students and a third of the teachers surveyed either have not heard of or are unsure about what MMMP does.

As the team analyzed their data and explored this question regarding MMMP, it became apparent that a gap exists between the school's assumptions about MMMP and the program's own objectives (MMMP's website reports that its objectives are to provide one-on-one mentoring, academic assistance, college preparation, and employment readiness to boys at Whitman). The team discussed this finding at length throughout sessions seven through nine, beginning with an early realization during data analysis in session seven that a pattern was emerging. Alyssa's question, "I wonder if MMMP realizes how many people think [gang intervention] is what they do?" (Alyssa, Session 7) was the first hint of what would become one of the team's most surprising discoveries. Her comment was in reference to the fact that MMMP was identified by a majority of students and staff as the intervention they would refer a gang-involved boy to. Sessions eight and nine were dominated with discussion about the unanticipated disconnect between Whitman personnel and MMMP. As explained by Travis, "We found this

go-to for MMMP as a source [for supporting street-life oriented boys], and that's not the group they work with" (Post-Interview).

"**We don't seem to have any program that's directed specifically at these kids"** (Davin, Post-Interview). The team found that none of the programs offered at Whitman are geared towards supporting street-life oriented youth. Although all are available to this population, none appear to purposefully reach out to them. For example, counseling and mental health services are available to all students, but street-life orientation is not cited as a reason to refer a student to these services (Whitman faculty handbook). In fact, the three counselors interviewed by the action research team reported that they would refer a street-life oriented student to MMMP, not to mental health services that might help a student learn how to cope with the trauma and conflict that often accompany street-life orientation.

Because a goal of the action research project was to determine principles and components of a new intervention for street-life oriented boys, the team decided to begin by assessing Whitman's existing work. This decision was first suggested by Travis in session five when he said to the group, "That's just one thing we could look at—is there a gap?" (Travis, Session 5). The team expected a few "gaps" in Whitman's repertoire for supporting street-life oriented students but instead found a glaring absence of anything—such as restorative justice practices, trauma-informed pedagogy, or gang intervention programs—that can be pointed to as a support system for this group. This finding left Davin wondering about the school's commitment to this population. In his post-interview, he noted:

> There's a big misconception there. And in terms of finding that out…my next step is wondering, like I mentioned earlier, does this school have any interest? Does this administration? Does this district have any interest in trying to build something specifically for these kids? Or is it more a matter of, like, this is just triage? (Post-Interview)

Alyssa reflected on this key finding when she stated that "from the data, everyone's assuming someone else took care of [the problem]" (Post-Interview)—namely, that the school's male mentoring program "takes care" of the problem of street-life orientation. Julie added in her post-interview, "I think it's the fact that I feel like we hear about [this population] a lot, but I didn't realize that there were so few resources dedicated to them. MMMP was considered the default, but they're not supposed to be" (Post-Interview). As a result of these unanticipated findings, the team's final recommendations included a suggestion that "[Whitman] should work with MMMP to consider how to more specifically utilize it as a resource for street-life boys." The team offered two specific ideas, one being that the school devote funding or staff resources to MMMP to help it develop an added component of supporting street-life oriented students. A second idea was for the school to design its own in-house mentoring service (MMMP is a non-profit organization) specifically for street-life oriented youth. Such a move was seen as a first step before attempting to build a new intervention from scratch.

This finding was rather discouraging for participants in that they began with a sense of adding to Whitman's repertoire of support systems and instead discovered an absence of support systems for street-life oriented boys. Phillip reflected, "I feel like I learned that a lot more needs to be done in terms of really pinpointing the problem and coming up with a solution for it (Post-Interview).

"I wonder why one third of school staff would not refer?" (Davin, Session 8). Another unanticipated discovery for the team concerned Whitman's teachers. Of the thirty-four teachers who completed the team's survey, eleven indicated that if they had a street-life oriented boy in class they would not refer him to any program or intervention. This surprised the participants, who wondered why teachers would not refer a student in need. "I'm wondering if people are

answering in terms of their habit…or if they just wouldn't do it because they don't want to?" asked Julie (Session 8). Alyssa explained a need to explore this further—to investigate "what this community of teachers are thinking, what they think their role is, what their habits are…clearly a different study needs to be done on them alone and their mindset, what they believe" (Alyssa, Session 8). Whitman has dedicated a considerable amount of school-wide professional development to the importance of building relationships with students. It has also embedded an advisory period into its daily bell schedule to give teachers more opportunity to get to know students' needs and help monitor their progress. The team concluded that having this many teachers report that they would not refer a street-life oriented student who may need academic or socio-emotional support to any resource is troubling and warrants further investigation.

Finding #2 (RQ2 – Content): Participants grew in their understanding of street-life oriented boys and the challenges they face in their pursuit of education.

From the beginning, participants expressed optimism that this collaboration project would not only be beneficial for Whitman's street-life oriented students, but that it would also add to their own knowledge and experience as educators. This was expressed by Alyssa when she stated that even if the team fails to adequately help these students, "I'm hoping that…some learning is happening, some process that people can take away and can reflect on" (Pre-Interview). Data show that the collaboration indeed shifted participants' understanding of the problem while also producing new realizations about Whitman's efforts to help street-life oriented students be successful in school.

"**I wasn't expecting this"** (Travis, Session 3). Our first deep dive into the topic of street life orientation came during session three. I showed two videos to the group, each produced by local street-life oriented boys. One video was an informal rap freestyle by a young man sitting in a car and the other was a music video produced by former Whitman students who are affiliated

with the largest gang in the city. The video of the young man in a car shows him holding a can of beer and flashing gang signs while rapping about committing sex acts and acts of violence. The second video shows groups of young men wearing gang colors while waving guns, liquor, cash, and marijuana and rapping about gang activity, crime, and violence. Participants viewed both videos and wrote reflections, comments, and questions on an anonymous online document. We then had a group discussion using the anonymous document as our guide.

One of the anonymous comments read, "it made me tense." The explicit language and graphic images of drugs and violence seemed to shock many of the participants despite their self-reported familiarity with street-life oriented youth. This touched off a lengthy debate regarding the authenticity of the lifestyles being portrayed in the videos. In his journal for that day, Phillip summarized, "I loved the discussion about how real the students are in each video. Some of us felt that the imagery was very relevant to the lives of the youth who created it, others of us felt that it was a front that was not realistic" (Participant Journal).

This debate marked the start of a running theme of exploring our own ideas and misunderstandings about what it means to be street-life orientated in Whitman City. Participants initially thought they knew plenty about street-life orientation and each of them shared strategies during their pre-interviews for teaching and supporting this population in the classroom. For example, Davin stated "I've had several of those kids over the years and a lot of how I approach them depends on our earliest interactions…in some cases with kids like that I've been tough-lovey, kind of speaking to them on what I think is their level of communication" (Pre-Interview). Julie explained that she grew up with siblings who are street-life oriented, although not in Whitman City (Pre-Interview). They each detailed teaching experiences with street-life oriented students and methods for supporting them class. Despite their self-reported experience and

familiarity with this population, participants realized through our collaborative study that they largely underestimated the severity of the challenges faced by these Whitman City youth. Specifically, they reported being unaware of the amount of gang violence, trauma, and criminal activity in the community that Whitman High serves.

Data show that there were instances during each session in which team members questioned and sought new understanding about street-life orientation. In session four, participants asked about specific neighborhoods, with Davin remarking, “in that location or just in a particular part of the city where that type of stuff is prevalent and they're poor, that's two strikes against them” (Session 4). In session five, participants questioned the strength of peer groups and the role of being on a sports team, with Alyssa stating, “They often do respect sports, so that's why they're given the pass to go participate in that and then come back to the game, so to speak” (Session 5). One conversation in session eight revolved around the dynamics between local Latino and Black gangs. Other conversations centered on motivations behind street activity; participants read excerpts from a past study I conducted in which I interviewed eight street-life oriented males about their motivations (Appendix C). These males shared that some of their illicit activity and drug use resulted from wanting to financially support their siblings or wanting to feel accepted by others. Phillip paraphrased this line of thinking by stating, “I don't want people to know what I'm going through at home. So if I just fit in…if I just fight a little bit, I’m good” (Session 4). Participants openly explored their assumptions and lack of knowledge about street-life orientation in an effort to better understand the issue.

By the end of the project each participant reported being surprised by the extent of what they did not know about this population. Some did not know how much violence this population experiences. Four homicides, including the deaths of two former Whitman students, occurred

within two miles of Whitman High during the course of this study. The weekend before our final team meeting saw three shootings and ten arrests. These occurrences are in addition to two instances of threatening gang graffiti being painted at the front of Whitman's main entrance and a string of gang-involved afterschool fights during the first two months of the school year. Jessie explained in her post-interview, "If you're just in Whitman, you don't know that their lives are like that. Just seeing what goes on once they step outside the school. Like I had no idea it was such a touch-and-go. I don't know if that's the word. They live moment by moment" (Post-Interview).

The final month of our study alone saw 383 reported crimes in Whitman City, 59 of which were violent crimes according to the Whitman City Police Department. Like others in the group, Jessie did not realize that Whitman City's level of gang and criminal activity is as severe as it is. One participant's anonymous video comment read, "all of this bravado, in my mind, is totally fake. These kids are scared and they feel hopeless." Travis verbalized his initial skepticism of the crime, gang, and violence references in the videos: "When you say glamour, it really looks to me like it's Hollywood-ized almost. It's produced, it's not authentic. They'd probably be insulted if I said that or whatever but it looks like they're trying really hard to convince me" (Session 3). He insinuated that the young men in the videos flashing weapons, drugs, and cash are lying about their lifestyles, saying "they're like, 'This is my life. I flash guns and everything.' I'm pretty sure they don't walk around flashing guns all the time. Maybe once in a while, maybe they carry" (Travis, Session 3). After being challenged by Phillip about the level of crime in Whitman City, Travis conducted an impromptu internet search for Whitman City crime statistics. This resulted in the following exchange:

Travis: Domestic violence…19. Assaults…22. Assaults in the last month…Yeah, already these numbers are way higher than I would have expected in

Whitman City.

Alyssa: Those are cases that are reported.

Travis: Right.

Alyssa: We're probably talking about a fraction of the actual ones.

Travis: I don't know if they have anything on here about ... What's ADW? I have no idea what that is.

Rustin: Assault with a deadly weapon.

Travis: Oh okay, so there's 19 of those. That doesn't necessarily mean a gun, but a bat I think counts. Yeah, it's a lot higher than I would have expected. I definitely do not walk around Whitman City ever in fear.

(Session 3)

By the end of the project, none of the participants were skeptical of the seriousness of the crime and violence in Whitman City. Five participants reported that they had underestimated the extent and severity of the challenges faced by Whitman's street-life oriented boys. In his post-interview, Davin shared a reflection that was symbolic of how most participants in the project felt:

> I learned stuff that I was not completely aware of. I didn't know how heavy, like truly heavy in, some of these kids were. And man, it's just mind blowing…you know it exists. You know there's kids this age running around doing this stuff. But, it's just like, Whitman City? You know? It's just, even after being here for eight years in Whitman City, I don't think of like, really crazy gang stuff going on. But it's real. (Post-Interview)

Jessie stated that "just being here a year, I had no idea how much violence there was. Not within the school but within their lives and people that they know" (Post-Interview). Phillip reported, "I learned that the problem is a little bit bigger than what we thought it was" (Post-Interview). Travis, who began as the most verbally skeptical participant of the group, stated that the collaboration project "helped me understand students that I have. It helped deepen my understanding of students' situations. I knew parts, she knew parts, Davin knew parts. But when we all started talking about it, I was able to understand the kids more, which I think is always a good thing" (Post-Interview).

An unfortunate development that contributed to participants' deepened understanding of the challenges faced by street-life oriented youth around Whitman came between sessions seven and eight. During that time, one of the young men who performed in the music video we watched in session three was killed in a drive-by shooting while attending a vigil for a friend who had been killed two weeks earlier. This killing happened at a housing complex near Whitman where many students live. Each participant expressed surprise when I notified them during our collaboration session the next week. Alyssa quietly exclaimed to herself, "RIP kid, RIP. There's only two, no, three directions in their life: death, jail, or somehow manage to get out" (Session 8). Jessie reflected on this shooting and expressed shock, responding in her post-interview, "They live in violent circumstances. Their environment is nothing like mine. I can't even imagine" (Post-Interview).

