How Do Classroom Teachers in Urban Charter Schools Enact Humanizing Pedagogy Amid Neoliberal Education Reform? A Case Study from the American South

Michelle R. Armstrong

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HOW DO CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN URBAN CHARTER SCHOOLS ENACT HUMANIZING PEDAGOGY AMID NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION REFORM? A CASE STUDY FROM THE AMERICAN SOUTH

by

Michelle R. Armstrong

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Instruction and Curriculum Leadership

The University of Memphis

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Dedication

This dissertation has been a journey filled with challenges, joy, fear, and self-discovery. There is no way that I could have dared to complete this process without the love and encouragement of my five heartbeats. My first two heartbeats are my husband, Toney, and my daughter Zoey. Given that they both are my greatest passions, I dedicate my dissertation to them for giving me space and freedom to pursue a new passion, which is researching and writing about the need for all children to learn in humanizing ways.

My three remaining heartbeats are my father and mother, Reginald and Deborah Brantley, and my grandmother, Betty West. I also dedicate my dissertation to them because they have always lassoed the moon for me and believed in me unconditionally, unequivocally, and unapologetically. Their love is the kind that I pray all humans are blessed to know and feel.

Lastly, I dedicate my research to three angels whose presence and loving memories remain with me posthumously—my grandmother, Hazel Brantley; my grandfather, Anderson West; and my mother-in-law, Billie Armstrong.
Acknowledgments

As my dissertation journey comes to an end, I must acknowledge and throw tons of gratitude confetti to the following individuals who helped me accomplish what often felt like the impossible. Dr. Beverly Cross's guidance and patience as my committee chair helped me challenge many personal and professional assumptions and gain comfort in being vulnerable as a learner. My appreciation for Dr. Cross really cannot be captured in words; she has helped me push through many of the ill-effects that can plague Black women who are in search of their scholarship voice. Additionally, I must acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Sharon Griffin, Dr. Alison Happel-Parkins, and Dr. Gina Tillis. They all provided supportive feedback and direction that were vital for the completion of my study.

I am blessed to know many empowered women who empower women. Lisa Baldwin, LaWanda Hill, and Dr. Tisha White all helped me gain confidence in my ability to see the process of writing a dissertation through to the end. Most importantly, in their unique way, each of these women reminded me of my power and duty to accomplish this feat, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Lastly, I must acknowledge the teachers featured in this study- Anna, Marissa, and Earlene. I am tremendously appreciative and humbled by the work they do for and with their students. They go hard for their students. They love their students. They understand that their humanity is inextricably tied to that of their students. Because of them and many teachers like them, the work to support classroom teachers and school leaders in creating humanizing learning experiences for our students must continue.
Abstract

Neoliberal education reform perpetuates the dehumanizing belief in individual merit within high-stakes testing environments. As a result, schooling experiences continue to disenfranchise historically marginalized African American children because of the overreliance on narrow standards to deem students proficient in their academic progress or not. Therefore, the purpose of this narrative case study was to examine the humanizing practices that classroom teachers enact within high-stakes testing environments of state and locally authorized urban charter schools in Tennessee that primarily serve African American students. The study found that classroom teachers acknowledge the problematic nature of the high-stakes testing and accountability environments in which they operate. The study's findings cite overreliance on compliance and silence, instability in education reform, and a focus on high-stakes testing as a leading learning measure as three main obstructions to enacting humanizing pedagogy. The study's participants push against the dehumanizing environments in which they work by inseparably linking learning and trusting relationships that honor students' individuality; by incorporating learning strategies that help students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities; and by understanding and using students' realities to help them access, own, and re-engineer academic content. Based on the findings, there are implications for charter leaders, given their autonomous latitude, to give teachers greater flexibility and opportunity to enact humanizing pedagogy, specifically to the end of raising students' critical consciousness and using their agency toward social action. Implications for teacher preparation programs include designing pre-service coursework that centers humanization as praxis so that teachers enter the profession with a greater disposition toward enacting humanizing practices with their students.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

...the human child receives its thoughts, the larger part of its habits, its tricks of doing, its religion; its whole conception of what it is and what the whole world about it is from the society in which it is placed; and this heredity which is not physical at all has aptly been called social heredity (Du Bois, 2002, p. 117).

It is both duty and challenge to write a dissertation that seeks to understand how classroom teachers enact humanizing practices in urban charter schools amid an era of high-stakes testing. As an African American mother of a school-age child and a career educator, writing a dissertation during a health crisis and civil unrest rooted in structural racism sparked by excessive police brutality victimizing Black people creates even more complexity. As the COVID-19 crisis is forcing the United States (U.S.) to grapple with racial inequities across multiple social and economic sectors, the density of the complexity intensifies. Parents, politicians, policymakers, and practitioners are all grappling with what schooling means at a time such as this.

Neoliberals believe that all individuals are self-interested and rational, and that given complete information, they will make the choice that is in their best interest. In a free market, people must have the power to choose between several options for all social transactions. Freedom of choice creates competition between service providers, such that they all strive to maximize the quality and efficiency of services available. Neoliberals assume that individuals will not choose service providers or businesses that are failing and that failing businesses will not survive. In free-market competition, organizations that survive do so based on their own merit and effort. (p. 432)

Neoliberal education reform and the positioning of individual merit within high-stakes testing environments as a quality improvement strategy has historically marginalized African American children (Bartolome, 1994; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Sleeter, 2018), perpetuating myths of meritocracy by relying on narrow standards to deem students as intelligent.

Placing meritocracy in a greater context, the current landscape of K-12 public education in the U.S. is marred by centuries of racial oppression and discriminatory practices that have kept children of color, specifically African American children, at a disadvantage and lacking opportunities to succeed (Andersen, 2018; Dee, 2005; Leung & Sy, 2018; Trusz, 2018). With over 25% of African Americans living in poverty-dense communities, characterized by 40% or more people at or below the U.S. federal poverty level residing within a given Census tract, African American children are more likely to attend neighborhood schools in communities with higher concentrations of poverty (Shapiro, Murray, & Sard, 2015). With state and local taxes as the main levers for school funding and given that property taxes are the primary driver of schools' financial resources, disparate funding approaches maintain inequity where funding gaps persist between low-poverty and high-poverty school districts (Baker, 2014; Knight, 2017).
Additionally, funding disparities, which are intentional legislative and policy results, perpetuate performance disparities marked by race and class. Based on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, known as the nation's report card, which purports to gauge student achievement, significant gaps in reading and math average scores persist between Whites and African Americans. Gaps are as broad as 26 points for average reading scores for Blacks and Whites in 4th-grade reading, and gaps span up to 28 points for Blacks and Whites in 8th-grade for average reading scale scores (NAEP, 2019). The picture is similarly bleak in math, with 4th-grade Black/White gaps at 25% and 32% for 8th-grade math (NAEP, 2019).

In Tennessee, the state in which this study took place, neoliberal education reform measures have been pervasive. Tennessee is one of the nation's first states, outside of Louisiana's response to Hurricane Katrina, to institute a state-directed charter managed district, where schools in the bottom 5% of the state's test rankings are affected (Glazer & Egan, 2016). Tennessee's Achievement Schools District (ASD) swept in with its first cohort of charter schools in 2012 with the promise of moving schools in the bottom 5% to the top 25% in five years per the state's testing accountability system (Glazer & Egan, 2016; Horn & Wilburn, 2013). According to the most recent data in the Tennessee Department of Education's (TDOE) State Report Card (2019), which publishes math, science, and English Language Arts (ELA) state test results for student subgroups, the ASD's data remains below the local Shelby County Schools (SCS) District (which formerly included the ASD schools) and overall state data.

In the 2018-19 school year, the ASD served 10,580 students; 97% were African American, Hispanic, or Native American students, and 74% qualified for free or reduced-price lunches (TDOE, 2019). With per-pupil expenditures at $13,336.77 (which is $3,000 more than
the state average), 11.2% demonstrated proficiency in math, 8.2% exhibited proficiency in ELA, and 9.1% achieved proficient scores in science (TDOE, 2019). The ASD, which predominantly serves African American children, is approaching its 10th anniversary without achieving its stated goal of bringing the lowest-performing schools into the first quartile of school performance.

Legal scholar and critical race theorist Lani Guinier (2015) argues that the previous national and state testing data exemplify meritocracy within education. She terms such testing as "testocracy," noting that merit should be democratic versus testocratic. Guinier (2015) signals that "testocratic merit assumes that test scores are the best evidence of [students'] worth. . . hereby ignor[ing] biases that privilege those who are already quite advantaged” (p. xi). High-stakes testing is a centerpiece in schools, supporting Guinier’s (2015) point. Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed over 500,000 U.S. lives. Even so, the U.S. Department of Education suggested it would deny state requests for ‘20-’21 testing waivers (Barnum, 2020).

High-stakes testing results in increased levels of student and teacher stress, pipeline-to-prison gateways, and an overall narcissistic education system per cheating scandals (Au & Gourd, 2013; Berliner, 2011a, 2001b; Bhattacharyya, Junot, & Clark, 2013; Henfield, 2012; Kearns, 2011; Mora, 2011; Thompson & Allen, 2012; Watson et al., 2014).

Paulo Freire (as cited by del Carmen Salazar, 2013) calls for critical pedagogues to usher in a social legacy of "becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world" (p. 37). Freire was an activist, philosopher, and leader in humanizing pedagogy. His words resonate with me today. For 25 years, I have served students and families as a teacher, school leader, professional developer of teachers, teacher educator, and now as coordinator of educational investments for a
private foundation. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as a high school English teacher serving African American students in urban schools, I had the professional freedom and flexibility to craft curriculum and learning experiences that were responsive to my students' reality within the context of flexible standards. I have witnessed many of my former students thrive and enjoy meaningful lives.

Over the past decade, I have worked with teachers, districts, and states as professional freedoms and flexibilities regarding curriculum, assessments, teaching strategies, and behavioral approaches have become increasingly rigid, scripted, and devoid of student and family input as a result of federal, state, and local policies. I have witnessed dehumanization in public education. Kelman (1975) notes that dehumanization involves "denying a person identity—a perception of the person as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices—and community—a perception of the other as part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for each other" (p. 301). Standards linked to state assessments drive high-stakes environments characteristic of conformity and uniformity, resulting in fewer teacher opportunities to meet individual student needs based on their interests and sensibilities (Kincheloe, 2008). As a result, high-stakes testing creates an increased risk of denial of identity, which by Kelman’s (1975) definition, is dehumanizing.

My research study is personal. I have been an agitator and actor privy to the dehumanizing practices that neoliberal education reform agendas demand. It is imperative and necessary to illuminate the critical humanizing practices that classroom teachers enact to honor students, arouse and develop their ability to transform social inequities often marked by race and class (Bartolome, 1994; Camangian, 2015; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Sleeter, 2018), and elicit qualities of human uniqueness and human nature (Haslam, 2006).
more guidance for educators to attend to students in humanizing ways; its findings contribute to a knowledge base supporting creating humanizing spaces for African American children to thrive and learn.

**Statement of the Problem**

As previously noted, the 2019 NAEP report sheds light on substantial gaps in reading and math average scale scores that continue to exist between Whites and African Americans in public schools (NAEP, 2019). U.S. high schools, labeled as "dropout factories," point to incongruent results in African Americans' persistence through high school to graduation. In dropout factories, 60% or more of the entering 9th-grade cohort does not graduate with the same exiting 12th-grade cohort because they drop out before graduation (DePaoli et al., 2015). Discouragingly, 23% of African American students and 15% of Hispanic students nationwide attend dropout factories (DePaoli et al., 2015). Today, Black and Hispanic students are more likely than White and Asian students to graduate with a General Education Development (G.E.D.) diploma versus a traditional high school diploma. They also disproportionately take over four years to graduate high school compared to White and Asian students (Murnane, 2013).

Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that there is a price to pay for the achievement gap or maintaining the Americanized social order of Black and brown inferiority that schools continue to perpetuate. Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to this idea as the education debt. She warns that “this all-out focus on the 'Achievement Gap' moves us toward short-term solutions that are unlikely to address the long-term underlying problem" (p. 4). These data offer examples supporting the deeper problems that Ladson-Billings signals. These underlying issues are historically rooted in dehumanizing economic, political, philosophical, and psychological practices perpetuated in America's central space of socialization--its schools.
Purpose and Significance of the Study

Given the noted disparities along the lines of race and class and the need to disrupt desensitization to these inequities, this study examines the humanizing practices that classroom teachers enact within the current high-stakes testing environments of state and locally authorized urban charter schools. For this narrative inquiry case study, I interviewed three classroom teachers; one works in an ASD-authorized charter school, and two work in SCS-authorized charter schools.