As the group grew in their understanding of the challenges faced by street-life oriented boys at Whitman, they learned through their action research that the school lacked the necessary supports—such as gang intervention programs, restorative justice practices, or accessible mental health services—needed to help this population achieve in school. The team's findings and recommendations were eye-opening for many of the participants and reflected the reality that despite being experienced Whitman teachers, they were not aware of the extent to which Whitman's street-life oriented boys are exposed to gangs, crime, and violence. Alyssa, who had worked at Whitman the longest and lives in Whitman City, said, "That's definitely what I learned. We don't know enough about the street life oriented students. What we know we are not interpreting correctly, and everyone is just assuming someone else has taken care of that group of students" (Post-Interview). This realization that Whitman has not developed services to specifically support street-life oriented students was also expressed by Julie, who explained

“That just made me realize like, oh, they don't really have a structure…I feel like they're being more neglected than I realized” (Post-Interview).

Category Two: Leading together *(Process)*

Seven teachers and I came together in late October 2016 to explore how Whitman High School could more effectively support its street-life oriented boys. As a participant leader interested in studying the team’s process, I provided minimal structure and guidance to the team. This input was largely relegated to the essentials of action research. The rest—what to specifically study, how to work together, how to develop a research design, and more—was left for the team to determine.

Many of the participants did not previously know each other and the diversity within the team spanned subject matter, experience, race, and gender. The seven-member team consisted of three English teachers, one science teacher, one digital arts teacher, one engineering teacher, and one social science teacher (myself). Collectively the teachers represented two of the campus’ three career academies and ranged in experience from one year at Whitman to ten years at Whitman. Two participants (myself included) identified as Black, one as Latina, three as White, and one as Asian American. Three participants identified as female and four identified as male.

Despite the absence of a designated leader, structure, or directive, this team of teachers succeeded in developing its own process of collaboration. The essential elements of this process included an open-ended, teacher-driven structure that allowed for the mutual engagement of all participants. Another essential element of the process was the development of a community of trust that allowed participants to work through disagreements and share accountability for various tasks. Participants reported that this collaboration was much more worthwhile and effective than most other teacher collaboration they have experienced.

Finding #3 (RQ1 – Process): Freedom to direct their own collaboration led participants to create a teacher-driven collaborative process that necessitated the mutual engagement of all participants.

An essential element of the collaborative processes that emerged in this study was the freedom of teachers to direct their own collaboration. As a participant-observer, I guided the team in learning the fundamentals of a traditional action research cycle. Aside from this nominal guidance, the team was left to explore and craft its direction and process on its own. There were many possible outcomes for how this process might turn out. For instance, the team could have struggled with disunity and lack of focus. Alternatively, individual participants could have "taken over" the project and instilled their own rigid ideas about how to proceed. It was also possible that the team would insist that I direct the project since it was my study in the first place. Instead, what emerged was a teacher-driven collaborative process that fostered mutual engagement of all participants.

"**There was a freedom to direct"** (Travis, Post-Interview). Session agendas were limited to two or three items that were either open-ended questions or team-created action items from previous sessions. For example, the agenda for session five had two items: check-ins and finalizing research questions. The check ins included three open-ended questions: "How are we doing on this?" "How are we doing on our norms?" and "Any adjustments as we head into our actual research process?" (Session 5 Agenda). The second item on the agenda read "Solidify Research Questions" and asked the team to finalize their brainstorming from the previous session and start mapping out possible data collection methods. These agenda items are illustrative of the minimal, mostly action-research related input that I provided the team (session agendas available in Appendix B). This nominal guidance allowed for a freedom of direction, an essential element of this collaboration.

In post-interviews, five of the participants credited this freedom for their ability to create a teacher-driven collaborative process. Alyssa reported, “You gave us the background information that we might have needed for whatever we were going to focus on in that meeting. Then it was like, ‘okay, well then let’s get into it.’ We were able to just kind of get in there” (Post-Interview). Agendas and meeting transcripts corroborate this. The session seven agenda, for instance, contains two items: 1) Data Collection Debrief and 2) Data Analysis. Transcripts from that meeting show that I spent 12 minutes explaining the process of thematic coding. During the remaining 49 minutes of the meeting participants jointly determined how to code the team’s data and negotiated what themes and colors to use. For example, Davin suggested to the group, “Okay there’s six of us here. What if we all just took like one interview and decide we highlight anything about ‘time’ in yellow?…and then move on to another theme?” (Session 7). This comment shows that, after receiving basic guidance from me, participants mutually contributed ideas and developed their own collective process of data analysis.

Phillip reported that the team “didn't have the restraint of having an agenda item that we have to definitely get past for the purpose of everyday work, because it was mostly ideas. Ideas and trying to come up with solutions for our big problems” (Post-Interview). The agendas and transcripts from sessions seven and eight show this flexibility. They indicate that team data analysis was initially planned for session seven only but it extended significantly into session eight due to the amount of time the process ended up taking. Given this visible absence of a dictated process, participants created their own teacher-directed process.

With freedom of direction, the team created a collaborative process that took the form of collective brainstorming, negotiation of ideas, consensus building, and action. An example of this process is seen in the session three transcripts. After the team explored the meaning of street-

life orientation, I advised the group to decide on a specific focus of their action research. I posed the question, “What do you think we need to know more about?” (Session 3). Meeting audio and observation notes reveal that an open discussion concerning the benefits and drawbacks of different areas of focus continued for thirty-one minutes. This discussion spanned brainstorming, negotiation, consensus and action.

George spontaneously began the brainstorming phase with an analogy of his quitting smoking. He reasoned that what helped him quit were daily tools, thus arguing that the team ought to focus on exploring tools that could help street-life oriented students. Phillip agreed and offered an example from his own teaching experience, adding that “we're not talking about the future, we're not talking about the schoolwork, we're talking about [helping the students] right now” (Session 3). Travis then presented his idea that the team needs to know the root causes of street-life orientation in Whitman City so as to better comprehend the issue. He hypothesized, “You can't change anyone unless they choose to change,” therefore understanding the root causes must be the first step in the team’s research process (Travis, Session 3). These statements reflect an unstructured, collective brainstorming discussion indicative of a teacher-driven process where no single team leader or structure is dictating the team’s movement.

For 15 minutes participants added their own ideas, posed questions, agreed with the ideas of others, or countered something that was said. As the group moved closer towards a consensus to focus its research on how Whitman can better support these students, Travis was the lone holdout continuing to push for us focusing on why youth in Whitman City become street-life oriented in the first place. While no one expressly disagreed with Travis’ general point about the value of understanding the causes of street-life orientation, participants did disagree with this being the primary aim of this action research cycle. In negotiating their way through this hurdle,

the participants affirmed Travis' ideas while also presenting alternative ideas. Phillip affirmed Travis when he stated, "I think the 'why' is very important," while Alyssa countered Travis' reasoning by explaining the nature of trauma and the reality that "there might not be a true 'why'" (Alyssa, Session 3). Jessie pointed to the phrase "means of survival" in the definition of street-life orientation and argued for the team researching and developing "some other skills, some other ways that they can survive without [street-life activity]" (Jessie, Session 3). Although he disagreed with Travis, George affirmed Travis' position in reasoning, "I think we'd be replicating a lot of research" by studying the roots of street-life orientation (George, Session 3).

These statements are indicative of an unstructured process of brainstorming, negotiating ideas, and attempting to build a consensus. George's comment about previous research was met positively by Travis, who shifted his position after I offered to bring excerpts of a previous paper I had written about Whitman City's gang-affiliated youth (Appendix C). At that point, the group reached a consensus to study the more immediate question of how Whitman High can best support students who are street-life oriented.

The unstructured joint enterprise described above was a regular feature of sessions three through nine. Freedom of direction meant that the group was left to create its own daily process for collaborating. Participants described the collaborative process as an organic, democratic form of collaborating. Travis wrote in his journal, "I liked the organic flow of the meeting and that with little in the way of formal group norms we were able to share and come to a consensus on several items" (Participant Journal), while Davin stated, "I think everybody latched on to [ideas] in a pretty organic sort of way" (Post-Interview). What participants called "organic" was in fact teacher-driven collaboration involving the mutual engagement of all participants.

Julie's comments in her participant journal for session three are illustrative of how these

exchanges allowed the team to mutually engage in the inquiry process and together determine their own direction:

> It was nice to hear the different perspectives, and I liked how people didn't feel hesitant to ask questions about things they didn't know or understand…I agree with Phillip's notion that these students can use more time to simply reflect on their lives. I don't think we should dwell on the past too much, because like Alyssa said, there isn't always a clear 'why,' and sometimes it can hurt even more to know that there is no logical reason why you're going through whatever you're suffering. (Julie, Participant Journal)

Julie's statement confirms the mutual engagement that occurred as team members shared and pushed back against each other's ideas until consensus was reached and a course of action was determined. This process typifies the teacher-driven "organic" nature of collaboration that unfolded in this study.

Transcripts and observation notes indicate that before every major team decision—determining norms, choosing an area of focus, writing research questions, choosing data collection methods, analyzing data, producing findings and recommendations—the participants revealed a similar pattern of collective brainstorming, negotiation of ideas, and consensus building. The previously discussed 21-minute conversation in session three produced the team's primary area of focus for the project. A 34-minute discussion in session five resulted in three finalized research questions. A 56-minute discussion in session 6 produced the data collection methods, instruments, and individual assignments for interviews.

"We didn't really allow anyone to not participate" (Alyssa, Post-Interview). The teacher-directed process of inquiry and decision-making necessitated mutual engagement, or input and involvement from multiple participants. Observation notes show that every participant spoke in each session with the exception of session three, where Julie did not speak. All six participants reported in their post-interviews that they observed a greater level of engagement

and participation from teachers in this collaboration than they observe in their school-wide, department, and academy collaboration. Phillip commented that “this one right here, I feel like no one had their phones out, no one had their work being graded, not checking papers or anything like that. It's just more directed towards the initiative that's there” (Post-Interview). Observation data support this reflection, indicating that each participant posed questions and responded to others’ comments throughout the nine sessions. Julie stated that “it felt like the teachers when they were there were more engaged” (Post-Interview), while Alyssa explained that “in the collaboration in this study, we didn't really allow anyone to not participate. We weren't forcing anyone, but we were trying to hear everyone's voices” (Post-Interview).

This mutual engagement of participants emerged despite the fact that only two participants reported having any training in collaboration strategies or techniques. The rest reported that they had not received any training regarding successful collaboration practices. “Nothing official. The only things we've ever gone over is maybe norms at the start of the school year” said Julie (Pre-Interview). Davin similarly stated that “in a lot of PD's there's always the touchy feely session of establishing norms and how we're going to be nice to each other and all that” (Pre-Interview), but that he had not received any formal training otherwise. Given that only one participant in this study currently holds a leadership position on campus (Jessie is a department chair), this democratic process of inquiry is not reflective of any established campus protocols or training for collaboration.

Finding #4 (RQ1 – Process): Establishing a sense of community and trust enabled participants to work through disagreements and share accountability.

Another essential element of the collaborative process was a sense of community and trust. The participants in this study teach across five subject areas in two different career academies, thus they had minimal familiarity or collaboration experience with each other prior to

this project. Despite the wide diversity of years teaching, years at Whitman, subject taught, and academy membership—as well as diversity in age, ethnicity, and gender—the participants created their own community from which feelings of trust, belonging, and mutual respect were shared by all participants. Jessie explained, "The easiest part was just feeling comfortable enough to say anything and not worry because everybody was on the same page" (Post-Interview). This statement typifies participants' observations that everyone in the group had a mutual respect for one another's ideas and an understanding that differences in opinion could be shared without resulting in personal judgement.

Exploring street-life oriented boys necessitated conversations dealing with race, gender, poverty, and other topics that some find difficult to openly discuss. The participants in this study reported that they felt comfortable in sharing their ideas with each other given the sense of community that they felt. Davin wrote in his participant journal after the second session, "I think everybody in the group is coming into this with a positive attitude, and I'm interested in hearing everyone's perspectives over the course of the study" (Participant Journal). Alyssa wrote after the third session:

> As an adult, you forget that you can still be influenced. I feel like we are all influencing each other in such a positive way. I find myself, being more mindful, more motivated, and more passionate…my hope is that this energy will translate in our final result. I know that it is having an effect on me. (Alyssa, Participant Journal)

This comment pointed to a sense of excitement that many participants shared as their community began to develop. Julie wrote in her journal that "it was nice to hear the different perspectives, and I liked how people didn't feel hesitant to ask questions about things they didn't know or understand" (Participant Journal).