Chapter 2’s literature review chronicles historical dehumanizing practices that have marginalized people of color, specifically African Americans, through significant developments in the United States’ public education system and the humanizing efforts that have created hopeful counternarratives. Specifically, the study investigated how teachers during the current era of education reform, characterized by standardization, uniformity, and compliance (Baker, 2016; Bartolome, 1994; Cohen, D. K., et al., 2018; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Sleeter, 2018) have created ways that allow children to see themselves as whole, free humans fully capable of social life versus social death (Pierce, 2017). Lastly, the study views the high-stakes testing environments as by-products of a more significant education reform movement mimicking free-market tactics (Brathwaite, 2017) that perpetuate a racially and economically re-segregated caste education system (Du Bois, 2002; Pierce, 2017).

Research Questions

To better understand how teachers in urban charter schools enact humanizing classroom practices in an era of high-stakes testing accountability, the following questions guided the study:

1. What are the critical humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?
2. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools engage in humanizing classroom practices with their students within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

3. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools perceive humanizing practices as supportive of or as obstacles to academic achievement for African American students in high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

Definition of Terms

Animalistic dehumanization. "The denial of uniquely human characteristics of refinement, civility, moral sensibility, and higher cognition. People are perceived as coarse, uncultured, lacking in self-control, and unintelligent. Their behavior should be seen as less cognitively mediated than the behavior of others, and thus more driven by motives, appetites, and instincts" (Haslam, 2006, pp. 257-258).

Dehumanization/dehumanizing. Kelman (1975) notes that dehumanization involves "denying a person identity—a perception of the person as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices—and community—a perception of the other as part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for each other" (p. 301).

High-stakes testing. Any combination of local, state, or federal student assessment where students, teachers, school districts, or states are held accountable and judged based on test scores. Highly controversial, high-stakes tests are a staple in free-market education reform, and the results may have consequences related to receiving additional funds to support any range of programming related to schools, teacher pay, or even school closure (Hursh, 2007).
Humanization/human nature (H.N.). "H.N. characteristics involve cognitive flexibility, emotionality, vital agency, and warmth, and are seen as a shared and fundamental 'nature' that is embedded in the person" (Haslam, 2006, p. 257).

Humanization/human uniqueness (U.H.). "U.H. characteristics involve [the perception of people in ways characterized by] refinement, civility, morality, and higher cognition, and are believed to be acquired and subject to variation between people" (Haslam, 2006, p. 257).

Humanizing practices. Humanizing pedagogy or practices require teachers and students to disrupt suppressive hierarchies that maintain asymmetrical power structures (Keet et al., 2009; Nieto, 2003). To apply humanizing pedagogy, the following must be considered:

1. The reality of the learner is crucial.
2. Critical consciousness is imperative for students and educators.
3. Students' sociocultural resources are valued, and extended-curriculum is permeable, not static.
4. Content is meaningful and relevant to students' lives.
5. Students' prior knowledge links to new learning.
6. Trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization.
7. Mainstream knowledge and discourse styles matter.
8. Students will achieve through their academic, intellectual, and social abilities.
9. Student empowerment requires the use of learning strategies.
**Infrahumanization.** The tendency for people to see others in their ingroup as more human than those in outgroups. Infrahumanization is an extension of dehumanization (Leyens et al., 2001, 2003).

**Mechanistic dehumanization.** "This combination of attributed characteristics—inertness, coldness, rigidity, fungibility, and lack of agency—represents a view of others as object- or automaton-like. . .humans can be contrasted with machines. . . automata" (Haslam, 2006, p. 258).

**Neoliberalism/free-market reform.** Brathwaite (2017) notes that:

Neoliberals believe that all individuals are self-interested and rational, and that given complete information, they will make the choice that is in their best interest. In a free market, people must have the power to choose between several options for all social transactions. Freedom of choice creates competition between service providers, such that they all strive to maximize the quality and efficiency of services available. Neoliberals assume that individuals will not choose service providers or businesses that are failing and that failing businesses will not survive. In free-market competition, organizations that survive do so based on their own merit and effort (p. 432).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I offer two slightly different historical perspectives to place education reform in context. These two different historical perspectives (one more limited in time than the other) contrast current neoliberal education reform and its dehumanizing characteristics with a second historical perspective that highlights education as a humanizing endeavor toward freedom (Bartolome, 1994; Haslam, 2006; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Sleeter, 2018). The literature notes that modern U.S. federal education reform initially focused on racial integration and resource mandates to provide educational opportunities to children in poverty. Ratification of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 emphasized support for African American children (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). After decades of ESEA reauthorization, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which mandated federal dollars to support the United States’ neediest students. ESSA created numerous challenges to enact and sustain humanizing learning practices.

Critics argue that the current neoliberal state of education reform teaches students to take tests versus teaching students to acknowledge, challenge, and transcend oppressive realities, which align with liberation or humanizing pedagogies (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Darder, 2003; De Lissovoy, 2011; Milner, 2013; Picower, 2011; Rooks, 2018; Santoro, 2011; Sleeter, 2012; Stillman, 2009). A more comprehensive historical perspective that examines slavery rather than desegregation policies as central to understanding current education reform challenges offers a more plausible analysis of dehumanization in urban education. The notion of dehumanization relates to critical pedagogy and critical race theory, which are foundational to this dissertation.
Neoliberal Reform: A Nearsighted View of Improving Educational Inequality

Neoliberal reform is supposedly attempting to address centuries of racial oppression and discriminatory practices that mar U.S. education and keep children of color, specifically poor African American children, at a disadvantage and lacking opportunities to succeed. Neoliberalism rationalizes that a free-market approach reduces regulation and bureaucracy to spur innovation and improved academic outcomes (Brathwaite, 2017). Neoliberal logic suggests that free-markets create competitive environments so that schools with the highest test scores emerge as better options for students and families while failing schools eventually close.

The 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported significant gaps in reading and math average scores between Black and White students. The gaps are as great as 25 points for average reading scores between Blacks and Whites in 4th-grade reading and average a 32 point difference between Blacks and Whites in 8th-grade reading scores (NAEP, 2019). Based on these data, race and reading proficiency correlate. Based on the NAEP results, neoliberal reform suggests that free-market approaches are faring better for students based on race.

The NAEP data highlight inequalities in student outcomes that are contextual and relate to historical and political factors. Today, African American and Hispanic students dominate enrollment in urban schools; White students are concentrated in suburban and independent schools, causing re-segregation (Bracey, 2009; Walsemann & Bell, 2010). In re-segregated schools, White teachers are more likely to teach students in urban settings, and, as previously noted, urban schools are more likely to be in poverty-dense urban centers (Shapiro et al., 2015). The “deeply ingrained belief that Whites are intellectually and culturally superior to Blacks” is an essential consideration in the racial imbalance of White teachers and Black students in urban
schools (Diamond et al., 2004, p. 502). The intermingling of race and intelligence creates the unfortunate space for White teachers in urban schools serving families in lower-income communities to shoulder less responsibility for Black students' achievement if they believe Black students are naturally less capable.

These inputs thrust this cycle of inequity forward. Current reform policies and practices require steep consequences for schools failing students' needs based on assessment outcome metrics influenced by teacher inputs. However, not all decisions are based on test scores alone. Racism and classism factor into which schools are closed for low performance on standardized tests. Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes’ (CREDO) 2017 report on school closures across 26 states found that closures were more likely to occur in low-performing schools with higher proportions of African American and Hispanic students than lower-performing schools where African American and Hispanic students were less represented (CREDO, 2017). The dynamics of economics and race are steeped in a history of institutional racism, with the most pervasive response to improving school quality being neoliberal reform (Brathwaite, 2017; Casey et al., 2013; Hursh 2000, 2007; Klafo & Kwan, 2010; Sleeter, 2014; Tuck, 2013). The next section of the literature review explores neoliberalism as an education reform tactic, its development and implementation via federal education policy, and the empirical research on its impact.

**Neoliberalism and Free-Market Education Reform**

Tuck (2013) describes neoliberalism as "the insertion of market values into nonmarket sectors of human activity" (as cited in Cameron, 2015, p. 186). To reiterate and extend Tuck’s (2013) definition of neoliberalism, Brathwaite (2017) notes that:
Neoliberals believe that all individuals are self-interested and rational, and that given complete information, they will make the choice that is in their best interest. In a free market, people must have the power to choose between several options for all social transactions. Freedom of choice creates competition between service providers, such that they all strive to maximize the quality and efficiency of services available. Neoliberals assume that individuals will not choose service providers or businesses that are failing, and that failing businesses will not survive. In free market competition, organizations that survive do so based on their own merit and effort. (p. 432)

A signature ideology of neoliberal reform incentivizes privatization and asserts that public goods and services, like goods and services in business, increase quality in the face of competition. Additionally, Brathwaite (2017) purports that supporters of free-market enterprise and reform see competition as "an effective way to insure that public funds are being used efficiently" (p. 432), and they see the state's role as regulators of improvement or termination of those competing goods and services.

In terms of origins, both national and international policies of the 1970s started to shift toward ideologies focused on maximizing economic growth by minimizing state intervention (Chorev, 2010). These policies include deregulation of business and labor, environmental policies, and privatizing state initiatives, which led to a “reduction in welfare and other social provisions; monetarism; elimination of protectionist policies; and liberalization of financial and foreign exchange markets” (Chorev, 2010, p. 127). The social liberalism of Roosevelt's New Deal during the Great Depression and spanning into the radicalism of the 1960s gave way to a growing neoliberal agenda in the 1970s that Reagan's 1980s administration bolstered with increasing tax cuts and government deregulation of major industries (Rodgers, 2018).
Regarding education, Casey, Lozenski, & McManimon (2013) see that the same practices of deregulation, privatization, and competition are at play in corporations and government. Neoliberalism shifted American education from a factory model to a business model. Teaching and learning are driven and based on performance objectives and standardized learning outcomes (Brathwaite, 2017; Casey et al., 2013; Hursh 2000, 2007; Klauf & Kwan, 2010; Sleeter, 2014; Tuck, 2013). Additionally, neoliberal education reform's free-market nature has inserted pioneering reform into traditional public schooling to enhance competition. Some examples are the use of publicly funded school vouchers to attend private schools if neighborhood schools are failing, charter schools, cross-zoning transfers from failing schools to higher-performing schools, and standardized curriculum and assessments of learning outcomes (Booker et al., 2007; Cramer et al., 2018; Hanushek et al., 2007; Sass 2006). Proponents of neoliberal education reform strategies argue for increasing school options for families through standardizing methods to evaluate schools and to determine teacher effectiveness will result in improved student outcomes (Au, 2009, 2010; Brathwaite, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hursh, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; McNeil et al., 2008; Menken, 2006, 2008, 2010; Slater & Griggs, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Valenzuela, 2004). This approach derived from shifts in government practice and increased deregulation that gained momentum in the 1980s.

socially democratic nature of schools (p.10). Others criticize the current landscape of education
reform (Bartolome, 1994; Haslam, 2006; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Sleeter, 2018) by noting that
standardizing traditional and non-traditional public education has created a truncated view of
teaching, learning, knowledge, and skills. Neoliberalism critics ultimately signal, as Peters
(1994) notes, the decline of the public good and critical discourse and debate, repositioning
people as competitive, rational individuals who enter the world as competitors in the
marketplace.

Further criticism of neoliberalism acknowledges that competition in a free-market is
drastically challenged and creates inequity when systemic racial and economic oppressions are
foundational to the market (Au, 2009, 2010; Brathwaite, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2004; De
Lissovoy, 2011; Hursh, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; McNeil et al., 2008;
Menken, 2006, 2008, 2010; Rooks, 2018; Slater & Griggs, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Valenzuela,
2004). Rooks (2018) outright laments the fact that neoliberalism’s cures marketed to poor
people of color as saviors of their children’s education “more often than not exacerbate the
problem” (p. 141). It is important to note that many of the above neoliberal education reform
tactics are less prevalent in affluent or suburban school districts. The reform initiatives have
greater significance in urban school districts and poorer counties and municipalities (Klaf &
Kwan, 2010), where racial and economic segregation are predominant.

Not the segregation of old, today's re-segregated schools are sans the segregated teaching
and administrative forces that characterized racially homogenous schooling in the early-to-mid
1900s. As recently as the 2017-2018 school year, the U.S. Department of Education reported that
79% of the nation's 3.5 million teachers were White and that a third of the nation's teachers were
working in schools where 75% or more of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price
lunches (Hussar et al., 2020). The Condition of Education’s 2020 report notes that in the 2017-2018 school year, 68.5% of the teachers in urban areas were White, while 11% and 14% were Black and Hispanic, respectively (Hussar et al., 2020). Data as recent as the 2015-2016 school year found that 68% percent of school administrators in urban schools were White, while 23% and 15% were Black and Hispanic, respectively (“large central metro counties of metropolitan statistical areas of 1 million or more population” defines city or urban) (USDOE, 2016, p. 35). Regarding student demographics, data from fall 2017 shows that 58% of Black students and 60% of Hispanic students attended public schools with 75% or greater minority student enrollment, whereas 6% of White students attend schools with the same enrollment characteristics (USDOE, 2019).

Today’s re-segregated schools shift the equilibrium of teacher-student relationships, school environment, and community (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). Unlike segregation of old, White teachers are a part of the equation; therefore, re-segregation now raises the crucial question of instructional efficacy along racial lines. In today’s urban schools, student-teacher relationships are more likely to comprise a White female teacher and a student of color, which was not the case during Jim Crow segregation. I call attention to this circumstance to reiterate the challenge of situating neoliberal practices within the context of racial and economic dynamics that disadvantage Black and Hispanic students.

**Federal Policies and Free-Market Education Reform**

Although gaining its most visible presence in American government and policy in the early 1980s, neoliberal thought within education spawned from but was not immediately central to education policy with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Chorev, 2010). With the ratification of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which outlawed discriminatory practices, and the Elementary and
Secondary Education Act in 1965 (ESSA), President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the first federal impetus for states to enforce desegregation more broadly and for schools to comply with the 1954 ruling in Brown versus the Board of Education. The time from President Johnson's 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to President Obama's 2015 reauthorization of ESEA with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) demonstrates fundamental shifts in education policy that existed before these federal acts. The following sections offer descriptions of critical federal policies enacted over the last 55 years and provide context to understand how neoliberalism has shaped the state of education reform over time.

**ESEA**

With growing awareness of America's racial and economic disparities in the 1950s and 1960s, Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) entered his presidency after Kennedy's assassination declaring war on poverty. As part of the broader Civil Rights Act of 1964, LBJ signed ESEA into law in 1965. Hess and McGuinn (2005) note that ESEA’s legislation was intended to supplement funds in the poorest U.S. schools to spur innovation and “improve educational services. . . Title I [a centerpiece of ESSA] was designed to assist communities with a high concentration of low-income families (defined as families earning less than $2,000 annually) by raising per-pupil expenditures” (p.4). ESEA primarily funded initiatives to support students from low-income families and those with special needs through Title I provisions, which channeled nearly one billion dollars to school districts and schools (Thomas & Brady, 2005) in its first authorization.

With ESEA legislation as a marker of widespread U.S. education reform, the question of civil rights and the federal government's role in addressing racial and economic injustice in public education started and remains a guiding force in the federal legislative education acts of today. DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) write that "ESEA of 1965 enshrined an equity
rationale at the heart of federal education policy—the national government would provide states with supplemental funding and programs in the hope of equalizing educational opportunity for poor and minority students" (p. 4). The subsequent partisan political challenges regarding federal influence on states in educational matters continue to arise today. These power dynamics are inherently at play in current federal education reform efforts and policies primarily originating with ESEA. They embody neoliberal practices, which place business or "market" values into human social institutions that retain the complex history of race and class, unlike free-market commodities (Tuck, 2013).

**A Nation at Risk**

Published in 1983 during the Reagan administration, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (NCCE, 1983) focused national attention on increasing the rigor of teaching and learning in K-12 education via curriculum standards and the need to improve educator preparation programs. *A Nation at Risk* posited that America's public education system fell short in creating a globally competitive workforce (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Ensuing despair regarding public education, the document set the stage for education reform. Significant spending increases in military budgets focused on remediation for recent high school graduates, declining science proficiency, and a decrease in the overall skill levels of college graduates prompted *A Nation at Risk*'s call to action, which resulted in policies emphasizing testing accountability still in place today (Jones, 2009; NCCE, 1983). Some argue the benefits spurred by *A Nation at Risk*'s resulting actions, including a more concerted focus on increasing professionalism in teaching (Seed, 2008). Others purport that resulting actions created technocratic standards-focused teaching and learning, which ushered in neoliberalism
reform as central to education reform (Endacott et al., 2015), perpetuating a view of economic enterprise and efficiency as education’s primary goal (Hursh, 2000).

**NCLB**

ESEA set precedence for federal funding of education reform; however, no reform efforts within its reauthorization resulted in such sweeping federal involvement as the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (Cramer et al., 2018). Signed into law on January 8, 2002, NCLB aligned with neoliberal tenets, specifically increasing stringent testing accountability (Sleeter, 2018). NCLB's crafters and supporters cite ESEA's original equity focus in service to civil rights law by requiring the measurement of all students' academic achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Scott, 2011).

In order to receive increased funding for public education, the federal government required states to set Adequately Yearly Progress (A.Y.P.) measures based on mandated state assessments so that all students, disaggregated by a variety of gender, racial, ability, language, and economic markers tracked to a proficient target within 12 years of the legislation (representing the 2013-14 school year) (Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Linn et al., 2002; Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Additionally, NCLB called for states to set performance levels for proficient and non-proficient achievement, including Annual Measurable Objectives (A.M.O.), noting the minimum percentage of students who must reach proficient reading and math levels each year (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Proponents argued the need for a uniform and consistent view of the nation's schools to understand student achievement better (Chubb, 2005; Haycock & Wiener, 2003). Critics of NCLB challenged the implications due to the act's design (Abedi, 2004; Gardiner et al., 2009; Hursh, 2007; Kim & Sunderland, 2005; Rooks, 2018; Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006), citing that required assessment resulted in disproportionately affecting children in
poverty and those who have historically been academically and economically underserved due to ethnic and linguistic racism.

NCLB's ill-effects spurred dehumanizing practices among educators, like teaching to the test (Holbein & Ladd, 2017). NCLB also called for labeling schools as "failing" after a few years of not meeting AMO/AYP targets. Darling-Hammond (2007) noted the hypocrisy of how the law, supposedly guided by equity and justice, created a diversity penalty. The diversity penalty resulted in "schools serving the neediest students will be first to lose funds" (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 247). Moreover, states that established high standards for themselves were "dubbed 'failing' because they fall below these standards, even though they score well above most other schools in the nation and world" (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 247). With NCLB, the free-market’s win or lose approach sought to weed out lower-performing schools without accounting for social disparities. Additionally, NCLB resulted in higher educator turnover due to performance pressures (Mitani, 2019), unintended adverse effects increasing student misbehavior due to results-centered versus student-centered learning environments (Holbein & Ladd, 2017), and disparities in teacher feedback and evaluation based on service experience created a lack of clarity regarding teacher effectiveness (Hazi Rucinski, 2009; Shavelson et al., 2010).

RttT

Similar to NCLB's end goals and born from NCLB's stark focus on accountability, the Obama administration's Race to the Top (RttT) shifted the federal approach from sanctioning states for low demographic performance to requiring states to compete for federal dollars based demonstrated reform innovations (McGuinn, 2012; Tanner, 2013). As part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act resulting from the 2008 recession, RttP required governors to focus on nationally established standards, innovations in school choice, and accountability
systems that allowed for longitudinal individual student performance linked to teacher evaluation (Childs & Russell, 2017). McGuinn (2012) asserted that RttP also "stimulated many state and local conversations—particularly in the context of the economic crisis and debates over budget cuts, tax increases, and teacher layoffs that brought education spending and collective bargaining policies into stark relief" (p. 141).

With innovation as a centerpiece, RttP included 14 criteria for application submission eligibility, one of which was to have no caps on the number of charter schools within the state (McGuinn, 2012). Eighteen states and the District of Columbia received awards ranging from $17 million to $700 million over three grant application rounds (Howell, 2015). The "winners" increased the average charter school percentage from 2.5% of public schools in their states in 2003 to about 7.5% by 2013 (Howell, 2015). The emphasis on charter schools was imperative to the overall strategy of RttP in a more pronounced way than NCLB due to consequences for low performance related to school closure and the need for a replacement in the event of closure.

Tanner (2013) described the federal models that RttP winners had to consider in the face of consistent annual trends for their lowest-performing schools. Schools with low test scores had to choose among four different models, “(1) transformation, by which the principal is replaced and interventions added; (2) turnaround, in which the majority of faculty and staff are replaced; (3) restart, which involves conversion to a charter; and (4) closure, in which the school is replaced by a charter” (p. 7). Tanner (2013) warned that the overemphasis on assessing students in RttT and the implications that testing had to determine school success or failure continued the problematic NCLB practice. Furthermore, critics noted other flaws such as the varied results of RttT policies like the mixed performance results of charter schools (Booker et al., 2007; Hanushek et al., 2007; Rooks, 2018; Sass 2006) and the problem of marking teachers'
effectiveness based on limited quantitative measures (Baker et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2013; Onosko, 2011) as shortcomings of RttT's basic theory of change.

Of the list of challenges noted in the literature, Viteritti (2011) raised the question of the federal grant's logic that permitted some of the nation's children to win and some to lose based on a state's desire to compete or “win” a grant. Viteritte (2011) highlights flaws in the competitive nature of the RttT's strategy, where winning was about states’ capacity to apply versus a strategy geared to serve the most underserved students. Although developed to be an inventive solution to assist states financially with meeting NCLB requirements, ease the financial trauma of the 2008 recession, and support more rigorous state standards, the nature of competition to meet these ends questioned equity. NCLB could not provide for the neediest children educated in the nation's public education system in states unwilling to apply or unsuccessful in applying.

RttT did not replace NCLB. States were allowed to apply for waivers in 2011. Subsequently, relaxed provisions resulted in greater flexibility than defined in the original NCLB legislation, particularly the requirement that all students reach reading and math proficiency by the 2013-14 school year (Black, 2015; House, 2013; Kober & Riddle, 2012). Additionally, the waivers mandated adopting Common Core State Standards, a set of controversial national standards (Dervarics, 2011; House, 2013; Otten & De Araujo, 2015). Signed into law in 2015 as a reauthorization and ultimate replacement of the ESEA of 1965, ESSA reflected the RttT reform strategies by granting states greater freedoms (Black, 2017; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). States were still required to submit accountability plans to the U.S. Education Department; however, states had more leeway to develop their own accountability goals for all student subgroups, select college and career readiness standards and assessments, and develop more intervention plans for schools falling within the bottom 5% of the state's accountability model (Darling-
Hammond et al., 2016). ESSA also emphasized multiple measures requiring states to include a combination of non-academic measures to account for indicators measuring opportunities to learn (e.g., quality of teachers and curriculum, school conditions, and access to resources) and engagement in learning (e.g., chronic absenteeism, expulsion, and suspension rates, and measures of social-emotional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

Critics of ESSA argued that although the education policy granted more freedom to states and extended additional Title I dollars in support of students living in poverty, ESSA still lurked in the shadows of NCLB and held firm on testing as the primary measure of schooling success. ESSA legislation ousted Adequate Yearly Progress; however, as Mathis and Trujillo (2016) note, “states’ flexibility has been restored to look somewhat like the first-generation, state-level systems that preceded (and, ironically, informed) NCLB. But at its core, ESSA is still a primarily test-based educational regime” (p.16-17). The "test-based educational regime" that Mathis and Trujillo (2016) posited suggests a grander scale criticism of ESSA linked to neoliberalism and threads through the significant policies described in this section.