Participants trusted their community enough to share their individual perspectives. This sharing reinforced the sense of community according to Jessie, who said in her post-interview:

> I see Alyssa differently now. I still think she's fantastic, but I see her differently. Because I knew she invested in the kids, but after this, she's like gung ho, all out there! It helped me understand where my colleagues are coming from more so also. I think it helped camaraderie some. (Jessie, Post-Interview)

Of note here is the fact that building community, or camaraderie as Jessie says, happened without any directive from myself for participants to get to know each other. No ice breakers, daily check-ins, or other community-building practices were built into the action research project.

This sense of community was initiated in part by the group's negotiated development of norms in the second session. Since I was interested in studying the group's own organic process, I did not ask for or establish norms for any of our meetings. Instead, I asked the group if they were interested in having norms. Travis responded by saying, "I could go either way, but I do feel like we have already demonstrated that we can get through whatever. I feel like we've already started the conversation without any formal norms" (Session 2). Alyssa responded, "I'll just openly admit, I'm one of those norms and common agreements type of people, only because as far as relationships go, for me the biggest thing is that there's nothing assumed. I don't assume what you believe is appropriate or not appropriate" (Session 2). Davin and Julie shared in their pre-interviews that they do not need norms, and Davin sarcastically referenced them as "touchy-feely" devices. However, they along with the rest of the team expressed a willingness to develop norms for the sake of everyone's comfort.

Jessie told the group that she has experienced being disrespected in collaborations before, thus she wanted to ensure our group had norms in place to avoid any conflicts of that sort. This launched a twelve-minute collective brainstorming and negotiation session that produced three fundamental norms for the duration of the project—*respect everyone's ideas*, *solicit everyone's ideas*, and *do your part*. Julie wrote in her journal for that day, "While not a fan of group norms,

most people did express an interest in having concrete ideas of how to interact with each other and respect each other's perspectives" (Participant Journal).

Three participants specifically credited these norms as a key factor for the sense of trust and community that the group developed. Travis, who originally was neutral about the idea of norms, explained in his post-interview, "As far as the norms, I'm not sure if that group, if you just stuck them in a room together, we would just behave that way together or if it was that we spoke them out loud at the beginning" (Post-Interview). He specifically pointed to the norm about soliciting everyone's input. "I know for myself and at least one other teacher, we had to keep reminding ourselves, 'okay, we gotta give two people a chance, so let them speak before we say what we got'" (Travis, Post-Interview). Alyssa shared the same sentiment in her session five journal, writing "I really do believe that our norms have really set a guideline for our participation, I find myself focused on hearing all voices" (Post-Interview).

"We're going to talk it all out" (Alyssa, Post-Interview). In forging a community of trust and belonging, the participants were able to avoid being hampered by disagreements. Disagreements routinely occurred, however they did not materialize into arguments or personal attacks. Jessie wrote in her journal, "I liked that the conversation was candid, and even though some participants had different viewpoints, all of the points were given due consideration and discussion" (Participant Journal). Julie shared that compared to other teacher collaboration meetings that she attends, "I feel like [this collaboration] was more respectful. People were more respectful of each other" (Participant Journal). Alyssa also drew a comparison between the interactions in our sessions and interactions in her other collaboration meetings. She explained in her post-interview,

> It's like I found myself this year questioning other people's intentions. Because [academy collaboration] is a touchy subject, I can't be open in my communication with that. While

> here I think we kind of set the tone a little like let's do the discussing. There's going to be some things we're not going to agree on, but we're going to talk it all out. That's the difference. (Alyssa, Post-Interview)

Many of these disagreements were about action research decisions, such as what data to collect or what phrasing of the research questions would be best. It took 21 minutes during session three for participants to negotiate and work through disagreements over what the focus of their research should be. In session six, participants disagreed over whether to administer surveys to all students or whether to specifically identify street-life oriented students to take the survey. Travis noted our daily disagreements and collective brainstorming when he stated that "[there] was a lot of negotiation and sharing of ideas more so, [it was] honest" (Post-Interview). Alyssa gave a specific example in her session five journal, writing that she "really liked that…when we gave ideas for possible survey questions, each participant was able to share their thoughts about what to question, how to question, and which questions they believe would not produce good data" (Participant Journal).

Disagreements were sometimes about matters related to street-life orientation. To help explore this topic early in the study, I had participants use an anonymous online forum to share reactions to two YouTube videos produced by local gang-affiliated boys. There were disagreements within the comments, for example some comments called the bravado of the videos "fake" and "a front" while other comments read "I have a better understanding of their reality" and "Id behavior, acting on impulse." Discussion of these disagreements during the meeting remained respectful and calm. Jessie wrote in her journal for that day that "the blind comments were a great tool to just prompt thought as opposed to judgement" (Participant Journal). During the conversation about the comments, she observed "the teachers seemed to be focused on how to address the problem with authentic concern and not reactionary judgement"

(Jessie, Participant Journal). The trust and sense of community that developed within the team appears to have stemmed any arguments or hurt feelings about discussion topics. Julie indicated this in her post-interview, stating, “I didn't really find anything that I disagreed with strongly, otherwise I would've spoken up more. If I did disagree with somebody really strongly I would've felt more comfortable speaking up” (Post-Interview).

“It was more egalitarian than I expected” (Travis, Post-Interview). The sense of community and trust that developed created a sense of shared accountability above and beyond the basic time commitments of this study about. A collective sense of accountability to the group was first revealed in the second session. Travis proposed a norm relative to everyone doing their part, “There's a professionalism about if we say that there's a time or a place that we want something, we all have to agree, ‘Okay, we'll have it by that time’” (Session 1). This was met with wide agreement from the group and became one of their three norms. Two participants suggested that there be “homework” to be completed outside of meeting times to help with the time constraints of our project. “I was just going to suggest, maybe what we do is take the list of people we want to interview, divide them up amongst ourselves, however you want to” (Davin, Session 5). In a later session, Travis similarly suggested, “Maybe it can be a homework assignment that we have for the folks who aren’t here as well as us, that before we come to the next meeting we do another color/highlight now that it’s all organized this way?” (Session 8).

The sense of shared accountability is evident in the fact that participants mentioned a desire to do their part and not let others in the group down. In her post-interview, Julie stated, “If there was going to be something, like we needed to compile interviews, then I wanted to help. It doesn't make sense I think to volunteer for something and then not help, right?” (Post-Interview). Alyssa observed, “I felt equal, okay? You got your thing. You got your thing. We're all coming

back. We have to come back with something, right? I don't think anyone came back empty handed, that I can think of" (Post-Interview). Similarly, Davin commented that "everybody had a little bit of their chunk to do…and everybody, as far as I know, everybody did their part, and got it in" (Post-Interview). This collective accountability speaks to the participants' sense that they each had a responsibility for what the team produced. Travis pointed to this shared accountability when he stated that the project was "more egalitarian than I expected" (Post-Interview).

Finding #5 (RQ1 – Process): Participants felt that this action research project was more effective than other Whitman collaboration and that it more closely reflected their ideas about what teacher collaboration should look like.

In pre-interviews, participants offered various reasons for why they are dissatisfied with much of their school-wide, department, and academy-based collaboration. Participant journals and post-interview data reveal that participants viewed this action research collaboration more positively largely because of the elements described in findings three and four. Specifically, participants reported that colleagues in this project were more engaged than in other collaborations and that they were pleased that the collaboration was teacher-driven and relevant. Each participant reported that they would be willing to continue on with this collaborative project.

"I felt like I was fully involved and engaged" (Phillip, Post-Interview). Prior to this project, participants overwhelmingly pointed to a frustration with the lack of teacher engagement in school-wide, department, and academy collaboration. Julie indicated that in her usual collaboration sessions "people were zoned out a lot of the times. It feels like we're just going through the motions" (Post-Interview). Davin echoed this sentiment in his pre-interview, stating that during school-wide collaboration, "I just, like, skate through that generally, because I'm not generally too invested in what's happening" (Pre-Interview). Both Phillip and Jessie had a

slightly more cynical view of teacher engagement in collaboration sessions. Phillip said in his post-interview that "in the past, other collaboration sessions, it feels like some people are there sometimes just to get paid, or for obligation purposes" (Post-Interview). Jessie commented that unlike those traditional collaboration sessions, "none of the teachers that we collaborated with [in this project] came here to just collect a paycheck" (Post-Interview).

A contrast in the level of teacher engagement between this collaboration experience and the traditional school-wide, department, or academy collaboration is clear when looking at the data. Each participant described a higher level of engagement than what they see in their other meetings: "the overall willingness to participate in whatever was actually, like, much higher than I typically see" (Davin, Post-Interview). Davin's observation here was similarly expressed by each of the remaining participants. As explained by Jessie in her post-interview, "People listened more and tried to understand each other's point of views more. Just more people voiced their opinion" (Post-Interview). As expressed by Julie in her journal, "There's more engagement, and it doesn't feel like the hour is dragging on and on, like how it would've felt if we were being forced to be here" (Participant Journal).

Observation data and meeting transcripts support this finding and point to few instances of observable disengagement. Each session took place in a different participant's classroom and participants sat in a circle or around a table facing one another each time. Observation notes show no particular pattern of seating—individual participants did not appear to favor sitting next to the same colleague from meeting to meeting. As such, no noticeable development of cliques or routine side-conversation was observed. Instead, participants appeared interested in hearing everyone's ideas and input. Phillip explained, "I thought everyone was involved, and I think it was pretty cool to hear different people's opinions and how they feel" (Post-Interview). No one

was observed grading papers during any of the nine sessions—a common indicator of disengagement mentioned by Phillip in his pre-interview—and few participants ever had their phone out. Travis was observed looking at his phone the most, although never more than a few times in a single session. Transcripts show that five participants spoke multiple times during each session that they attended, with Julie being the only participant who attended a session without speaking. She explained in her pre-interview that her reasons for being quiet during collaboration are cultural, adding, "It was just the way I was raised, if someone's older than me, they should talk first, and I'm the youngest teacher on campus. That typically means I won't get a chance to talk" (Julie, Pre-Interview). Nonetheless, she indicated in her participant journal after session five that she was highly engaged even when not joining a conversation. She writes, "I tend to stay silent, because if I already agree with or understand what's being said, then I don't feel a need to speak up just to regurgitate what's already been said and take up even more time" (Julie, Participant Journal).

While four participants reported that engagement was consistently high during each session, two participants shared in their post-interviews that they believe teacher engagement was high from the beginning and increased as the project went on. Davin explains, "The more that they learned about what we were studying and the more they kind of participated, they were kind of amped. The more amped up they got about it…participation and willingness sort of had an uptick rather than the downtick that you normally see [in collaboration]" (Post-Interview). Alyssa reported an observation that one of the least outspoken participants (Julie) was speaking more and more each week during our collaboration. Transcripts indicate that Julie did speak more during the second half of the three-month project, although she herself did not report this.

"It didn't feel like some sort of top-down thing" (Davin, Post-Interview). A major

theme communicated during participant pre-interviews was a distaste for collaboration in which teachers have little to no say in deciding on the agenda or objectives. Such administrator or district-directed collaboration was cited in pre-interviews as a key factor for teacher's negative experiences with collaboration. Regarding department and academy collaboration at Whitman, Julie explained that "a lot of times when it's coming from a certain person above us, it just seems very top down, and it's you have to do this, or I want you to do this" (Pre-Interview). Phillip reported that "the worst experiences with collaboration are when you have a top-down type of situation where admin or someone that's your superior comes and actually tries to tell you how the collaboration should happen, and they have an agenda they're trying to fulfill" (Pre-Interview). Directives from those with positional power negatively affect teachers' collaboration experiences in that they create a sentiment of "let's get it done because our boss told us to do it. We don't want to lose our job, we don't want to get him mad, so let's do it" (Phillip, Pre-Interview).