Federal Policies, Free-Market Education Reform, and Wide-scale Initiatives

Large-scale reform initiatives emerged from the various federal policies previously discussed as initiatives most directly felt in urban schools. Many of these approaches emanated from universities, the private sector, state boards of education, and governors’ panels (to name a few). The Comer Process, launched in 1968, is one such comprehensive reform strategy originating at Yale University to mobilize entire communities to develop relationships and collaborative actions inside and outside of school communities explicitly to improve educational outcomes for children in poor neighborhoods (Lunenburg, 2011). Eventually implemented in 1150 schools, 35 school districts, and 25 states, Lunenburg (2011) wrote that the goal of the
Comer Model was to "transform the school into a learning environment that: builds positive interpersonal relationships; promotes teacher efficacy; fosters positive student attitudes; increases students' pro-social behaviors; and improves student academic achievement" (p. 2). Program research demonstrated significant improvements in students' academic achievement and schools' social environments when implementing the Comer Model with fidelity (Lunenburg, 2011).

More contemporary reform approaches like Geoffroy Canada's Harlem Children's Zone, which launched in the late 1990s and boasted of serving families and communities spanning over 100 blocks in New York City's most impoverished communities, were also touted as successful approaches to improve student academic outcomes. Similarly, Canada's comprehensive school and community reform initiatives focused on intentional collaboration, no-fault problem solving, and assistance with community resources needed for families to support children in schools (Peck, 2017). Other more contemporary reform examples have been large-scale and curricular, such as High Schools That Work, which blends college preparatory and vocational curricula to increase students' job readiness (Fullan, 2009). Another example is Success for All, developed by Robert Slavin, Nancy Madden, and a team of developers from Johns Hopkins University geared toward ensuring on-grade reading levels for pre-kindergarten through sixth-grade students. These are examples of large-scale reform models spawning from the 1965 ESSA legislation, in which the federal government granted education dollars to support broader school communities reaching academic standards (Vinovskis, 2019). These legislative acts established precedence for reauthorizations like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and more competitive state races for funding like Race to the Top (RttT).
The federal policies, resulting practices, and large-scale initiatives collectively and conclusively captured aspects of what Peck (2017) described as three key concepts and five central tensions that persist in understanding almost any facet of urban education and related reforms. The first of the three key concepts emphasizes the importance of the intersections of race, ethnicity, poverty, politics, power, and trust (Peck, 2017). ESEA's core goal of creating more equitable learning experiences, resources, and outcomes with Title I dollars exemplified this first concept. The challenge with NCLB's focus on racial subgroups held schools accountable for all students' learning. However, as discussed in the literature, schools with large numbers of students of color in poverty require far more than dollars to create symmetric outcomes; ultimately, these students were subjected to highly publicized lower test results and as members of failing schools. The second concept is that of the outsider, which highlights that “delocalized outsiders have routinely engendered unanticipated local effects and fierce community resistance” (p. 2). The outsider concept suggests that communities are incapable of producing policies and that only outsiders, devoid of local knowledge, are required to develop policies for communities of which they are not otherwise participants. The third concept is the cyclical nature of education reform. Both the second and third concepts relate to the first. The literature demonstrates how education reform innovations like charters and larger comprehensive reform models like Success for All have infiltrated schools in communities and still have not demonstrated any meaningful or measurable positive change.

**Liberation Reform: A Farsighted View of Education Reform**

The previous section of the literature review provides a glimpse of 55 years of reform. The section served as an overview and analysis of relevant landmark federal legislation that shaped the current neoliberal view of education reform. Born from a place of social justice
surrounding the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ESSA ushered into law a year later, signaled the federal government's first of many initiatives to provide additional funding for resources and interventions in support of children raised in poverty and those who need additional special education services (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn; 2009; McGuinn & Hess, 2005). Today, a familiar rally cry of reformers is that public education, especially urban education, is the most critical current equity issue. Paradoxically, the effects of practices designed to standardize policies and make testing accountable created teaching and learning conditions that detract from freedom as the end goal of education.

The next section of the literature review examines liberation education as it juxtaposes current neoliberal education reform policies and practices. Leaning heavily on Paulo Freire's liberation position, education's goal is not about competition and standardization. Freire’s position is that learning must provide a way that allows students to express human nature through "intentional, reflective, meaningful activity situated within dynamic historical and cultural contexts that shape and set limits on that activity" (Glass, 2001, p. 16). Freire (2018) writes:

education for liberation implies talking about change of a political kind. For me, education for liberation implies the political organization of the oppressed to achieve power. Only then will there be the possibility of having a new kind of education which takes the reality and the possibility of each member of society seriously. This means thinking about the implications for the educator and about the changes - the revolutions - we need. (p. 16)

The post-NCLB era, now reauthorized as ESSA, provides challenges for obtaining an education whose end is liberation, not test score proficiency. Standardized, narrow curriculum
and the sidelining of equity-based pedagogies weaken education's civic nature, lead to teacher demoralization, and undermines student motivation (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Milner, 2013; Picower, 2011; Santoro, 2011; Sleeter, 2012; Stillman, 2009). Current urban education reform does not center on freedom or liberation as the point of origin. Liberation is not who fares best in the free-market education space. As Freire (2018) posits, liberation education aims to situate the historical reality and possible future within all students’ educational experience allowing them to transform and make power structures symmetric. Understanding this premise within the context of U.S. education reform requires examining the nation’s intertwined history of oppression and schooling, starting with Africans' enslavement in colonial America. A broader historical view of U.S. education places liberation as the goal of education and recognizes the damaging nature of education reform that many currently look to as justification of neoliberal approaches.

**Colonial America, Emancipation, and Education as Liberation**

Initially, the impetus for education in America was primarily religious, supporting Puritan law, and primarily localized to communities for leadership and governance (Hiner, 1973; Teaford, 1970). Once free of British rule after the American Revolutionary War and the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the idea of federally funded education gained some support. Early champions of public education shaped education's Americanization and set precedence for the nation's compulsory education laws. The Northwest Ordinance signed by Congress in 1787 provided land grants to establish educational institutions that encouraged mass educational concepts like New York City's monitorial schools started in the early 1800s, which foreshadowed compulsory education (Synder, 1993). Standardization of American thought and
ideology was a crucial reason for the early spread of schools; proponents drove Christian morality and the basics of reading and writing as ways to foster a good government.

Compulsory education for all White children was first enacted in 1816 as a statute in Indiana’s Constitution, although many states included education as hortatory provisions (Eastman, 1998). Other states followed suit, like Massachusetts’ laws for public education legislated in 1852, led by Horace Mann, Massachusetts's Secretary of Education and “father” of the common schools or U.S. public-school movement (Synder, 1993). Regarding numbers, Snyder's (1993) comprehensive data report for the National Center for Education Statistics notes the expansion of the nation's elementary and secondary schools:

Public school enrollment expanded rapidly during the late 19th century, with a particularly large increase of 44 percent during the 1870s. The increases of the 1870s and 1880s were fueled by increases in the school-age population and increases in the enrollment ratios. Some of the apparent increase, particularly during the 1870s, may be due to improvements in the relatively primitive data collection systems. Enrollment growth continued in the 1890s and the early 20th century, primarily driven by population increases. (pp. 25-26)

With the spread of schooling in America, schools' growth was less for women and African Americans, especially in the South. During the era of American slavery and before women's movements began to carve out a formal place in U.S. history, education, whether public or parochial, was denied to enslaved Africans in the South and majorly reserved for White males. Throughout the South, anti-literacy legal codes prohibited educating enslaved Africans and restricted meeting places among enslaved Africans other than religious reasons.
Additionally, the spread of abolitionist literature throughout the South and slave insurrections like Nat Turner's (1831), in which revolutionaries killed over 60 Whites, gave Whites even more credence to deny African-Americans literacy (Mitchell, 2008). The Civil War left the Union struggling to rebuild. Reconstruction (1865-1877) represents the first time in American history that Haslam's (2006) notions of cognitive openness, agency/individuality, and depth were legally recognized and extended as realistic humanizing opportunities to African Americans. The Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution provided legal personhood to all enslaved Africans and enfranchised Black men to vote. June 19, 1856, or Juneteenth ushered in freedom and shifted enslaved Africans to free U.S. citizens.

The Reconstruction Era represents the first time the U.S. established federal legislation that allowed public education for freed Africans in all of the U.S. (Anderson, 2007). However, White supremacy challenged Blacks' education, ushering in Jim Crow, which propagated black codes and eventual laws segregating and deepening White America's belief in Black inferiority (Fairclough, 2000). The Jim Crow era between 1876 and 1965 supported racism in its most visible and public forms--separate public spaces based on race. Jim Crow laws supported by The U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 decision in Plessy v Ferguson essentially supported Jim Crow laws, making African-Americans vulnerable to abuse, judgment, civic disenfranchisement, and continued economic subservience.

Some celebrate early Reconstruction's historical significance of Black leadership and local and federal political representation from the South. During Reconstruction, over 2,000 Black men served in elected political capacities, including the U.S. Congress (Campbell, 2012). While a colossal feat for men born into slavery, their elevated positions came in the face of a
steep economic terrain of occupying public office while struggling to make a living in the remnants of a war-torn, racially hostile South (Campbell, 2012). Political empowerment began to collapse by the early 1870s. As Southern states regained entry into the Union, the strength of the Democratic party took hold among Southern Whites, who remained committed to truncating African Americans’ political gains and civic engagement in the post-Civil War era (Erman, 2017). Protection for African Americans worsened between 1889 to 1891 when the then Republican-led White House did little to enforce constitutional mandates and ultimately failed to enact federal law when Southern states suppressed and denied African American voters (Erman, 2017). The aftermath of this political shift away from the emancipatory promise to African Americans through the 13th-15th constitutional amendments soon resulted in a subjugation of the newly freed population.

With Southern Democrat's legislative control toward the end of the 1800s and the lax enforcement against voter disenfranchisement, the South swiftly tilted to its traditional values of White supremacy. It released a social and political narrative that shaped daily life for free African Americans, a legacy that exists even today. Erman (2017) explains that the Southern narrative:

...propounded a false history in which tyrannical northern radicals imposed upon the South governments of incompetent and barbaric Blacks, corrupt Northern carpetbaggers, and opportunistic Southern scalawags. The resultant misrule emptied state coffers and unleashed Black men's sexual violence against White women until White Democrats 'redeemed' their states with the help of the Ku Klux Klan. (p. 1205)

The Ku Klux Klan gave rise to highly publicized physical danger and allowed humans to see others as less human. Animalistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) characterizes the actions of
fearmongering Southern Whites, who threatened and claimed free Black bodies all over the American South. The social and political aftermath and the short-lived gains of Reconstruction's enfranchisement left African American progress thwarted in all life areas, including education.

Only after the end of the Civil War in 1865 did the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution enshrine legal efforts to establish schools for freed slaves (Anderson, 2007; Butchart & Rolleri, 2004). Anderson (2007) notes the literate leadership among African Americans “reflected a consciousness of literacy as a means of resistance as well as an understanding of anti-literacy movements as mechanisms of oppression” (p. 3). White suppressors and African Americans understood literacy’s cascading effect for liberation in all other aspects of life. Without literacy, the ability to organize and stabilize is thwarted. With literacy, the opportunities to coordinate leadership around civic and economic engagement are bolstered for African Americans, hence challenging the nexus of White power dynamics. The progressive move to create schools for African Americans yielded high literacy increases during Reconstruction (Anderson, 2007). Given that it was illegal for enslaved Africans to learn to read or write in the antebellum South, the Black/White literacy gap pre-Civil War was a given. Anderson (2007) notes that approximately 90% of Whites were generally literate by 1800, and African American illiteracy rates were at 90% at the start of the 19th century.

The Reconstruction Act of 1867 required that states rejoining the Union adopt universal education for all citizens in their state constitutions. The 14th amendment served to strengthen the federal constitution granting citizenship to African Americans. Education was a centerpiece of the Reconstruction Era, so much so that more than two-thirds of the Freedmen’s Bureau budget focused on educational opportunity (Anderson, 2007; Black, 2018; Verdugo, 2014). African Americans also forged a way to solidify literacy by expanding schooling opportunities for
themselves. As an example, the Rosenwald Schools, which Booker T. Washington, founder and first president of Tuskegee Institute, co-founded with Julius Rosenwald, part-owner and once president of Sears, Roebuck, and Company during the late 1800s (Aaronson & Mazumder, 2011; Anderson, 2007; Finkelstein, 2014; Scott, 2009). Rosenwald supported building schools in rural Black communities in the South, matching funds that Blacks raised for themselves (Scott, 2009). In the years spanning 1912 to 1932, nearly 5,000 Rosenwald Schools opened across 15 states serving over half a million Black students. The Rosenwald Fund contributed more than $4.3 million; African American communities raised over $4.7 million in matching funds (Aaronson & Mazumder, 2011; Schneider, 2014).