Every participant expressed a distaste for collaboration that is not teacher-driven. Jessie explained why she dislikes what she calls "forced" collaboration when she stated that "it tends to create hostile environments, and often the person who is gung-ho about it gets the brunt of the hostility" (Pre-Interview). She additionally stated that Whitman's school-wide, academy and department collaboration meetings fit her definition of "forced" collaboration. Davin attempted to quantify how much of the collaboration that he's experienced is top-down:

> Mostly - when I say mostly, I'd say 65, 70% of the time - I feel like collaboration time for teachers is spent less in terms of earnestly collaborating on a common goal, and more just about crossing T's and dotting I's with things that have been passed down from either the administration or the district. (Pre-Interview)

Participant descriptions of our action research collaboration indicate a stark difference between it and the "top-down" collaboration that they have typically experienced. Davin, in

trying to account for the amount of teacher engagement in this collaboration, explained that "it didn't feel like some sort of, you know, top-down thing that we had to be doing" (Post-Interview). Travis commented, "I felt like it was long-term structured without being micromanaged" (Post-Interview). Five of the six participants reported that they favored this collaboration's teacher-driven nature over the top-down nature of their other collaboration experiences.

Four participants speculated that the key to the teacher-driven feel of this project was the fact that it was voluntary. Davin stated, "And that was the other thing—everybody that was involved was doing it on a voluntary basis, not because they had to" (Post-Interview). Phillip, Julie, and Jessie also pointed out that the voluntary nature of this collaboration made a noteworthy difference in teachers' engagement levels and overall positive feelings about the project. Phillip explained

> It's something that we're all passionate about, something that we feel like needs to happen and to change. When you're on the job and your boss tells you, or your principal tells you, that you have to collaborate about something, it's a little more difficult. It happens, but it's more so like obligation. I think just making it open where we're choosing to do it makes a big difference. (Post-Interview)

"It is an issue that clearly has been here for a long time" (Davin, Session 2). An additional factor that played a role in participants' positive impressions of the collaboration process was its relevance. Four participants reported in their pre-interviews that much of their school-wide, academy, or department collaboration does not seem to be important or relevant to them. Julie, for example, explained that "it feels they're repetitive, or they're just going through the motions. It doesn't seem like this genuine interest to do whatever we're doing in that department meeting. Even for the [school-wide meetings], when we spend weeks analyzing an article and annotating article it just feels like busy work, and I thought, I already finished college,

why am I doing this?" (Pre-Interview). Davin explained, "I tend to get a little frustrated sometimes, so in most cases I'd rather just work by myself and figure my own job because I feel like I know my kids, I know my content, I know the standards, just leave me alone" (Pre-Interview). In contrast, participants in this action research project unanimously reported that they saw it as relevant and important work.

The subject of street-life oriented boys at Whitman is an issue that is not explored in other collaborations. Each of the six participants indicated that this was one reason for their interest in participating in this project. Davin stated, "it's an interesting subject to take a good hard look at, because it's part of our campus. It's part of our school and it's an important thing to consider" (Post-Interview). Phillip reported that he enjoyed being on the team in part because it allowed him "to really be part of a solution to a problem that has been going on for a very long time" (Post-Interview).

This theme of relevance was widely indicated during the first introductory team discussion which was during session two. When asked to introduce themselves and why they decided to participate in this work, five participants expressed that the topic of street-life oriented boys at Whitman was a topic of particular relevance that is not given the attention it needs. Jessie explained, "my interest in [this project] is that it's about a real problem, not just something that somebody said, 'Let's look at this,' and putting focus on it just because somebody said to" (Session 2). Davin added, "it is an issue that clearly has been here for a long time and hasn't gone anywhere" (Session 2). In his comments, Travis expressed that the low educational success of street-life oriented boys at Whitman was one of many problems that he's observed on campus that have frustrated him. He has attempted to do his individual part outside of collaboration to address several campus issues due to the apparent lack of relevance in collaboration meetings. "I

was just like, ‘If you can't do it yourself, you get help from others,’ and I thought this might be my best chance at seeing a victory. Even if it doesn't it's at least not walking with blinders or with your head in the sand, ignoring the issues we see” (Travis, Session 2).

“When do we get the group together again?” (Travis, Post-Interview). In their post-interviews, each participant expressed a willingness to continue collaborating like this. Julie and Jessie specified that their willingness would be contingent upon who the participants would be, for as Julie pointed out, “certain people, their personalities—I'm not trying to diss anybody—but I think sometimes they have unrealistic expectations of what teachers can get done or what teachers are available to do” (Post-Interview). She appreciated that our collaboration was not burdensome for her in terms of increased workload outside of her normal teaching duties. Jessie explained that her willingness to participate would depend on who is involved “because I would want it to be productive. We both know that there are certain people here [at Whitman] that make collaboration less productive” (Post-Interview).

Although each participant reported that they would participate in an action research collaboration project again, Travis was perhaps the most enthusiastic about the possibility of continuing this work. Prior to our project he explained, “So far, I don't have something that I can say today that I would put in a portfolio and say, ‘Man, this person and that person, we all got together. We came up with this. This is where it was successful’” (Pre-Interview). However, after our project his perception changed. Travis explained in his post-interview, “I feel like we made progress. I thought it was evident by the time I got into week six, there was clear steps being done and progress, measurables, but I definitely think the next step would be, when do we get the group together again?” (Post-Interview). He went on to explain that he’d be interested in initiating his own action research project around the issue of student mental health:

> Yes, I'm actually more interested in doing this again than I am probably doing anything else on campus that's outside of normal structure, if that makes sense...I think [this collaboration] was more worthwhile. In fact, it would be interesting to have maybe one of our administrators or leads sit in on this role, because they often try to do school-wide situations that may or may not fit all teachers, and it would be an interesting idea if they wanted to tell you, 'Okay, this is something we wanted to work on,' and they asked for volunteers to work on that, and then that group was given some structure, but a lot of leeway to just work through it. (Travis, Post-Interview)

Conclusion

A team of seven teachers from different subject areas at Whitman High School conducted a three-month action research cycle to study how their school site could better support its street-life oriented boys. The team collected survey and interview data to explore the challenges and successes of existing support systems in the hope of discovering areas of weakness that could be addressed by a new intervention. The team was surprised to discover that none of the intervention systems at Whitman are specifically designed for street-life oriented youth despite a widespread belief that at least one of the available interventions is. In lieu of developing a new intervention that would address Whitman's areas of weakness, the team recommended that school leaders should explore ways to partner with existing interventions to strategically support street-life oriented youth. The team also recommended that the site explore teacher perceptions of this population of students.

The process by which the team conducted its action research was reliant on an essential element of freedom for teachers to direct and mutually engage in their own collaboration. Participants reported feeling a sense of community and trust that allowed them to work through disagreements and share accountability. As compared to other teacher collaboration at Whitman, participants felt that this collaboration was more effective and that it better reflected their ideal of what teacher collaboration should look like.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

My study engaged a group of teachers to investigate a problem at their school site that has been overlooked by national, state, and local interventions. The team conducted three months of action research and found that one of the school's most vulnerable populations, street-life oriented boys, was quietly being left behind to navigate education and adolescence on their own. The site in this study claimed to support all learners through its robust interventions and extracurricular offerings. Participants cut through this façade and uncovered school-wide assumptions that leave these boys largely unsupported and on their own to negotiate school, community, and street socialization. Participants also discovered their own misperceptions about the difficulties that street-life oriented boys face in their pursuit of education. The team's findings regarding academic and socio-emotional support for these boys can serve as a cautionary tale to similar school sites that believe they are adequately serving and supporting all students.

Overall, the team's work demonstrates that teachers are engaged agents of change when allowed to come together to study a problem at their school site. The teachers in this study, by disrupting the school's silent practice of leaving street-life oriented boys behind, have helped to bring change to how Whitman High conceptualizes its support for this population. Their findings can now be used to initiate further cycles of action research that can build the services that Whitman is missing. Schools that are interested in engaging teachers as leaders to address problems specific to the context of their own sites can learn from the process that unfolded in this study. Given how unique and complex each school is, encouraging teachers to study a site-specific problem can be a powerful tool for prompting change and engaging teachers.

This chapter first discusses the significance of the team's findings on the school's lack of support for street-life oriented boys. If schools believe this population can succeed, they must engage in the difficult task of acknowledging their own failures to provide the intensive care and attention these students need. Next I discuss the significance of my findings regarding the team's successful collaboration process. These findings indicate that teachers can be leaders and change agents for their school sites; they just need the space and opportunity to direct their own collaboration and forge their own communities of practice. I conclude this chapter by discussing research implications and the limitations of my study.

Significance of Key Findings

The Whitman action research team's findings align with existing literature that has identified an absence of school-based interventions to close the achievement gap between street-life oriented Black and Latino boys and their counterparts (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009; Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009). The team found that despite a popular school-wide belief that Whitman does indeed offer these interventions, like most schools it largely fails to provide the many care-based services that research suggests could help this population achieve (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Delpit, 2006, Wolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009). Additionally, the study's findings align with research that suggests that teachers misperceive the experiences of street-life oriented boys (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). This study addresses gaps in the literature by revealing how teacher-driven action research can be used to address issues like street-life orientation that exist beyond the realm of classroom pedagogy. The team demonstrated that a group of engaged teachers with a clear research objective can cut through a site's façades and assumptions to examine hard truths. The process by which this occurred demonstrates the potential of teacher-driven action research as a tool to address site-specific

issues above and beyond classroom pedagogy.

It is important to note some of the characteristics of Walt Whitman High School that have influenced this study, given that action research is specific to the site within which it occurs (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Walt Whitman High School shares demographic similarities with many urban public high schools in California. Of its 900 students, 65% are Hispanic and 29% are African American. Thirty-five percent of Whitman's students are English learners and 85.6% of the student body is socioeconomically disadvantaged. Unique characteristics of this site that have influenced this action research study include the fact that Whitman is the only public high school situated within Whitman City's gang territory. Its attendance zone includes multiple Section 8 and subsidized housing communities as well as several group homes and foster homes that together produce a student population unique to Whitman High School. These characteristics, along with its wall-to-wall career-themed academy structure and its twice-weekly teacher collaboration meetings, have contributed to the unique context of this study. Also of note is fact the principal of Whitman High has initiated several professional learning activities—including collective reading of education research and piloting faculty instructional rounds, for instance—that reflect his openness to collaboration and continued growth. Having an administration that is supportive of teacher collaboration allowed for this study to proceed without any significant opposition from school or district leaders.

Whitman Boys Left Behind

The action research team found that Whitman High does not provide services that meet the particular needs of street-life oriented boys. These needs—which include learning how to effectively overcome trauma, conflict, substance abuse, or the negative influences of gang membership—are not addressed by any of Whitman's numerous interventions or support

systems. Black and Latino boys who have internalized a street socialization are among the most vulnerable students in our schools (Conchas & Vigil, 2010). Gang involvement, economic barriers, and the trauma associated with living in impoverished communities negatively impact their achievement in school (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Gilman et al., 2014; Pyrooz, 2014). It is especially important for schools that serve this population to provide services and interventions that help them overcome these barriers and achieve in school.

The action research team found wide belief among school leaders at Whitman that their school site was indeed doing this. One administrator said, "I think Whitman does a remarkable job considering the number of students that we have with behavioral challenges… and I've never seen a school site that has supported kids, or has the offerings to support kids, like Whitman has." This sentiment is reflected in much of the team's research data. These school leaders, like nearly every participant in this study, expressed ideas that are in line with research regarding how to support this population. In particular, they expressed a belief that fostering care, hope, and empowerment through strong staff-student relationships can disrupt the tradition of removal and exclusion of street-life oriented boys (Alder, 2002; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). For example, a security officer interviewed by the action research team stated that success for these students has often come from "having teachers that helped and cared. Really having people there to show them that people were interested in them."

Despite this alignment between what Whitman leaders express and what research suggests is needed, the action research team found a glaring absence of any particular intervention or campus-wide system strategically targeting the needs of street-life oriented youth. The absence of such systems aligns with literature that indicates schools by and large fail to address the needs of this most vulnerable population (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). In short,

Whitman High, like many schools across America, is leaving this population behind. This finding surprised participants even though the absence of support systems aligns with existing research.

The significance of this finding lies in the fact that even at a school that offers a wealth of support systems and where campus leaders express a belief in care-embedded approaches to street-life oriented boys, this population is still largely underserved. Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2014) write in their case study of schools designed for Black and Latino boys that "good intentions may not be enough to generate real solutions" (p. 3). The research team found that Whitman's good intentions are indeed not enough and that the school has a false sense of accomplishment with regards to supporting all students. This finding speaks to the need for school sites to critically self-assess their current offerings. School must evaluate whether these offerings are actually targeting the students who are most in need of support.

Critical Self-Assessment. The false sense of accomplishment at Whitman was interrupted not by an outside entity or accreditation team, but by an in-house group of teachers who were offered the freedom to explore an issue through action research. The action research team demonstrated that a collective of engaged teachers with a clear research objective can examine hard truths. Significantly, all but one participant entered the study with a perception that Whitman was already doing an impressive job of meeting the needs of street-life oriented students. Most participants reported that while there was still room for growth, Whitman's interventions and support offerings were in fact quite robust. Not a disgruntled staff faulting their workplace, they were instead an optimistic collective hoping to contribute to an already promising effort.

Surprisingly, through this action research process the teachers discovered that Whitman's

efforts to support street-life oriented boys are not as robust as they had previously thought. Interviews with campus leaders revealed beliefs that these boys need care and support, however these leaders could not point to examples of street-life oriented boys receiving specific support services. These interviews as well as survey data indicated one particular program—a non-profit male mentoring group—as the campus intervention for street-life oriented boys. The action research team found through interviews and document analysis that this program does not in fact serve nor actively recruit these boys. In short, the team discovered that Whitman knows what this population needs but it does not currently address these needs in its system of supports and interventions.

The critical self-assessment undertaken by the action research team was revealing and considerably changed participants' views about their school site. Phillip described his newfound view of Whitman when he explained, "I learned that a lot more needs to be done in terms of really pinpointing the problem and coming up with a solution for it. Who's going to do what, and what's in place for it? Fully define it, not just say, 'We just help kids.' I say no, it has to be, 'We help these *type* of kids in *this* way.'" Phillip's statement is reflective of the team's realization that the existence of general programs and support services is not evidence that a particular group of students, in this case street-life oriented boys, is getting the help that they need to be successful in school. Rather, concrete assessment of the specific functions and activities of these services is needed.

Sites like Whitman must engage in the difficult task of identifying their own weaknesses if they truly believe that even the most challenged students can achieve positive educational outcomes. A list of broad interventions and supports cannot be regarded as evidence of a school's success in supporting street-life oriented boys if those systems do not actually reach this

population. This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding teacher action research, which largely focuses on teachers using action research to examine problems within their own pedagogy or teaching practice (Capobianco & Feldman, 2006; Feldman & Weiss, 2009; Subramaniam, 2010; Vaino, Holbrook, & Rannikmäe, 2013). This study shows that through action research, critical self-assessment is possible if sites empower their teachers to examine issues beyond their own classroom instruction.

Shifting Perceptions. This study aligns with research that suggests that school personnel lack a careful understanding of the complexities of Black and Latino youth (Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008; Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). Black and Latino boys are not the monolithic groups that traditional narratives describe them as, but rather diverse and complex populations (Howard, 2013; Vigil, 2002). Deficit-based narratives of this population have situated Black and Latino boys as a broad problem in need of strict discipline and control, particularly those who are street-life oriented. Although the participants in this study did not express any beliefs that this population ought to be disciplined or excluded from school, they each indicated that they lacked understanding of street-life orientated boys and the extent to which they are being underserved at Whitman.

Research shows that street-life oriented boys are often misperceived by their school sites as being unable or unwilling to learn (Noguera, 2008; Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). Research also shows that this population of boys values and aspires to attain a formal education (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). If we are to challenge the embedded bias against street-life oriented boys in our schools and honor their desire to achieve, we must work towards shifting the misperceptions that school personnel have about this population. This study indicates that one way to do this is to engage teachers in action research.

Teachers as Change Agents

The process by which the team of teachers collaborated and conducted its action research highlights the potential of teachers to contribute to the continued growth of their school site. Each school site is unique, complex, and has its own particular context within which national challenges like street-life orientation occur. For Whitman, the challenge of supporting street-life oriented students is magnified by the school's attendance zone which includes gang territories particular to Whitman City, multiple low-income housing complexes, and multiple group homes. Schools existing within a different context have their own local and unique challenges. Encouraging teachers to study such site-specific challenges—especially in the absence of district or state guidance—can be a powerful tool for fostering change specific to the context of a particular school site.

This study aligns with literature showing that action research can empower teachers through its democratic form of collaboration (Capobianco & Feldman, 2006; Cooper, 2006; Goodnaugh, 2014). Our process started with a diverse assortment of participants who typically do not engage in leadership activities on campus. One teacher in this study holds an official leadership position as a department chair, but others do not hold leadership positions or lead any campus initiatives. The absence of positional leaders in this study is important because it highlights the potential of this process to empower teachers and give them leadership opportunities outside of traditional department or academy structures.

Teachers' heightened sense of leadership and empowerment is reflected in participants reporting feelings of accomplishment and purpose at the end of the study. This is exemplified by Travis' post-interview comments when he explained, "What we accomplished, I think, was successful and drove us in a direction, but I think what it really spoke to was that we needed to

do maybe some more measurements or research." Like most of the other participants, Travis had a desire to keep this project going despite my study coming to an end. Significantly, he was cynical about collaboration at Whitman prior to this study. He explained in his pre-interview that he was frustrated with collaboration and that he perceived it to be a top-down directive wherein teachers are asked to "put the spin" on district ideas and mandates. This study shows that such cynicism and withdrawal may be combated through teacher-driven action research that fosters teacher leadership.

Action research empowers teachers by allowing them to co-construct their research process through democratic collaboration that is not beholden to one established leader or structure (Cooper, 2006). Participants in this study credited such freedom as a key reason why they perceived this collaboration to be more effective and worthwhile than department or academy collaboration. Phillip explained the difference, saying "when you're on the job and your principal tells you that you have to collaborate about something, it's a little more difficult. It happens, but it's like an obligation." Participants' freedom to construct their own collaboration created a sense of empowerment rather than obligation. Davin explained this feeling of empowerment in saying that "it didn't feel like some sort of top-down thing that we had to be doing." Every participant reported having enjoyed this collaboration process and four participants expressed a desire to keep this project going despite my study coming to an end.

While many studies have examined the use of action research as a way to empower teachers to study their own teaching practice (Capobianco & Feldman, 2006; Coles-Ritchie & Lugo, 2009; Feldman & Weiss, 2009; Subramaniam, 2010; Vaino, Holbrook, & Rannikmäe, 2013), few have studied how action research can be used as a tool for engaging teachers in the process of addressing problems at their school site beyond pedagogy. Cochran-Smith and Lytle

(1993) argue that teachers' use of action research can be a form of social change that can alter classrooms, schools, and communities. Whereas most studies situate teacher action research as a tool to improve classrooms, this study examines its use to alter a school site within the context of the community-wide challenge of street-life orientation.

This study's findings offer insight into how school sites can engage in critical self-study through teacher-driven action research. A prerequisite, of course, is an administrative team that is open to the idea of teachers collaborating in this fashion. Where administrators are supportive of teacher input and involvement outside of the classroom, action research projects like the one in this study can be a worthwhile process for engaging in school improvement efforts. Key principles of this process, discussed below, are to (1) offer interested teachers the freedom to create their own collaboration structures and research methods, (2) embrace professional, demographic, and ideological diversity within teacher collaboration teams, and (3) establish communities of practice to promote trust and belonging within these teams.

Principle 1: Give interested teachers the wheel. The "freedom to direct" this process, as Travis phrased it, was essential in offering teachers the opportunity to be the directors, collaborators, and researchers of their own work (Capobianco & Feldman, 2006). Teachers joined the team with the general understanding that they would be asked to collaborate with other teachers to study Whitman's work with street-life oriented youth. As such, the participants in this study had personal interest in both the problem being studied and in the collaborative approach to studying it. Davin explained his initial interest when he said, "I'm way more optimistic about teacher-led things than I am about 'think tank' led things or outside advisor-led things" (Pre-Interview). Teachers like Davin who have a vested interested in a particular school-site problem and a willingness to work on this problem with a team of teachers should be offered

the opportunity to "take the wheel" and direct their own collaborative projects.

The freedom to direct this present project meant that there were no rigid meeting agendas or predetermined objectives aside from the general aim of improving Whitman's support of street-life oriented boys. The research questions, methods, and process were left for the team to create together. This freedom to direct distinguished the collaboration from tradition department or academy collaboration which is often dictated by local, state, or national directives. Participants credited the opportunity to mold their own collaboration as a key reason for the increased engagement that they saw. Alyssa commented on this freedom in explaining to me, "You gave us the background information that we might have needed for whatever we were going to focus on...then it was like, 'okay well then let's get into it.' We were able to just kind of get in there" (Post-Interview). This freedom resulted in a necessary co-construction of the research process that included having to negotiate what research questions and data collection methods to use.

An example of this co-creation is seen in session four when participants exchange ideas about possible research questions. Phillip's participant journal for session four reads, "Today we attempted to further pinpoint our research questions and process to help street oriented boys. We now pinpointed that we need to explore a questionnaire to students who fit our target demographic." In session five the team debated the final wording of the research questions and arrived at the conclusion that a survey of street-life oriented boys would not be feasible or appropriate. The mutual engagement of all participants in creating this collaboration process is consistent with the literature. As was the case in Goodnaugh's (2014) study about teachers conducting action research alongside students, decisions about what actions to take and how to collect and interpret data were democratically negotiated through mutual engagement. Given

freedom of direction the Whitman team solicited everyone's input and upheld shared norms to create a democratic and teacher-driven process.

This manner of teacher-driven collaboration may not suit all teachers, but this study shows that teachers who are interested in a particular problem may benefit more from this form of collaboration than from traditional department and academy collaboration. The teachers in this study not only contributed to the continued growth of their school site, but they also benefitted from engaging in collaboration that they felt was more effective and worthwhile for them than their other collaborative experiences. Giving interested teachers the opportunity and freedom to direct their own teacher-driven action research has the duel benefit of improving the school site while also re-engaging teachers who might not otherwise be benefitting much from their traditional collaboration.

Principle 2: Embrace diversity and tension. Action research can be a challenging endeavor. Zygouris-Coe et. al. (2001) point out that such collaboration is not an easy task but rather one that requires mutual co-laboring and shared construction of social knowledge. This inherent challenge does not need to be met by assembling a team of like-minded teachers who already work well together. The findings in this study show that community, trust, and direction can be forged even when teachers are unfamiliar with each other and have notably different teaching backgrounds.

The team forged their democratic, teacher-driven process despite a wide range of personal and professional experience. For instance, Alyssa has worked at Whitman High for roughly a decade and grew up in Whitman City. Travis has worked at Whitman for three years and lives in a more affluent neighboring city. The two expressed opposing ideas about the severity of crime and poverty in Whitman City, particularly during an exchange in session three

where Travis resorted to an impromptu internet search to defend his claim that crime is not very common in the area. Julie explained in her pre-interview that she had seen Alyssa and Travis get into arguments during their academy collaboration meetings prior to this study. Despite their different professional and personal experience, as well as a possible history of conflict, Travis and Alyssa mutually engaged in our teacher-driven process and together helped shape the direction of the project. Each reported feeling safe to express their personal views, which helped this diverse group share different perspectives with one another. Travis signaled this in his post-interview when he explained, "Some teachers are closer to the neighborhood, they enlightened me about their experience, and it was revealing and it made everything a little bit more personal." This aligns with research that shows diversity in experiences, background, and knowledge is beneficial to a community of practice (Goodnaugh, 2014; Wenger, 1998).

The team of teachers created a community that valued open sharing and negotiation of ideas, even if some ideas conflicted with the ideas of other team members. The discussions and negotiations on matters ranging from research methods to street-life orientation paved the way for new growth and a shared construction of knowledge (Cooper, 2006; Zygouris-Coe et al., 2001). As Alyssa described, there was a mutual understanding that no matter any differences in opinion, "we're gonna talk it all out." This aligns with Wenger's (1998) assessment that diversity enhances a community of practice as members mutually engage with one another's differing ideas.

For example, in negotiating research questions the team struggled to stay focused on developing questions that they could reasonably find answers to given the time and logistical constraints of the project. Alyssa in particular continued to comment about peer groups outside of campus and asked how we could "remove" our students from those external peer groups. In

attempting to move her thinking back towards developing feasible research questions, Phillip responded to Alyssa with a series of redirecting questions, including "How much control do we have over that, though?" and "Most likely we have to figure out a way to do something here while we have them." Navigating differing ideas and pushing against each other's suggestions and comments like this drives the collective learning process. As noted by Goodnaugh (2014), the dialogue produced by confrontations and challenges becomes a context for team members to develop shared perspectives and understandings that push the work forward.