Rooks (2018) highlights that Rosenwald’s financial interest in supporting schools for Blacks in the South was tied to the South’s economic viability and need for lower-skilled workers. Rooks (2018) also challenges the dehumanizing audacity of requiring people who were only a few decades removed from enslavement and mostly sharecroppers and tenant farmers to raise a minimum of $500, secure the land, and be willing to fund teachers before Rosenwald’s match. Rosenwald benefited from substantial tax reductions through his charitable giving (Rooks, 2018). Additionally, poor Black communities were charged taxes for educating their children because public tax dollars were not committed to Black schools in many former slaveholding states (Rooks, 2018). Coming out of slavery, relegated to sharecropping and tenant farming, African Americans saw literacy as a necessary means to true freedom, and their sacrifice to educate their children makes this evident.

**Liberation, Education, Separation, and the Price of Black Personhood**

Almost 40 years after the Dred Scott case, the U.S. Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) established the doctrine that as long as policies, practices, and facilities were equal that
segregation of the races was not in violation of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Tate, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1993). De jure separate, but equal lawfulness emboldened southern states to divert tax dollars to support White schools over those serving Blacks, dismantle African Americans’ new leadership opportunities, and thwart the momentum toward true liberation that increased literacy created for African Americans (Anderson, 2007). Northern city school boards also hid behind de facto segregation in diverting government education funding ushering in corporate-driven housing patterns (Glass, 2018). These actions created segregated schools as well. Even with a close to Reconstruction’s gains, marked with the Plessy v Ferguson (1896) ruling, African American illiteracy rates still dropped from 79.9% in 1870 to 16.4% by 1930 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Snyder, 1993).

As the Reconstruction era ended, economic, social, political, and educational gaps widened as the federal government’s presence in the form of Union troops and federal aid to the Freedmen’s Bureau ceased (Anderson, 2007; Black, 2018; Materson & Trotter, 2018; Moore et al., 2018). Literacy and progressive policies favoring African Americans came at a cost. Over 4,000 lynching murders occurred between 1881 and 1968. Black males represented over 70% of the cases (Moore et al., 2018). Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) created a thick and long-lasting demarcation between the enfranchisement African Americans experienced at the end of the Civil War and the gradual disenfranchisement they formally faced with the landmark Supreme Court decision.

The increase in deaths that began during Reconstruction was one of the most egregious examples of White supremacy and racism in U. S. history; a close second was Jim Crow's rise. Jim Crow generally refers to the legislative aftermath of the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson U. S. Supreme Court’s ruling, which stemmed from a law passed in Louisiana preventing African
Americans and Whites from riding together in railcars. Between 1876 and 1965, racism in its most visible and public form existed in public spaces where separation was based on race. Few Southern public spaces remained beyond biopolitical markers of race. Formally sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1896 decision, Jim Crow laws made African Americans vulnerable to abuse, judgment, and economic subservience.

Jim Crow laws epitomize Leyens et al.’s (2001, 2003) definition of infrahumanization. Infrahumanization tends to see others in their ingroup as more human than those in outgroups. Jim Crow produced visible markers of where, when, and how African Americans could experience their “free” lives. Jim Crow’s infrahumanization told African Americans that the ingroup of Whiteness's biopolitical construct was more human than the African American outgroup's biopolitical construct and strengthened new social slavery in post-Reconstruction America.

The infrahumanizing nature of Jim Crow undercut mandated schooling for Blacks in the South. Even with African Americans’ increase in literacy rates and slight economic advancements, African Americans’ schooling experience suffered from the same separate but equal inequalities experienced in other areas of African American life. With the rise of Black support for Black schools, previously mentioned with the example of the Rosenwald Schools, critics, particularly scholars within the African American community, offered diverse perspectives regarding the type of schooling most appropriate for African Americans.

different angle with fierce criticism of caste educational systems that wove together biology, sociology, economics, and history to challenge the notion that educating Blacks perpetuated what Whites believed was a “less than human,” subservient, mechanistic status of Black people. Du Bois (1935) pointed to eugenics, which some Whites promoted as fact regarding Blacks' biological inferiority, as a critical reason for a different type of education for them. Pierce (2017) notes that Du Bois challenged the non-scientific notion of eugenics and White purity that helped to spur caste education and enfranchised White supremacist ideology.

Du Bois asserted that this biopolitical segmentation demonstrated how Whites rationalized infrahumanization with the idea of purity and humanness, juxtaposed with African Americans’ assumed impurity as an out-group. Pierce (2017) acknowledges that:

one of the most important lessons we can learn from Du Bois’s analysis of caste education is how racial capitalist schooling is deeply invested in producing caste individuals who act and behave in line with the values, habits, and customs of the White and dark worlds—what Du Bois (1935/1998) called caste psychologies. (p. 29)

The perpetuation of “otherness” that Du Bois emphasized remains alive today in urban education reform, resulting in disparities in academic achievement that maintain a caste schooling experience that race and class mainly define (Rooks, 2018). Additionally, the “otherness” that Du Bois signals hearkens to the dehumanizing social-psychology of the Black educational experience that neoliberal education reform, like caste systems, further deepens.

**Liberation Gaze: Progressive Attempts to Democratize Education**

Besides the cultural conclaves that African Americans formed within their communities due to de jure and de facto segregation, other factors coexisted within American schooling to contribute to African Americans' self-humanizing practices during segregation. The purpose of
schooling was debatable per increases in school expansion and immigration due to the spread of war in Europe in the early 1900s (Perrotta & Bohan, 2018). Those with interests in America’s growing industrial economy posited that supplying the nation with a workforce required educating the masses. In contrast, others saw the ideals of democracy and freedom as the primary purpose for education, arguing that “learning can only occur when connected to learner’s goals and interests” (Garte, 2017, p. 9.). The latter represents the more progressive philosophical belief with roots in Jean Jacques Rousseau’s approach to educating children of elite aristocrats in the late 1700s. Rousseau’s method was child-centered and focused on learning through nature (Fallace & Fantozzi, 2015; Garte, 2017). Almost a century later, Maria Montessori employed approaches similar to Rousseau’s. However, Montessori provided structure to encourage a focus on emotional regulation as she worked to develop the strengths of children living in extreme poverty in Southern Italy (Garte, 2017). Even with the underpinnings of progressive education, the question of the type of education for whom existed and played out later in John Dewey’s philosophy regarding the purpose and nature of education in U.S. society.

Progressive education in America is nearly synonymous with John Dewey, whose influences trace to Rousseau and Montessori’s more individualized education approach. Dewey’s focus on education and democracy also included attention to the visual arts to help children develop. In contrast to what had become a more traditional, didactic approach to teaching and learning, Dewey strongly supported creating intentional school experiences that supported children’s social, cognitive, and emotional growth (Lindsay, 2015). Similarly, Kelleher and Leonall (2011) note that Dewey’s mantra for children’s educational experience focused on engaged, active learning that promoted discovery and independence as a practice guided by children’s interests.
The Progressive Education Association’s Eight-Year study conducted from 1932-1940 showed that students taught in schools with more prominent elements of progressive education did as well or better than students taught in more traditional settings once students entered college (Bullough, 2007; Feldmann & Watson, 2003; Kelleher & Leonall, 2011; Kridel & Bullough Jr., 2002; Watras, 2006). However, the cry for “back to basics” occurred in the late 1950s with Russia’s launch of Sputnik. The 1958 National Defense Education Act expended millions to improve math, science, and world language programs to increase the United States’ worldwide competitiveness (Kelleher & Leonall, 2011). These opposing views regarding the type of education best suited to guide America’s public system are characterized as broader versus narrower, child-centered versus subject-centered, unprompted versus scripted, and transformative of America’s educational traditions versus one intended to sanction educational traditions. The divergence represented in these philosophical approaches remains today.

Albeit significant in the development of America’s public education system, critics argued that Dewey’s progressive ideas were not inclusive of African American children. Margonis (2009) notes that Dewey’s 1915 text, co-authored with his daughter Evelyn, Schools for Tomorrow, offers descriptive accounts of schools during the time that illustrated Dewey’s ideas about progressive schooling in action. Margonis (2009) challenges that Dewey failed to see the vocational approach used in Indianapolis’ all-Black P.S. 26 as promulgating Black children's subordination. Additionally, Margonis (2009) argues that Dewey’s stance on the segregated P.S. 26 reinforces the assumed second-class citizenry of African Americans and “report[s] favorably upon a form of vocational training that was segregated, narrow, nonacademic, and designed to adapt students to the existing racial order” (p. 18). Others attempt to balance Dewey’s praise of subservience for Black children’s schooling experience as less static than his critics assert given
the critical roles he played in organizations like the National Advancement for Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union (Cohan & Howlett, 2017; Fallace, 2010; Fallace & Fantozzi, 2015; Stack, 2009).

Fallace and Fantozzi (2015) argue that Dewey’s position on race evolved after publishing Schools of To-morrow. They assert Dewey’s more “egalitarian view on culture. . . and [that] Dewey’s belief in the social, as opposed to the biological inferiority of non-White groups, distinguished [him] from virtually all other White scholars of the period” (p. 143-144). In all, John Dewey’s efforts to advance ideas of democracy in public education found Black people lagging the political gains they experienced during the short headway made during Reconstruction. Dewey’s consideration of Black children in Black schools demonstrates his gaze toward Black people and their liberation. Yancy (2013) expresses the white gaze as “hegemonic, historically grounded in material relations of white power. . . [and it is] also ethically solipsistic: within it, only whites have the capacity of making valid moral judgments” (sec. 3, para. 4). Dewey’s gaze was toward liberation, but it only attributed democratic privilege to some.

**Liberation Gaze: Segregation, Education, and Agency**

bell hooks (2003) wrote similarly about the critical gaze but empowered the Black eye in the gazing. hooks (2003) asserted, “even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it opens up the possibility of agency” (p. 94). Segregation and separate schooling represented manipulation of the gaze and the agency that this manipulation ensured. With separate schooling and unequal funding practices for segregated schools, it was imperative to note that segregation research
highlighted the value of education that African Americans received in all-Black schools and the agency Black educators carved out to ensure excellence (Walker, 1996, 2000, 2009, 2018).

With clear opposition to the spread and support of schools for African Americans, Hale (2018) outlines the anti-Black tactics of southern legislatures in that they “maintained public schools with exacting and discriminatory institutional policies” (p. 446). To fund the new system of education, Whites often utilized “tax shifting, the process by which planters, landowners, and business owners could shift or “share” the primary tax responsibility to others (mostly African Americans) through alternative taxation methods” (Hale, 2018, p. 446). Hale (2018) highlights the animalistic dehumanizing (Haslam, 2006) White sentiment that directed public funding to educate African Americans.

McMillen (as cited by Hale, 2018) recalls, “Mississippi Governor James K. Vardaman recapitulated the prevailing view of Whites in 1899 when he stated that Black education ‘only spoils a good field hand and makes a shyster lawyer or a fourth-rate teacher. It is money thrown away’” (p. 446). In the face of grueling anti-Black tactics, segregation researchers noted that African American educators formed national and state-based professional education organizations like the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, called for the highest standards of professionalism, and developed curriculum aimed as a political weapon to uplift African American history and achievements in Black schools (Hale, 2018, Walker, 1996, 2000, 2009, 2018). What Whites meant for evil and depredation, Blacks used to self-humanize through education.

In her examination of Black excellence in Black schools, Walker’s (2000) study focuses on the teaching and learning experiences of Black students in segregated Southern schools. She found common themes supporting the excellence and agency African Americans provided
students with far fewer comprehensive resources than their White counterparts. The study notes exemplary teachers, curricular and extracurricular activities, parental support, and strong principal leadership as trends emerging from a review of published case histories of segregated schools from 1935-1969 (Walker, 2000). With segregation, Haslam’s (2006) humanizing tenets of human nature (emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency) are evident in the high esteem that African Americans held for themselves within their segregated communities.