Principle 3: Forge a community of practice. Participants in this study relied on their mutual valuing of trust and community in order to work through differences in opinion. Two key incidents described earlier (Alyssa wanting to explore off-campus peer groups and Travis doubting the severity of crime and street-life orientation in Whitman City) showed that participants felt comfortable sharing alternative or opposing views and having those views challenged by others in the group. Jessie commented that "the easiest part was just feeling comfortable enough to say anything and not worry because everybody was on the same page," a reference to the mutual feelings of trust and respect that team members felt.

Capobianco and Feldman (2006) observed that an important aspect of teacher action research is to establish a community of practice that is built on trust and respect. It is possible that the voluntary nature of this project contributed to the tone of trust and respect present among the team since each participant was interested in the project. Davin wrote in his first journal entry, "I think everybody in the group is coming into this with a positive attitude, and I'm interested in hearing everyone's perspectives over the course of the study." Jessie encouraged sharing of ideas during session two when she suggested a norm of "acknowledging that there's more than one truth." The optimistic attitude of these volunteers and their desire to hear each

other's ideas from the outset of the study may explain why, above and beyond written norms, a sense of community and trust was forged. Nonetheless, the team articulated its mutual understanding through the shared development of group norms. The team made sure to set a tone that valued open communication and differences of opinion with the expectation of mutual respect. This compliments research by Nelson et al. (2010), who argued that "explicit attention to collaborative norms and adherence to agreed-upon protocols together help foster collegial conversations that neither avoid nor promote conflict" (p. 177).

The team's norms called for respecting each other's opinions and adhering to a protocol that asked participants to allow two other members to speak after them before speaking again. Alyssa credited this particular protocol for her ability to temper her usually dominant participation style. The team's norms highlighted a shared belief in democratic collaboration in that they privileged input, respect, and honesty. In this way, the team was able to utilize its diverse wealth of knowledge and experience as a community of practice without being held back by negative confrontations or an inability to compromise. This community that developed between participants contributed to feelings of belonging, camaraderie, and empowerment. Julie explained that there was "more engagement, and it doesn't feel like the hour is dragging on and on, like how it would've felt if we were being forced to be here." This aligns with previous research linking communities of practice to feelings of empowerment (Goodnaugh, 2014).

Limitations of this Study

Action research is often described as a messy endeavor, and the present study is no exception. Over the course of three months of collaboration the members of the action research team had their own individual logistical challenges (like unforeseen family obligations or being pulled to other after-school events) as well as general research challenges that limited the

efficacy of this study. As full time teachers in a comprehensive urban high school, participants found themselves at times unavailable for our after-school collaboration sessions. One participant, George, withdrew from the project altogether after three sessions due to his inability to continue meeting the time commitments. Each participant missed at least one session and calendaring meeting dates was a constant challenge. Consequently, it was difficult to maximize our collaboration time since each meeting started with a significant amount of reviewing and revisiting the previous meeting.

General challenges inherent in studying a vulnerable population limited the quality of data collected by the action research team. The team could not interview or survey street-life oriented boys partly because there was no feasible method for reliably identifying these students. Even if there were an objective method for identifying students who have internalized a street orientation, the team did not have the time nor training to collect data from these students without there being some degree of emotional or psychological risk taken with them. The team therefore collected data from school staff, documents, and from a general student survey about the school's programs and extracurricular offerings.

These data were nonetheless adequate because they provided the team with survey data from roughly two-thirds of teachers and one-fourth of students, along with first-person accounts from Whitman High's school leaders (every counselor, two of three administrators, the campus probation officer, and clerical staff were interviewed) which revealed the absence of strategic support offerings. As noted earlier, school leaders struggled to give examples of ways that street-life oriented students are supported. They along with students and staff identified one particular mentoring program as the exemplar for where these boys get the help they need. This information was instrumental in the team's discoveries about Whitman's lack of strategic

interventions for this population of boys. Collecting data from street-life oriented students themselves would have been helpful in the team's desire to study how well Whitman's services help this population, however the data that the team managed to collect revealed that there is not much being done directly for this population in the first place.

An additional limitation concerns the sample of teachers involved in this study. Participants reflected the professional and demographic diversity of Whitman's teaching staff. However, they set themselves apart from many of Whitman's other staff members in that they each volunteered ten hours of their time to engage in this project. This study's findings concerning the process of collaboration may have been different had the team been composed of a more reluctant or unenthusiastic set of teachers.

Lastly, as is the case in qualitative action research, the study's findings cannot be generalized outside of Whitman. This study is localized to the specific, current context of Whitman High School—by no means can the team's findings regarding street-life orientation and Whitman apply to another school site. Travis spoke about this in his post-interview, reasoning that "I wouldn't suggest to another school or another group, 'this is the way you would approach and solve the problem immediately,' but it is a good way to work on a problem and, over time, address it." As such, the process by which this collaboration occurred can be useful to similar schools that are interested in using teacher action research to examine a problem at their site.

Practical Implications

The findings in this study suggest that school sites can benefit from engaging teachers in action research to examine site-specific issues. For Whitman, this critical self-study helped identify a school weakness that neither site leaders nor participants anticipated finding. Such

self-study has enabled teachers to engage in the process of continued growth for the school site. In terms of supporting vulnerable student populations, this teacher-driven study can be used as an example of how and why to assess a site's interventions and support systems to ensure that they are serving the students who need them the most.

Another practical implication of this study is for school sites to offer interested teachers the opportunity to initiate their own action research project. One participant in this study is currently working on starting a new action research project about students at Whitman who have mental health challenges. This participant previously reported feeling disillusioned with department and academy collaboration. For teachers like him, the opportunity to create an action research project can reignite interest in collaboration and leadership. I encourage school leaders to consider teacher-driven action research as an opportunity to engage interested teachers who may not otherwise be getting much use out of their traditional collaboration experiences. This study may be useful as a guide for how to engage in this process.

An implication for teachers is to consider the possibility of action research as a method for getting involved in school leadership endeavors. The classroom can be isolating and leadership positions can be intimidating. This study shows that teacher-driven action research can build community and foster leadership between teachers who would otherwise stay within the confines of their own classroom. At sites where administrators are open and supportive of collaboration and professional growth, teachers should initiate conversations with administrators about teacher-driven action research share the collaboration principles presented in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Social ills including poverty and systemic racism will continue to inhibit the opportunities of students to achieve in school and prosper in the workplace. A segment of these

students who are street-life oriented are perhaps the hardest hit by the confluence of class and race. As policymakers continue to debate methods for closing the national achievement gap, street-socialized boys enter and exit our schools with significant needs that cannot be met by redesigned assessment systems, school choice measures, or other hot button education issues attracting attention today. Future studies should identify and examine schools that are succeeding in the effort to transition street-life oriented boys out of high-risk activity and towards college and career. As this is an understudied segment of the student population, more needs to be known about how schools can implement practical measures that positively impact the educational trajectory of these youth.

There also exist opportunities to further explore how teachers can be engaged as agents of change through action research. Much is already known about teachers' use of action research as a tool to improve instructional practice. Less is known about how teachers can use action research to address non-instructional problems at their school site. Teachers serving on the front lines of education can be empowered through action research to take part in the continued growth and improvement of our school systems, and researchers should continue to explore how this process works.

Conclusion

Administrators and policymakers are often regarded as the parties responsible for education reform. When it comes to the persistent and oft neglected needs of street-life oriented boys, waiting and relying on change from above is insufficient. This study engaged a group of teachers to examine how their school site could improve its efforts to meet the needs of this population. The team of teachers collaborated over the course of three months in an action research project that revealed a quiet absence of support systems and interventions for the

school's most vulnerable boys. Although school leaders expressed belief in forging caring and supportive relationships between school staff and street-life oriented boys, the team found that little was being done to actualize these beliefs.

Street-life oriented boys are far from the only population in our schools whose specific needs are not being met. Similarly, street-life orientation is far from the only socio-emotional challenge that limits the academic achievement of our students. Sites should encourage their teachers to engage in teacher-driven action research particularly when there is an absence of district, state, or national leadership to address such challenges. As agents of change within their own school sites, teachers can provide the leadership needed to ensure that the needs of all students are being met.

POST SCRIPT

After the Study

At the outset of this study, it was my sincere hope that a new intervention for street-life oriented boys would be mapped out that could be implemented at Whitman for the 2017-2018 school year. Like the participants in this study, I did not expect that our assessment of Whitman's current offerings would take as long as it did or that it would produce the surprising findings that it did. Davin's words best captured the sense of disenchantment that we all felt when this study concluded: "Does this school have any interest? Does this administration? Does this district have any interest in trying to build something specifically for these kids? Or is it more a matter of, like, this is just triage?"

We do not intend to allow our street-life oriented boys to continue to be left behind, thus our work on this project is not over. The principal of Whitman who supported the initial idea to study our street-life oriented boys has left to pursue new career opportunities. At the time of this writing I have not yet met the incoming principal. I have, however, engaged in conversations with our assistant principal about the team's findings and recommendations. A summer meeting is schedule with the director of the male mentoring program to share some data and results from our study. The meeting is particularly aimed at examining the assumption that this program is the one tasked with supporting the educational achievement of street-life oriented boys. As recommended by the action research team, Whitman High needs to search for ways to help expand the scope of this mentoring program so that it can meet some of the needs of this population. Alternatively, Whitman should consider how to build an intervention of its own.

With regards to building its own intervention, the participants in this study have tentatively agreed to continue their work by conducting a second cycle of action research. This

second cycle will be aimed at creating an in-school intervention to address some of the needs that our street-life oriented boys have. I hope that the incoming principal will be supportive of our collaboration. Ideally, he will consider the findings of my study and see teacher-driven action research as a worthwhile and beneficial form of collaboration for teachers interested in examining challenges at their school site.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Teacher,

My name is Manuel Rustin, and I am a UCLA doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program (ELP). My dissertation is a study of the process by which teachers collaborate to design an intervention program for street-life oriented youth. I am looking for teachers who work at Whitman High School to participate in my study and share their time and experience with me. My research project seeks to understand how teachers can use collaborative action research to study, discuss, and intervene in a problem at their own school site.

As a volunteer, you will be asked to participate on an action research team for the length of one semester. The team will meet for one hour after school every other week for a total of nine meetings. The full estimated study time will be nine hours of meetings and two one-hour individual interviews, for a total commitment of 11 hours. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you may choose to stop at anytime. All information shared with me will be kept confidential. This information will be published and presented in a way that does not identify any specific person or school site. The purpose of this study is to develop an intervention at Whitman while also producing best practices for teachers engaged in collaborative action research.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me directly and I will arrange a time and location to meet. Thank you!

Respectfully,

Manuel Rustin
UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies Educational Leadership Program
Doctoral Candidate
Mobile: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: XXXXXXXXX

Appendix B

Action Research Meeting Agendas

Session 2 of 9
Monday 10.24.16
3:30-4:30

1. Intro – *How did you end up at Whitman?*

2. Action Research Overview
    a. Goals of this project
    b. Purpose of the study
    c. Collaboration Plan
    d. What's your primary interest in this project?

3. Group Norms or Common Agreements?

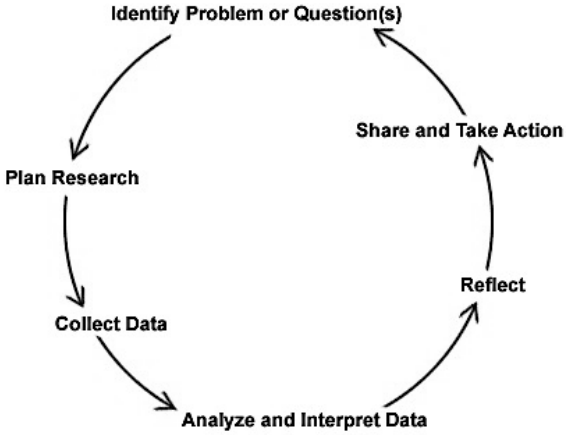
4. A preliminary look at street-life orientation

5. Q&A

6. Journaling

Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Purpose of the study: Examine the process by which a group of teachers comes together to collaborate around an issue at their school site.



Session 3 of 9
Monday 10.31.16
3:30-4:30

1. Intro – Review Purpose & Norms

2. Videos: Street-life orientation
    a. Anonymous reflection
    b. Group discussion

3. Street-life orientation at Whitman
    i. What do we know?
    ii. What more do we need to know?

4. Looking ahead – Session 4
    i. Develop agenda
    ii. Logistics – Date, time, location

5. Journaling

Norms:

A. Respect everyone's ideas
    - Avoid snide & dismissive remarks
    - Keep it professional
    - Everyone's perspective is accurate
B. Solicit everyone's ideas
    - Equal air time
    - After speaking, wait for two others to share before you speak again
C. Do your part

Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Street-life Orientation: spectrum of networking behaviors that manifest through bonding and illegal activities. Adopted by students who come from urban areas so impoverished that street-life activities are seen as a primary means of survival.

Payne, Y., Starks, B., & Gibson, L. (2009). Contextualizing black boys' use of a street identity in high school. New Directions for Youth Development, 2009(123), 35–51.

Session 4 of 9
Monday 11.14.16
3:30-4:30

Norms:
A. Respect everyone's ideas
B. Solicit everyone's ideas
C. Do your part

1. Intro – Quick-read RE: Values/beliefs of Whitman's Street-life boys

2. Finalize primary focus of our team's research

3. Research Questions
    i. Brainstorm in pairs
    ii. Group share-out

4. Looking ahead – Session 5
    i. Develop agenda
    ii. Logistics – Date, time, location

5. Journaling

Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Street-life Orientation: spectrum of networking behaviors that manifest through bonding and illegal activities. Adopted by students who come from urban areas so impoverished that street-life activities are seen as a primary means of survival.

Payne, Y., Starks, B., & Gibson, L. (2009). Contextualizing black boys' use of a street identity in high school. New Directions for Youth Development, 2009(123), 35–51.

Session 5 of 9
Tuesday 11.29.16
3:30-4:30

Norms:
A. Respect everyone's ideas
B. Solicit everyone's ideas
C. Do your part

1. Intro – Check-ins
    a. How are we doing on this?
    b. How are we doing on our norms?
    c. Any adjustments as we head into our actual research process?

2. Solidify Research Questions
    a. Finalize our brainstorming from last session
    b. Map out data collection methods

3. Journaling

Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Street-life Orientation: spectrum of networking behaviors that manifest through bonding and illegal activities. Adopted by students who come from urban areas so impoverished that street-life activities are seen as a primary means of survival.

Payne, Y., Starks, B., & Gibson, L. (2009). Contextualizing black boys' use of a street identity in high school. New Directions for Youth Development, 2009(123), 35–51.

Session 6 of 9
Tuesday 12.8.16
3:30-4:30

Norms:
A. Respect everyone's ideas
B. Solicit everyone's ideas
C. Do your part

1. Review Research Questions
    a. *Do they reflect what we discussed last meeting?*
    b. *Do they lend themselves towards helping us accomplish our goals (below)?*

2. Plan Data Collection
    a. *Select data collection methods for each RQ*
    b. *Craft protocols (survey/interview questions)*
    c. *Distribute responsibilities*

3. Journaling

Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Street-life Orientation: spectrum of networking behaviors that manifest through bonding and illegal activities. Adopted by students who come from urban areas so impoverished that street-life activities are seen as a primary means of survival.

Payne, Y., Starks, B., & Gibson, L. (2009). Contextualizing black boys' use of a street identity in high school. New Directions for Youth Development, 2009(123), 35–51.

Session 7 of 9
Wednesday 12.21.16
1:00-2:00pm

Norms:
A. Respect everyone's ideas
B. Solicit everyone's ideas
C. Do your part

1. Data Collection Debrief
    a. *Challenges/Successes in collecting assigned data*

2. Data Analysis
    a. *Primer and Guidelines*
    b. *Analyze interview and survey data for common themes in response to research questions (below)*
    c. *Determine key findings*

3. Journaling

Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Team Research Questions:

RQ1 – To what extent do current interventions and extracurricular offerings at Whitman support the success of street-life oriented boys?

What do program staff identify as their major challenges and successes in supporting street-life oriented boys?

RQ2 – What do street-life oriented students identify as potential services, programs, and opportunities that would support their engagement and success in school?

RQ3 – How can Whitman collaborate with local organizations and programs that aim to support street-life oriented youth in order to increase the academic and personal success of street-life oriented boys?

Session 8 of 9
Wednesday 1.11.17
3:30-4:30pm

Norms:
A. Respect everyone's ideas
B. Solicit everyone's ideas
C. Do your part

1. Data Analysis Debrief
    a. *Review codes/colors, themes, process*

2. Data Analysis continued – Looking for findings
    a. *Primer and Guidelines*
    b. *Collectively determine key findings*

3. Journaling

Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Team Research Questions:

RQ1 – To what extent do current interventions and extracurricular offerings at Whitman support the success of street-life oriented boys?

What do program staff identify as their major challenges and successes in supporting street-life oriented boys?

RQ2 – What do street-life oriented students identify as potential services, programs, and opportunities that would support their engagement and success in school?

RQ3 – How can Whitman collaborate with local organizations and programs that aim to support street-life oriented youth in order to increase the academic and personal success of street-life oriented boys?

Session 9 of 9
Wednesday 1.19.17
3:30-4:30pm

Norms:
A. Respect everyone's ideas
B. Solicit everyone's ideas
C. Do your part

1. Findings from Data
    a. *Examine, add to shared findings chart*

2. Recommendations – where do we go from here?
    a. *Key principles?*
    b. *Key components?*
    c. *Next steps for those at Whitman interested in supporting this population*

3. Post-Interview dates and Journaling

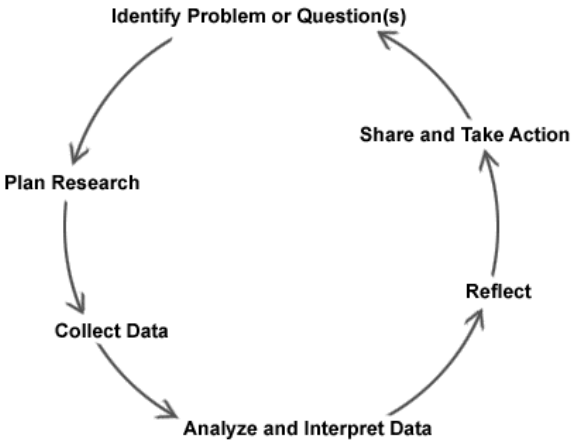
Goals of this project: Utilize action research to identify key principles and components of an intervention program that supports the educational success of street-life oriented boys

Team Research Questions:

RQ1 – To what extent do current interventions and extracurricular offerings at Whitman support the success of street-life oriented boys?
What do program staff identify as their major challenges and successes in supporting street-life oriented boys?

RQ2 – What do street-life oriented students identify as potential services, programs, and opportunities that would support their engagement and success in school?

RQ3 – How can Whitman collaborate with local organizations and programs that aim to support street-life oriented youth in order to increase the academic and personal success of street-life oriented boys?



Appendix C

Reading Distributed in Session Four

Excerpt from Previous Action Research Study

Interviews with eight current and former Whitman students provided several insights regarding the values and beliefs that guide the decision-making of street-life oriented African American males. Among the most frequently referenced values were acceptance, respect, camaraderie, and family. The most frequently referenced beliefs related to participation in gang activity, sports, and general high-risk behaviors as a means for achieving acceptance, respect, camaraderie, or supporting one's family. Responses regarding what types of interventions may help students avoid street life orientation varied widely, from a complete reorganization of the school system to no change at all.

Values and Beliefs

Research Question 1: What values and beliefs do street life oriented African American male students say guide their decisions about participating in gang, criminal, and/or deviant activity?

Value 1 - Acceptance. Participants shared that being accepted by others was a primary influence in their decision-making. Six of the eight participants referenced the idea of "fitting in" or gaining approval and belonging from others, particularly peers, as an important factor for their behavior. Charles explained, "I wanted to be good but at the same time I was just being bad, just doing what I felt everybody wanted to see. Friends—they were peer pressuring me into doing stuff." Similarly, Kalvin stated, "we just wanted to be like everybody else. That's how everybody wanted to be, just like the next person." The majority of participants considered it important to be accepted by others and cited this value as a key reason for many of the activities that they participated in while at Whitman. Perhaps most adamant about this being an important value for street life oriented African American males was Geoffrey, who declared, "no matter what

anybody says, everybody's a follower. Everybody models themselves after somebody."

However, not all participants agreed. An interesting exchange during the group interview revealed that two participants either do not value acceptance or do not want to admit that they value it. Jamil stated, "I only do my thing, I don't copy the next person on the side or nothing. I kind of lead my own self," and Tyquan agreed. Deshawn then accused each of them of not being forthcoming. Deshawn, who describes himself as being very close to both of them, proceeded to provide examples of how they each have sought acceptance from others. However, neither Jamil nor Tyquan retracted their statements about not valuing acceptance from others.

Value 2 - Camaraderie. All eight of the participants referenced camaraderie and friendship as an important value. Aside from valuing acceptance, these young men clearly value the bond and connection that they feel with their peers. Geoffrey spoke on this value when he described, "wanting to belong with that brotherhood, that camaraderie with other males is like—I feel something—it's my brother, you feel me?" Others spoke with similar sentiment regarding the enjoyment that they get from this bond they feel with their friends, whom they often referred to as their *homies*, *brothers*, or *boys*. Kalvin expressed this value when he stated, in reference to his close peers, "You guys are still my homies. You need something to eat? I'll try my best to help you. You need a ride? You need somewhere to stay? You can stay at my crib." Whereas most, but not all, participants discussed the importance of fitting in, all of them spoke on the value of close friendship.

Value 3 - Respect. A third value found in the interview data was that of being respected and being known. Seven of the eight participants referenced this desire. This differs from the finding on acceptance in that here we see participants describing a feeling of wanting to be seen as special. Matthew described this as having a "name" in his description of what went through

his mind on a daily basis: “Music, popularity, trying to be tough, trying to get at the girls. Trying to be the man, trying to earn a name. Trying to make a name for yourself and you ain't did shit to earn it.” James, who showed me a music video he created for his first rap song, discussed wanting to “be the man” and wanting others to know that he’s not weak. The song contained several lines about getting girls, having money, and being famous in the streets. Charles described how these value influences teens like him:

> They see one guy doing it, like just ‘oh I got this girl I got this girl, I could beat up this dude, that dude.’ And you just be like ‘oh I wanna be like that dude so bad. What could I do to be like him? I’m gonna try my hardest to be like him’

Value 4 - Family. Five of the participants made reference to family members as an influence in their daily behavior. When asked why he considers himself “more serious” now than in the past, Jamil responded:

> My little sisters, and seeing where I stay at. I didn’t want them to grow up how I grew up and go through the things I went through. So that’s when I really started taking things serious. And I tried my hardest to push myself to do the things… We’re on food stamps, so I [stole] to buy food. I bought food, and bought movies and stuff like that. Sometimes we don’t have cable.

Similarly, other participants spoke of the importance of family. Matthew, Charles, Karl, and Geoffrey all stated that their mothers played a large role in convincing them to try to do well in school. Kelvin, Geoffrey, and Charles also cited the influence of uncles and cousins.

Belief 1 - Gang Activity. All but one participant mentioned street gangs. My analysis of interview data revealed that participants believe gang activity is a viable means of realizing many of the values discussed above. Charles identified his participation in gang activity as “heavy” and described his initiation as being a result of seeking more belonging and camaraderie: “Once I started meeting new friends it started bringing me around more and more friends. More and more friends and next thing you know I knew everybody that was gang related.”

Kalvin's participation in gang activity resulted from his wanting to be known and respected. Although he says he is not an official member of a gang, his friendship with gang members appears to complement these values. He states:

> To be honest you didn't want to be one of those guys that got picked on. If you hangin' around a whole bunch of guys that's in a gang or you know banging Blood, you good. Someone could pick on you or talk about you but it's not going to go too far because you know that they know that you stay with a whole bunch of Bloods around you.

None of the participants spoke of gang membership in a negative manner and all who mentioned gangs discussed the role of gangs in fulfilling at least one of the values discussed earlier.

Belief 2 – Sports. Seven of the eight participants played sports at Whitman. Matthew describes the close connection between sports and street life orientation when he reminisced that, "if you're a gang member, you also play sports and you're in the streets…if you was an athlete you hung out with the gang members anyways." Participants shared their belief that participating in sports helped them achieve camaraderie, acceptance, and respect. Geoffrey stated that he only played sports to belong, while Kalvin and Matthew viewed sports as a way to become famous and successful.