Segregation laws and practices continued well into the mid-1900s but were slowly dismantled with the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education (1954) decision that found separate but equal to be inherently unequal. This landmark case focused on the inequities of cities’ financial resources used to fund public education for Black and poor children (Diamond, 2006; Garte, 2017; Irvine & Irvine, 1983). As a form of social equalizing to promote social mobility, the centuries of racial injustice and established systems of oppression preceding the 1954 decision undermined the hope of integration. Edwards (1993) noted that integration’s legislative stopgap corroded African American communities’ “cultural strength. . . [and] never took on the true cause of inequity as measured in our institutions and our history as a nation, that is, racism” (p. 347). The landmark Brown desegregation case targeted schools, but the effect shifted social structures within African American communities in totality, given schools’ central position within these communities.

Irvine and Irvine (1983) asserted that the variables of interpersonal (teacher-student relationships), institutional (school environment), and community all influenced African American achievement, and during segregation, disrupted the “homeostatic” nature of post-Brown (p. 421). The pre-Brown decision allowed equilibrium among these variables integral to
achievement among African-Americans. The interpersonal variable shifted from African American teacher to African American student pre-Brown, to White teacher to African American student post-Brown, which significantly influenced African American achievement. Consequently, White teachers began to drive achievement for Black students in ways that had not been the case in segregated schooling. Even though unequally equipped and unequally funded, segregated schools were places of familiarity, comfort, and respect among school communities and families; whereas integrated schools amplified racism and placed Black children face-to-face with hatred in the space of the school, theoretically designed to grow, develop, and nurture their intellect and humanity (Edwards, 1993; Walker, 1996, 2000, 2009, 2018). A critical point to note is the self-assertion or agency that African Americans enacted in their segregated communities. Irvine and Irvine’s (1983) suggestion of self-created homeostasis within the Black community highlights a Black self-view that Whites do not determine. Black people’s self-determination allowed them to display human nature and humanness within their internal relationships, communities, and institutions.

Along with progressive educational attempts in public schools was a growing social equity thrust from African Americans to integrate other segregated public Southern facilities. Integrated schooling forged a massive change in the landscape of America’s socio-political environment and was nestled within a macro environment of change in the country. By the 1960s, race, ethnicity, and poverty had become the defining markers of urban settings, including urban schools. The migration of African Americans from the American South to the North starting in the early 1900s, periods of steady immigration to America after World Wars I and II, and increasing White flight from urban to suburban areas impacted the racial and economic composition of the nation’s city-centers (Peck, 2017). Given the sweeping changes that persisted
into the mid-1900s, school integration’s desired effects are questionable in terms of African American achievement and what integrationists hoped would create quality educational experiences for all American children.

In direct opposition to integrationists’ hopes, over time, integration has created re-segregation with White-flight between schools and in-school segregation within schools. Within the last 20 years, Walsemann and Bell (2010) note the increase in segregated school composition:

Black students today are more likely to attend predominately minority schools than they were in the 1990s; in 1991 to 1992, 66% of Black students attended a school where 50% to 100% of the student body was non-White; 77% attended such schools in 2000 to 2004. Predominately minority schools are less able than majority-White schools to provide the full array of educational opportunities. (p.1687)

Bohrnstedt et al. (2015), using data collected from the 2011 National Assessment of Education Progress report, found that “On average, White students attended schools that were 9 percent Black while Black students attended schools that were 48 percent Black, indicating a large difference in average Black student density nationally” (p. 1). Whites' political and economic abilities to leave urban centers demonstrated their will to re-segregate communities and schools.

Additionally, with an increase in re-segregation, funding disparity within states across school districts with varying poverty levels along racial lines, as seen in segregation, persists today. Baker et al. (2016) explain that as recent as 2013, only a third of states consider equitable funding models for school districts based on poverty levels. The report added, “eighteen states had no substantial variation in funding between high poverty and low poverty districts, and fourteen states had regressive funding patterns” (Baker et al., 2016, p. 3). The current re-
segregation of schools and lack of intentional state education funding policies to provide additional financial resources to poor communities, which are more likely comprised of people of color, perpetuates the pre-Brown versus Topeka Board of Education practices consistent with de jure segregation.

**Liberation as a Challenge to Nearsighted Views of Neoliberal Education Reform: Critical Race Theory and Critical Pedagogy**

With the current U.S. landscape of re-segregated schools, urban education is a complex political and social construct to examine. It is imperative to consider pertinent theories to create a conceptual point of entry to the intersecting dynamics of race and class ever-present in urban schools. Critical race theory is a significant aspect of this dissertation’s theoretical foundation to analyze educators' efforts to disrupt dehumanization in urban schools. The juxtaposition of the two-part historical trace in this chapter—one that starts with ESSA versus one that starts with U.S. slavery—is plausible given the tenets of critical race theory and how they provide a conceptual lens through which to understand the dehumanizing effects of slavery. Given the philosophical underpinnings surrounding urban education reform, I examine critical race theory at the macro-level, critical pedagogy as the mid-level theory, leading to more micro or specific critical humanizing practices.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Macro-level</th>
<th>Critical Race Theory (Societal)</th>
<th>Critical Pedagogy (Contextual)</th>
<th>Humanizing Practices (Specific)</th>
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**Figure 1**

*Macro, Mid, and Micro-level Theories*
At a macro-level theory, critical race theory (CRT) is not “tied to one specific methodology, and it can be applied at the… micro (local systems and contexts), or macro (societal) level” (p. 633). Using critical race theory as a point of departure, I explored research regarding critical pedagogy as a mid-level theory to develop a more specific understanding of how teachers in urban charter schools enact humanizing practices within the context of high-stakes testing environments. Critical pedagogy operates as a “practice-based theory” in the study providing a “narrow range of interest. . . focused on specific phenomena and contexts” (Reeves et al., 2008, p. 633). The literature presented work to explain and analyze theories precisely focused on humanizing and dehumanizing practices found in schools amid current high-stakes testing environments.

**Critical Race Theory**

Philosophically, CRT grew out of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and Critical Legal Studies as an intellectual movement associated with noteworthy scholars Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, Cheryl Harris, Lani Guinier, and Richard Delgado (Tate, 1997; Zorn, 2018). CRT's central tenets include interest convergence, challenging neutrality claims, myths of color blindness and meritocracy, and understanding whiteness as property (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Critical race theorists see race, racism, and power as fixed concepts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Peck, 2017), operating within all aspects of American life, including schooling (historically), politics, and society, generally. In addition to highlighting how these tenets operate throughout history and various social spheres and institutions, the scholarly aim of critical race theory is to present counter-narratives that refute dominant White themes (Harper, 2009; Harper & Davis, 2012; Milner, 2013).
Critical race theory facilitates a nuanced understanding of urban education, specifically as it relates to race and class. CRT is rooted in critical theory, which disrupts oppressive power dynamics and challenges the status quo (Kincheloe et al., 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). Critical theorists posit that people and institutions with power will oppress those without power, given the contextual dynamics of race, class, and gender (to name a few). If unchecked, this oppression intensifies when the less privileged accept their socially determined place. A final tenet in critical theory is the understanding that conventional research practices often inadvertently play a role in oppression (specifically race, class, and gender oppression) (Brenner, 2009, Kincheloe et al., 2011; Ponterotto, 2005).

CRT guided the study by addressing the role of racism in the United States’ education system, namely demonstrating how racism has led to dehumanizing schooling experiences for African American children, families, and communities throughout history. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain CRT as a conceptual framework for understanding education inequity. Furthering Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) stance on CRT as the lens through which American education is viewed best, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) subsequently used CRT as a "method of analysis in educational research" (p. 30), cautioning that researchers must remain critically aware of CRT to address race and racism within schools effectively. As part of the dissertation's conceptual framework, CRT provides a lens for understanding inequities in our education system and sets the stage for examining the dehumanization that African Americans have experienced historically within all facets of America's education system. White teachers comprise the overwhelming majority of the nation's educators. CRT helps to substantiate the need to amplify humanizing pedagogical practices, especially within urban high-stakes testing environments, given that researchers widely question the extent to which teachers' beliefs about students'
abilities affect achievement (Andersen, 2018; Dee, 2005; Leung & Sy, 2018; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trusz, 2018). CRT’s tenets, explored in greater detail in the following sections, all coalesce the notion of privilege afforded to Whiteness’s racial construct, which functions to exploit and subjugate non-Whites through denial of identity and sociopolitical and economic access.

**Interest Convergence**

Harvard Law School’s first tenured Black professor Derrick Bell espoused a pathbreaking principle of interest convergence as a dominant CRT stance (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Critical race theorists see interest convergence as White people taking an interest in racial equality for non-White people when it benefits their economic and ideologic desires (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Rector-Aranda, 2016; Tate, 1997; Zorn, 2018). For example, Bell used Brown v. Board of Education to argue interest conversion in integrated schooling. Bell (1980) writes:

> The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites. However, the fourteenth amendment, standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for blacks where the remedy sough threatens the superior societal status of middle and upper class whites. It follows that the availability of the fourteenth amendment protection in racial cases may not actually be determined by the character of harm suffered by blacks or the quantum of liability proved against whites. Racial remedies may instead be the outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle and upper class whites. (p. 523)
Through Bell’s examination of landmark cases like Brown v. Board of Education (1954), interest convergence signaled the need for elite Whites to push for desegregation in the South because segregation limited the South’s ability to shift from an agricultural economy to an industrialized economy whose more considerable Southern expansion would benefit White business owners (Brown & Jackson, 2013).

Several CRT scholars have used the idea of interest convergence in their empirical work. For example, Sleeter (2017) offers a more contemporary analysis of interest convergence research in examining course work for teacher preparation. Sleeter’s (2017) findings assert that mostly White faculty offer minimal add-on courses to reflect something other than “White sensibilities.” Thus, overall content fails to prepare teachers to be culturally responsive educators who, by default, all work in the interest of White people’s position of power (Sleeter, 2017). Milner (2008) argues that one can plausibly use interest convergence and an “analytic, explanatory, and conceptual tool in the study and analyses of policies and practices in teacher education” (p. 332). Milner (2008) demonstrates that interest convergence is evident in cases of diverse student enrollment (White students need to learn in diverse settings), syllabi decisions (white sensibilities in text content are at the curricular core), and silencing of teacher candidates and educators regarding discussions of race and culture as realities in need of disruption.

Sleeter’s (2017) and Milner’s (2008) stances on interest convergence in teacher education are critical issues given that White teachers are likely to teach students in urban schools most populated by non-White students (Andersen, 2018; Dee, 2005; Leung & Sy, 2018; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trusz, 2018). Other scholars applied interest convergence to explain the “interest” that major White universities take in African American football athletes because of the increase in commercialization and profit that elite athletes garner university fundraising (Donnor,
2005). These CRT scholars demonstrate how interest convergence as a tenant of CRT operates to debunk common perspectives that perpetuate White supremacy.

**Critiques of Meritocracy and Colorblindness**

Meritocracy suggests that a person’s input correlates with his or her output. Thus, the notion of meritocracy “allows people to believe that all people—no matter what race, class, or gender—get what they deserve based primarily on an individual’s own merit and how hard a person works” (Bernal, 2002, p. 111). The history of discriminatory practices along the lines of race, class, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, language (to name a few) prove that meritocracy, in this respect, is mythical, and it can be rooted in bias. Feingold (2011) uses reliance on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) as a qualification measure to reveal meritocracy. His research discredits the notion that meritocracy is sensible within the presence of psychological realities like stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), which many African Americans face in their experience with standardized tests. According to Steele and Aronson (1995), stereotype threat is “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 797). Arguing that the LSAT is not the sole indicator of talent, Fiengold (2011) asserts that rescaling LSAT scores, given the nature of stereotype threat, provides African American and Latino students a fairer measure. Feingold (2011) writes, “rescaling offsets the mismeasurement of vulnerable Black and Latino/a students by correcting scores in accordance with the observed mean effect of stereotype threat on LSAT-takers” (p. 233). Here, as Ballakrishnen and Silver (2019) and Fox-Davis (2009) corroborate, meritocracy serves whites' interests, as evidenced by the small overall percentage of African Americans and an overwhelmingly large percentage of Whites admitted to elite American law schools.
The myths of meritocracy and color blindness are precise tensions related to urban education reform movements, particularly the notion of relying on narrow standards to deem children as intelligent. Guinier (2015) argues that meritocracy within education is a form of “testocracy.” Guinier (2015) signals that “testocratic merit assumes that test scores are the best evidence of applicants’ worth. . . It hereby ignores biases that privilege those who are already quite advantaged” (p. xi). Similarly, Lardier Jr et al. (2019) affirm that the “lingering rhetoric of American exceptionality and bootstrapping is not only unrealistic, but also detrimental” (pg. 476), as evidenced by their findings on understanding how urban youth of color in under-resourced schools form bonding or bridging relationships to support their desire to attend college.

The study found that the student participants were hugely self-reliant and highly capable of navigating social capital within their communities. However, they lacked the resources or relationships outside of their communities to “support a critical read of the world, which would ultimately allow for greater access to its possibilities” (Lardier Jr. et al., 2019, p. 494). The findings point to the challenge students of color face when they cannot claim Whiteness as property. Stanton-del Carmen Salazar (2009) captures the foundation of Lardier Jr. et al.’s (2019) point, noting that adolescents in underserved, under-resourced communities need adults who can serve as institutional agents who, “when, on behalf of the adolescent, [the institutional agent] acts to directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued resources (e.g., high school course requirements for admission to 4-year universities)” (p. 1067). These findings exemplify Guinier’s call for democratic merit and mitigate merit that operates sans the social, political, and economic disparities related to race in America.
Other tenets of CRT are grounded in the reality of racism and whiteness as property (Harris, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT acknowledges that institutional racism has favored Whites and marginalized people of color. Originating with slavery in America, property rights issues have led to laws, policies, and actions that falsely entitle Whites to hegemonic self-interests, including education (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Given this, Whiteness becomes the absolute value to use and preserve systems of educational advantages and privileges, which Harris (1995) defines as rights of property: “(1) rights of disposition; (2) rights to use and enjoyment; (3) reputation and status property; and (4) the absolute right to exclude” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 59). CRT is imperative to demonstrate how culturally-based property rights perpetuate the disenfranchisement of African Americans in education.

Buras’ (2011) study, *Race, Charter Schools, and Conscious Capitalism*, applies Whiteness as property to analyze the development of New Orleans’ mostly charter school Recovery School District that emerged after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Charter schools are publicly funded, privately run schools that typically have some state policy and regulatory leniencies. Within the context of a reimagined K-12 public education system, Buras’(2011) research demonstrates how the dispossession of African American communities and schools allowed Whites to exert properties of exclusion via policy decision-making that worked to their benefit but set a negative trajectory for, mostly, African American families and their children’s education. Buras (2011) notes that,

In New Orleans, white entrepreneurs have seized control of a key asset in black communities—public schools—and through state assistance, charter school reform, and
plans for reconstruction, have built a profitable and exclusionary educational system that threatens to reinforce rather than challenge the political economy of New Orleans. This economy has long [been] based on the economic exploitation of African Americans, particularly in the cultural tourism industry. (p. 304)

Again, critical race theorists see Whiteness as property when White people can take actions to exclude non-White people when it is beneficial to White interests and ideologies. As with the example of New Orleans’ Recovery School District, such exclusionary practices include of schools and communities.

Similarly, Wilson (2019) establishes the theoretical stance posited in Whiteness as property in a study that looks at the emergence of White conclaves created through choice charter schools. Wilson (2019) found the property of exclusion in analyses of state legislation that allows charter schools to create neighborhood and admissions criteria within areas with predominantly White student demographics.

The notions of Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and the myths of color blindness and meritocracy are central aspects of critical race theory that challenge traditional racism issues and require looking to the mindset of enslavement both as victim and aggressor. Specifically, within an analysis of urban education reform, critical race theory urges a more in-depth view of education than attempts to correct Jim Crow’s wrongs through goals fixed on closing racial performance gaps in test scores for the sake of America’s global competitiveness and capitalism (Kelleher & Leonall, 201; Pierce, 2017; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Sleeter, 2018).

Critical race theory plausibly forces analyses of urban education reform to address broader societal values in educating the traditionally underserved (Bartolome, 1994; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Hoff, 2018; Ladson- Billings, 2014; del Carmen Salazar, 2013;
Critical race theory calls into question what it means to be human and to what extent some humans are allowed to embody their humanity based on race's socio-cultural constructs.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Theoretically, critical pedagogues strive to avoid standardization and uniformity (Kincheloe, 2008). As a diverse and multi-faceted practice, critical pedagogy aims to disrupt and challenge the status quo through a "variety of tools to expose oppressive power politics" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 50). The tenets of critical pedagogy emerge from the scholarship of critical theorists which include, Darder (2003), hooks (1994, 2003), Gay (2010), Ladson-Billings (1995, 2007, 2007, 2014), McLaren (2002), Kincheloe (2008, 2011), to name a few. Bercaw and Stooksberry (2005) describe the primary tenets of critical pedagogy as “(a) reflection upon the individual’s culture or lived experience, (b) development of voice through a critical look at one’s world and society, which takes place in dialogue with others, and (c) transforming the society toward equality for all citizens through active participation in democratic imperatives” (p. 2).

With the goal of liberation, critical pedagogy seeks to expose and unravel the sociopolitical forces that impact schools, including power dynamics related to race, gender, and class. These power dynamics play out in many ways and "are defined as a set of tacit rules that regulate what can and cannot be said, who can speak with the blessings of authority and who must listen, whose social constructions are valid and whose are erroneous and unimportant" (Kincheloe, 2008, pp. 55-56). The study ultimately questioned the tension of valid versus invalid social constructs by examining how humanizing practices operate within larger neoliberal high-stakes testing environments that policymakers have created and deem valid.
Darder (2003) notes that critical pedagogy is “committed to the development and evolvement of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students. By doing so, this pedagogical perspective seeks to help transform those classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life” (p. 11). Hence, critical pedagogies must investigate the promotion and hindrance of freeing or humanizing cultures in schools. Darder (2003) goes on to write:

this investigation is intricately linked to the fulfillment of what Paulo Freire defined as our ‘vocation’- to be truly humanized social (cultural) agents in the world. In an effort to strive for an emancipatory culture of schooling, critical pedagogy calls upon teachers to recognize how schools have historically embraced theories and practices that function to unite knowledge and power in ways that sustain asymmetrical relations of power under the guise of neutral and apolitical views of education. (p. 11)

Critical pedagogies like humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1985; Keet et al., 2009; Nieto, 2003), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012); engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) (to name a few) all aim to create more equitable and democratic schooling experiences for all students.

**Engaged Pedagogy as Liberation Pedagogy**

bell hook’s (1994) engaged pedagogy, a critical pedagogy that focuses on the relational aspects of pedagogy’s liberating factor. Engaged pedagogy opposes “a rote, assembly-line approach” (hooks, 1994, p. 13), which defines today’s high-stakes testing landscape. Like Freire (2018) and del Carmen Salazar (2013), hooks emphasizes that engaged pedagogy challenges educators extend beyond the classroom and teach students in ways that recognize who they are
as full human beings. hooks posits that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-
actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers
students” (p. 15).

bell hooks’ (1994) *Teaching to Transgress* focuses on engaged pedagogy, which is
teaching students “in a manner that respects and cares for” (p. 13) their inner selves. Engaged
pedagogy is the antithesis of “a rote, assembly-line approach” (hooks, 1994, p. 13) characteristic
of today’s current high-stakes testing landscape. hooks asserts that engaged pedagogy stresses
going beyond the classroom to see and teach students in ways that acknowledge who they are as
full human beings. hooks asserts that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-
actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers
students” (p. 15). hooks aligns with del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) principles of humanizing
principles and further refines these tenets with a teacher’s self-awareness as a starting place to
humanize the educational experience for teachers and students.

Given that our educational institutions are so deeply invested in a banking system (Freire,
2018), teachers are more rewarded when they do not teach against the grain. The choice to work
against the grain, to challenge the status quo, often has negative consequences” (hooks, 1994, p.
206). hook’s engaged pedagogy, written in the aftermath of NCEE’s (1983) *A Nation at Risk*,
offers examples from her teaching for liberation in higher education; however, a challenge is
understanding how these examples of teaching to transgress as a means to freedom transfer to
staunchn and standardized high-stakes testing environments like the current reform of high-stakes
testing.
Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogies as Liberation Pedagogy

In the company of engaged pedagogy is Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) and Gay (2010), who advance honoring students’ culture as an authentic means to leverage academic excellence. Of culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (2014) writes, “culturally relevant pedagogy is the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (an appreciation for culture)” (p. 7). Gay (2010) extends the focus of culture as a centerpiece of critical pedagogy to culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive pedagogy is “teaching to and through [students’] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (p. 26); culturally responsive pedagogy is purposed to “close interactions among ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement” (p. 27). Akin to Ladson-Billings' assets-based approach to seeing students as subjects and not objects, Gay (2010) also emphasizes that “students of color come to school having already mastered many cultural skills and ways of knowing. To the extent that teaching builds on these capabilities, academic success will result” (p. 213). Others have built upon Gay’s (2010) culturally responsive pedagogy to emphasize more attention to political action and social justice. These include culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) and political action pedagogies (Bartolome, 1994; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Hoff, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Ware, 2006). Critical pedagogies advance similar ideas of critical theory within education that benefit marginalized students who have been dismissed or unattended to through the lens of education.

Like engaged pedagogy and aligned with critical race theory, culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies argue for teaching critical inquiry. These pedagogies inquire about the relationships, curriculum, and power dynamics within and outside the school
that shape students’ cultural experiences to support students. They are all situated within socio-cultural and historical contexts, an appreciation for students’ cultures, and educators leveraging their cultural knowledge to achieve academic excellence. (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2014). These pedagogical stances dominate the past two decades’ literature regarding advanced thinking in humanizing pedagogy. More recently, the challenge of these pedagogies is expressed in the literature in that their actual implementation lacks the critical action stance of the frameworks’ origins.

Specifically, Ladson-Billings’s (2014) personal critique of culturally relevant teaching focuses on the need to push beyond teachers’ cultural competence as the primary mean for humanizing education. Emphasizing the relevance of culture, Ladson-Billings (2014) notes her observation of teachers being more intentional about “cultural examples and analogs as [teachers teach] prescribed curricula” (p. 7). Beyond Ladson-Billings’s (2014) self-critique, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999), Dixson (2003), and Ware (2006) all argue for the advancement of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching to involve teachers and students more deeply in the critical nature in which these pedagogies are rooted—political action.

Ladson-Billings (2014) advances culturally relevant teaching to focus more on culturally sustaining pedagogy and acknowledges Paris’ (2012) critique of her initial theory to go beyond culturally relevant pedagogy. Paris (2012) challenged that culturally relevant pedagogy be inclusive of sustaining language to “ensur[e] maintenance of the languages and cultures of African American, Latina/o, Indigenous American, Asian American, Pacific Islander American, and other longstanding and newcomer communities in our classrooms” (p. 94). Acknowledging the nascence of critically sustaining pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (2014) insists that researchers and practitioners move its tenets forward with the dual responsibility of increasing student
outcomes within the current space of high-stakes testing and engaging in student and community-centered learning experiences that require critical response and action.

Convergently, Bartolome (1994), Gay (1993, 2002, 2010, 2013), Hoff (2018), Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014), Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999), Dixson (2003), Ware (2006), and Paris (2012) all signal the need for research to highlight humanizing practices that are culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustaining so that they inform teacher development and practice. The current literature still, however, acknowledges a need to strengthen the critical aspects of these pedagogies by enacting them in ways that address the political nature of schooling and students’ agency to transform inequitable conditions through their learning experiences. Additionally, the literature highlights a need that del Carmen Salazar (2013) stresses, which acknowledges the lack of instances where teachers, students, and communities co-create humanizing pedagogy. Addressing some of these needs, Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte (2019) offer a pedagogy of revolutionary love as emancipatory education, citing strategies that “counter fake love and interrupt the ongoing anti-black violence [both real and metaphoric] encountered by Black, urban youth,” (p. 54). Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte’s (2019) countering of fake love looks like eldering, locating students where they are, multiple ways of knowing, question-driven pedagogy, culturally-authentic assessment, and communal responsibility.