What stood out the most about participants' views of playing sports was the belief that sports kept them out of trouble. Each of the participants who played sports cited this activity as encouraging them to keep their grades up and avoid street life. Geoffrey (football) and Charles (baseball) specifically stated that they would only maintain their grades during the season so that they could be eligible to play. Charles explained that he'd be "thinking about baseball all day. I got a game, I gotta go to practice, I gotta do this so I could play baseball."

Belief 3 – Risk Behaviors. A third belief revealed in interview data was that the high risk behaviors of substance abuse, truancy, and crime addressed many of the values found in this study. Five participants admitted to regularly smoking marijuana on campus. Tyquan described

skipping class to smoke marijuana with others simply to hang out with them, while Deshawn also admitted to skipping class to hang out with friends who smoke marijuana even though he himself does not like to smoke. Matthew similarly describes a dislike of marijuana but an affinity for risky behavior as part of camaraderie with his close friends. He states, “We used to sell weed on campus, we used to get into fights. I had guns in my backpack and my car,” in his description of activities that he participated in with friends.

Appendix D

Action Research Team Findings Chart

When you add a finding, just select "Insert Row" to add your row into the table and type into it:

Theme	Finding(s) *List any conclusions you have from your reading of the data*	Evidence in support of finding *Cite which pieces of evidence you see that support this finding*	Follow-up questions based on finding *List any follow-up questions that should be considered based on this finding (optional)*	Link to our RQs *Which, if any, research question(s) does this finding help answer?*	Recommendations / Next Steps based on this finding *List ay preliminary ideas you have about what our school action or next steps our school should follow based on this finding*
MMMP	Staff and students largely view MMMP as the go-to resource for supporting street-life boys	MMMP items 2, 4, 7, 9, 12. Staff survey, student survey	Is MMMP actually designed to specifically support this population? Item [redacted]PYD source) says it doesn't target this population	RQ 1, RQ 2	School should work with MMMP to consider how to more specifically utilize it as a resource for street-life boys.
Relationships	School leaders view caring/supportive staff-student relationships as a strength in our site's approach to street-life boys	Relationships items 1, 8, 10, 15, 30, 50,	Within what context is this care communicated--do students see/feel this in their classes, or just in out-of-class interactions?	RQ 1a	School should re-visit ways for teachers to build positive relationships w/ challenging students
Relationships	School leaders report that meaningful relationships are of critical importance and more should be done to develop these	Relationships items 16, 18, 22, 26, 36, 46	Is there a process for identifying proper steps or system for developing meaningful relationships?	RQ 1	A future team may wish to investigate best practices for forging this kind of support. ie--Who on campus does this well, how can we learn from them?
Economics	School leaders believe that economic challenges and non-traditional family structures play a big role in the school performance of street-life boys	Economics items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8	What economic support can a school offer above and beyond singleton internship opportunities?	RQ 1a	Outside of pathway structure, can kids be linked to work opportunities tied to school performance? Possible carrot?
Hooks/Motivation	School leaders identify finding a "hook" as a major challenge in supporting street-life boys	Hooks/Motivation items 1, 4, 6, 8, 16, 19	If hooks don't work, what sort of mandatory measures could be introduced - for instance, builidng in intervention classes into particular students' schedules based on their exhibition of street-life orientation.	RQ 2 (?)	It is necessary to indentify what motivates (intrinsic vs extrinsic) the street life boy and use that to develop and implement the "right" hooks for continued participation and growth.
Academic	School leaders report that street-life boys are in dire need of added academic support systems	Academic items 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16	So, would these academic support systems be specifically for these boys, or would this be a matter of recruiting street-life oriented boys to preexisting academic supports?		
Behavior/Discipline	There is some disagreement on whether street life boys on campus would benefit more from a gentler approach to behavior management, or a stricter, structured discipline system.		The answer to this should come from the top. The ways in which the administration treats these boys should be similar to the ways that the individual staff members do...otherwise the boys get mixed messages. It would appear that with the CKH training and other things discussed in PD that we're on a path for more gentle approaches		
Other	One third of school staff would NOT refer a street-life oriented boy to one of our extracurricular intervention offerings	Staff Survey	Seriously? Why? If this is the case, what would these teachers do when confronted with a child who they think is in danger of slipping into this lifestyle? If they're not recommending these boys to existing programs, then what are they doing?	RQ1	There may be a need to discuss this topic with staff. Lots to unpack here

Appendix E

Interview Protocols

Interview of study participant prior to the first action research team meeting

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am a graduate student at UCLA doing research for my dissertation. My research interest is to learn about how teachers can come together through collaborative action research to address a difficult problem at their site. This interview should be about an hour in length. This is a confidential conversation and I will not share it with anyone. I will use the findings for my study, but every effort will be made to ensure the information from this interview will not be traced back to you. My goal is to capture all that you are saying, as well as learn from your experience. While I will be taking notes, I would like to use a recorder to record our conversation. This will allow us to have a natural flow to the conversation. If at any moment you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop recording the interview, you can stop the recorder here. I will transcribe the conversation and will not share the recording with anyone. Please be advised that the recordings will be stored in a secure password-protected device and I will be the only person who has access. From time to time during this interview you will see me writing and this is just to write down questions or clarifications that I might have at a later time. The interview will last approximately one hour.

Before we start:
Do I have your permission to record this interview?
Do you have any questions for me before we start?

1. Tell me about your role at Whitman. What do you do here and how long have you been working here?

2. How experienced would you say you are when it comes to teacher collaboration?
    a. Within what context has the majority of your teacher collaboration experience taken place?
    b. Have you received PD on effective collaboration?

3. What's your general attitude when it comes to working in collaboration with other teachers?
    a. What do you like about it?
    b. What do you dislike about it?

4. What do you think effective teacher collaboration looks like?
    a. Do you have an example of this from your own experience?

5. What do you think ineffective teacher collaboration looks like?
    a. Do you have an example of this from your own experience?

6. What do you think are some effective methods for overcoming differences in opinion or arguments that arise during teacher collaboration?

Our current project will include conversations on race, gender, class, and other topics that can sometimes be challenging to discuss openly.

7. Do you think teachers have difficulty openly discussing topics like race, gender, or class with their colleagues? If so, why do you think that is?
    a. How comfortable do you think you are with having discussions like these with colleagues? Explain.

8. What do you think are some effective collaboration conditions or practices for teachers to discuss these topics openly with their colleagues?

For this project, we're going to be talking about street-life oriented students. These are students who participate in a street culture that can include gang involvement, violence, selling drugs, stealing, and other illicit activities. One of our goals is to develop an intervention program to help improve the educational outcomes of these students.

9. Think about some of the street-life oriented students you've taught at Whitman. In your opinion, how good or bad of a job is our school site doing to help these students meet our school-wide learning outcomes?
    a. What makes you think this?

10. A first-year teacher is about to begin teaching a class at Whitman that has some street-life oriented students in it. What would your advice be for how they should work with their street-life oriented students?

11. Describe how optimistic you are about creating change for Whitman's street-life oriented students through our teacher collaboration project.
    a. How do you expect this teacher collaboration process to turn out?
    b. What are some of the challenges you think we'll have?

Interview of study participant after the final action research team meeting

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know, I am a graduate student at UCLA doing research for my dissertation. My research interest is to learn about how teachers can come together through collaborative action research to address a difficult problem at their site. This interview should be about an hour in length. This is a confidential conversation and I will not share it with anyone. I will use the findings for my study, but every effort will be made to ensure the information from this interview will not be traced back to you. My goal is to capture all that you are saying, as well as learn from your experience. While I will be taking notes, I would like to use a recorder to record our conversation. This will allow us to have a natural flow to the conversation. If at any moment you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop recording the interview, you can stop the recorder here. I will transcribe the conversation and will not share the recording with anyone. Please be advised that the recordings will be stored in a secure password-protected device and I will be the only person who has access. From time to time during this interview you will see me writing and this is just to write down questions or clarifications that I might have at a later time. The interview will last approximately one hour.

Before we start:
Do I have your permission to record this interview?
Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Please think back to what you experienced over the last few months as part of this action research project, from the initial invitation to our final collaboration session.

1. How did this collaboration compare to traditional teacher collaboration that you've been part of?

2. What's your overall impression about how worthwhile this collaboration was as compared to traditional teacher collaboration that you've experienced?

Please think about the involvement of the various participants in this project.

3. As compared to other teacher collaboration that you've experienced, how involved were the teachers in this project?
    a. Did teacher involvement change in any way over the course of the project? If so, how?

4. How did the interactions *between* teachers in this project compare to traditional collaboration that you've experienced?
    a. Did these interactions between teachers change in any way over the course of the project? If so, how?

5. What do you consider to have been some effective features of this collaboration?

a. What features weren't so effective?

Please think specifically about your own involvement in this project.

6. What were your original reasons for agreeing to participate in this action research project?

7. How did your level of involvement and contributions here compare to your involvement or contributions in your traditional teacher collaboration?
    a. What drove you to put in the effort and make the contributions that you did?

8. Did your level of involvement change over time? If so, how?

9. What would you say was the most challenging part of this collaboration for you?

10. What was the easiest part of this collaboration for you?

Looking back at your experience on this project:

11. What, if anything, have you learned about street-life oriented students and Whitman through this project?

12. If a similar project was initiated later this year or sometime next year, would you be likely to participate again? Why?

Appendix F

Participant Journals

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the following journal prompts in writing. As you know, I am a graduate student at UCLA doing research for my dissertation. My research interest is to learn about how teachers can come together through collaborative action research to address a difficult problem at their site. This is a confidential journal and I will not share it with anyone. I will use the findings for my study but every effort will be made to ensure the information from this journal will not be traced back to you. My goal is to capture some of what you are thinking as well as learn from your experience. Please be advised that your writing will be kept confidential and will be stored in a secure password-protected database for which I will be the only person who has access.

Please be as detailed as you can be and respond to each question openly and honestly:

1) What are your key takeaways with respect to what took place in today's meeting?
2) What are some aspects of today's meeting that you liked or disliked? Explain.
3) Please describe any other thoughts, questions, or comments that you would like to express regarding the topics or process of today's meeting.

Appendix G

Whitman Tiers of Support and Intervention

[redacted] High School ~ Tiers of Support and Intervention

	Academic	Social-Emotional
Tier 1 ***Universal*** For All Students	College and Career Readiness course for all freshmen with follow-up Advisory modules for grades 10-12. Academic counseling with four-year graduation plan. Explicit learning objectives for each class posted with agenda on "blackboard configuration" (BBC). Chunking lessons into segments and check for understanding. Daily structured opportunities for students to cooperate with partners and heterogeneous groups. Meaningful reading and writing integrated into every lesson. TenMarks mathematics practice and remediation system. Work-based learning (exploration through internships) [redacted] After school tutoring and enrichment. College & Career Center & College Access Plan	Advisory grouping by grade-level and academy to ensure personalized environment for each student. On Time and Safe Positive Sweep for every class period. Greeting students at the door by name with smile every period. Assigned seating for every class; flexible seat arrangements to meet instructional needs for each class period. Bell-to-bell instruction; Begin classes with a Do Now students can do independently while attendance is recorded. Social contracts in each class for mutual respect and accountability of students and staff. Proactive Classroom Management Strategies Daily attendance and tardy phone/email/text alerts. Review 360 Universal Screener administered each semester.
Tier 2 ***Targeted*** For Students Needing Additional Support	Differentiated groupings within classes as needed to focus on specific skills and standards. Focused tutoring in specific subjects. Student Study Team (parent-teacher team conference with action plan). Co-teaching sections for students with disabilities and those needing additional support in specific subjects. ELD classes for English Learners & students needing literacy support.	Advisory follow-up & support plans ("Pick 6"). Disciplinary referrals to Student Support Office. Behavior contracts; daily attendance/behavior checks. School Attendance Review Team (SART) contracts. Mentoring program enrollment (e.g., [redacted]. Coaching for Success Program – with on-site Probation Officer (voluntary). Consultation with School Psychologist. Referral for Mental Health services ([redacted]).
Tier 3 ***Intensive*** For Students Needing Intensive Support	Referral for Alternative Education program. Evaluation for Special Education services. IEP accommodations in the general education setting. Academic Assistance class for students with disabilities. Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) sections in specific subjects for students with disabilities.	Attendance monitoring by CWAS intervention specialist. School Attendance Review Board (SARB) hearing. Evaluation for Special Education services. Behavior Intervention Plan (through IEP). Psychiatric Emergency Team (PET) referral.

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