**Humanization as Liberation Pedagogy**

The liberatory pedagogies examined in the previous section are all anchored in humanization. They all present opportunities to combat dehumanization's adverse effects in schools, specifically in urban education reform, where race and poverty issues are most likely to intersect. Liberatory or humanizing pedagogy takes root in Freire’s scholarship and life’s work. Freire (as cited by del Carmen Salazar 2013) asserts that critical pedagogy is “becoming more
fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world. Humanization happens when the oppressed are engaged in their liberation” (p. 37). Freire (2018) describes humanizing pedagogy as a critical pedagogy where the instructional approach "ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves" (p. 51). Freire (2018) adds that educators who enact humanizing pedagogy engage in pursuing mutual humanization with their students nurtured through problem-posing education where students co-investigate through discourse with teachers.

As the purpose of education, humanization centers the struggle between educators who strive to teach in ways that promote humanizing pedagogy principles but operate within school systems that require uniformity, conformity, and standards-based teaching. Humanization is the specific pedagogy that frames this dissertation because actualizing humanization as praxis incorporates all aspects of the previously examined pedagogies to the end of teachers and students understanding that their mutual humanity is inextricably tied and requiring teachers and students to disrupt suppressive hierarchies that maintain asymmetrical power structures (Keet et al., 2009; Nieto, 2003). Humanizing pedagogy recognizes that it cannot be mass-produced as a standards-based curriculum and sold to districts and school networks for teachers to internalize and then regurgitate to students. This inability to commodify humanizing pedagogy, then, signals a need for educators to be developed and supported in their enactment of humanizing practice in ways that contextualize who they and their students are. According to del Carmen Salazar, applying humanizing pedagogy means educators must consider the following:

1. The reality of the learner is crucial.
2. Critical consciousness is imperative for students and educators.
3. Students’ sociocultural resources are valued and extended- curriculum is permeable, not static.
4. Content is meaningful and relevant to students’ lives.
5. Students’ prior knowledge is linked to new learning.
6. Trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization.
7. Mainstream knowledge and discourse styles matter.
8. Students will achieve through their academic, intellectual, social abilities.
9. Student empowerment requires the use of learning strategies.
10. Challenging inequity in the educational system can promote transformation (del Carmen Salazar, 2013, p. 138)

With these principles, del Carmen Salazar (2013) recommends more research to better understanding how educators enact these tenets to create humanizing experiences for their students, which is the dissertation’s goal.

**Liberation and Humanization: What is Human?**

Critical race theory and critical pedagogy challenge deficit notions of what it means to be human. U.S. history demonstrates the extent to which some humans are allowed to embody their humanity, and some are not, based on race's bio-political and socio-cultural constructs. The theoretical conceptions and various tenets of critical race theory and critical pedagogy shed light on understanding the diverse conceptions of what it means to be human, which must be considered initially to understand the dissertation’s keen focus on humanizing pedagogy in urban education. The historical significance of race in humanizing pedagogy as a critique of White supremacy and privilege is paramount. The current state of public education in the United States’ urban centers has formed through generations of philosophical thought, legislative acts, and sophisticated systems that dehumanize non-White, poor people. Examining urban education developments by acknowledging humanizing and dehumanizing practices is imperative to understand the conception and construct of being human or not being human and the various ways these ideas have operated historically. I have intentionally chosen to focus on the idea of human and what it means to be human, not to scrutinize human evolution theories, but to investigate the shifts in ideological formations and interchanges of humans as physical beings.
with varying degrees of humanity. To strengthen the focus, I delimit my investigation of human as an idea to those areas most influential of U.S. culture and history (e.g., case law examples are restricted to the U.S. legal system, and philosophical explorations are specific to the Western canon given its chief influence on U.S. culture, government, and thought). Figure 2 illustrates the investigated conceptions of human in general categories that are not entirely bound or demarcated, but flexible in that they inform the others, are plausible in interrogating the others, and are, in some cases, intertwined.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 2

Categorical Conceptions Defining Human

Philosophical Conceptions of Human

Philosophers have questioned what it means to be human for centuries. The Western philosophical canon takes a metaphysical position with ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle, who asserted the soul as human ontology. With Aristotle’s Divine Intellect view, Cohoe (2013) notes that:

Aristotle argues that the activity of understanding cannot have a bodily organ. No physical structure could enable a bodily part or combination of bodily parts to act as an organ of understanding, producing or determining the full range of forms that the human intellect can understand. Further, some things that we understand do not have distinctive
material characteristics and thus could not be cognized through a bodily organ, regardless of how this organ was constituted. (p. 349)

Aristotle contends that thought is not physical, hence metaphysical and that even though thinking and understanding live within a physical being, cognition does not emanate via physical organs.

Progressing centuries of thought, Thomas Aquinas’ 13th-century stance of what it means to be human is characterized as embryogenesis or delayed animation. This characterization means human ontology begins with an embryo that develops as a human through a succession of souls—nutritive soul, sensitive soul, and finally rational soul—the last of these defining the physical human (Amerini, 2013; Eberl, 2005; Vanden Bout, 2013). Additionally, 17th-century philosophers like Descartes further explore the concept of being human and add positions of separation of mind and body, but still argue that the mind is what solidifies being human (Mills, 2008). This position is akin to Aquinas’ assertion of a human’s rational, discerning mind but loses Aquinas’ integration of biology (i.e., embryogenesis).

Advancing Aquinas’ argument of the human’s rational mind, 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant is less concerned with the development of the physical human being and takes a greater interest in the rational mind as the critical determinant of being human. Louden (2011) explains that Kant posits:

Animals have desires, and many of them think about how to realize their desires. But Kant also holds that only humans—at least among the class of terrestrial beings—have substantive rationality: ‘in order to assign the human being his class in the system of animal nature, nothing remains for us than to say that he has a character, which he himself creates, insofar as he is capable of perfecting himself according to ends that he himself adopts’ (as cited in Louden, 2011, p. xxi)
Kant and other noted 18th century European philosophers drift from God and religion toward reason and science as definitive measures that define human. Kant’s conceptions situate humans to have agency based on character and his or her own mindful decisions or fruition.

Categorized as Enlightenment philosophers, Kant and others like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and David Hume influenced early American revolutionaries' philosophical thought (Meyer, 1976; White, 2001). In *Dissonant Hue-manity: Another Way to be Differently in The Work of Audre Lorde and June Jordan*, White (2001) explores Enlightenment philosophers’ impact on American ideals of democracy and freedom and how their lives and actions were hypocritical in response to race with American slavery and their inferior views of women. White’s (2001) position contributes to the notion of degrees of human or levels of humanity afforded to some and less so to others. White (2001) writes,

Rousseau, Locke, and Hume, to varying degrees, participated in the dehumanization of the “Other” in order to justify the existing social order. More specifically, Locke laid the foundation in reference to the dissonance that existed in his overall philosophy with regard to race and humanity. From Locke’s position that “all men are created equal, but some men are more equal than others,” arose the dynamic of making claims in opposition to what one believes or practices, which enables one to argue for particular qualifications in order to dismiss the obvious. (p. 89)

White (2001) goes on to mention that “philosophers like Hume and Rousseau built upon Locke’s perspective, to varying degrees, and, in the long run, continued to reinforce the perception of Black inferiority over and against White superiority” (p. 90). The complexity and overlap of science, religion, values, and reason contribute to what has ultimately become a hierarchy of humanity.
Though philosophical descriptions of the human and what it means to be human relate to metaphysical and then later with issues of the extent to which people are human (as in the Enlightenment Era), there are, as earlier noted, philosophical dispositions that connect to science, specifically biological connections as with Aquinas’ theory of embryogenesis. Biological definitions present a variety of theories the attempt to clarify human origin using embryotic cellular development. However, the original point of origin within biological human development is questionable per the various theories regarding the onset of becoming human (Erk, 2016; Ford & Ford, 1991; Goldenring, 1985; Shea, 1985; Tauer, 1985).

**Legal Conceptions of Human**

Legal domains also have a historical role in defining what it means to be human related to science. According to the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 ruling in Roe v. Wade, a legal human or person is defined by fetus viability outside of a woman’s uterus. This viability period is typically twenty-three weeks of gestation, therefore supporting viability theory (Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113, 1973). The milestone case “held that the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause protects a constitutional right to abortion” (Dyer, 2017, p. 34). What is scientifically meant to be human has connections to socio-political, religious, ethical, and legal issues like abortion, fetal research, in vitro fertilization, treatment of rape victims, and fetal remain disposal (Abbate, 2015; Cohen & Adashi, 2018; Berg, 2007; Erk, 2016; Forsythe & Arago, 2016; Gaddie, 2017; Graziani, 2017; Reed & Ellis, 2019; Sofronas, Wright, & Carnevale, 2018; Symons; 2018). Scientifically, these societal issues further intensify the complications of understanding human ontogenesis.

In addition to biological considerations for defining human based on legalities, the U.S. Supreme Court also placed statutory definitions upon the extent to which humans, as defined
biologically, are human based on external biological factors, specifically race (Robinson, 2016). The pre-Civil War Supreme Court Case of Dred Scott v. Sandford (1856) explores the question of the extent to which humans with the same internal biological characteristics were human within the context of afforded rights. Notably, the high court found enslaved Africans were not citizens protected under the Constitution and were their white slave owners' property, hence establishing a slave’s inability to sue in a federal court.

According to presiding Chief Justice Taney, who ruled in the case, blacks were “so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (Dred Scott v. Sandford, 1856). The Dred Scott v. Sanford decision was later overturned with the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the 13th-15th Constitutional Amendments, which abolished slavery, granted citizenship to persons born in the United States, and prohibited the disenfranchisement of voters (respectively) (Gormley, 1968; Jenkins & Peck, 2021; Smith, 2016). Almost 40 years after the Dred Scott case, the U. S. Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) established separate but equal policies and practices- meaning that the 14th Amendment to the Constitution was not in violation if the same facilities were provided to blacks and whites; however, the case still perpetuates “otherness” for one group of humans versus another group. Chief Justice Taney’s sentiments over a century and a half ago signal the more profound question of what it means to be human socio-politically when power is in question and is evident in case law related to women’s rights, gay and lesbian rights, and immigration laws. The United States’ struggle with white dominance and the court cases that have resulted in a release of power to those deemed as less than human are reminders of Enlightenment philosophers’ influence on American culture, customs, and laws as they relate to a hierarchy of humanity.
Dred Scott v. Sandford is a significant supreme federal ruling predicated upon early framers of the U.S. Constitution resolution that enslaved Africans counted as three-fifths of a person for federal taxation and representation. With the 1787 Three-Fifths Compromise, delegates constitutionalized slaves as a part person and part property (Simba, 2014). As the bedrock of American thought and ideology, the Constitution sets the stage for dehumanizing threads woven through the very fabric of all things American. The deep roots of dehumanization also make future attempts to humanize practices, institutions, and mindsets built to dehumanize non-Whites grimly problematic in all aspects of life, especially for African Americans.

Social-Psychological Conceptions of Human

Exploring human or personhood theories interrogates who is human with power and supremacy as main denominators in how high or low one falls within the social order of humanity. Across various domains, there are convergent and divergent perspectives regarding the idea of human and what it means to be human; however, social psychologists codify these different views through the binary theoretical frame of humanization dehumanization (see Figure 3).
Dehumanizing practices directly or indirectly diminish opportunities for others to be whole or complete in the multi-faceted ways humans engage in living and existing in the world. Haslam (2006) defines humanizing qualities based on a five-factor theoretical model of human uniqueness and human nature. Derived from a series of studies (Haslam et al., 2005), Haslam distills human uniqueness to civility, refinement, moral sensibility, logic/rationality, and maturity. The study defines human nature as emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency/individuality, and depth (Haslam, 2006).

The converse ends of human uniqueness and human nature are animalistic dehumanization (lacking culture, childlikeness, coarseness, irrational, and amoral) and mechanistic dehumanization (inertness, passivity/fungibility, superficiality, coldness, and rigidity), respectively (Haslam et al., 2006). Essentially, if the qualities of human uniqueness are not attributed to others, the resulting dehumanization is animalistic. If human nature's qualities are not afforded to others, the resulting dehumanization is mechanistic and categorizes others as automata. Whether animalistic or mechanistic, dehumanization is “evidenced when outgroup
members are perceived as relatively more “animal-like” or “less than human” and thus fundamentally different from and “inferior” to one’s in-group (Costello & Hodson, 2010). Figure 2.3 is included in Haslam’s (2006) integrative review of dehumanization. It visually represents the corresponding polarities between human uniqueness and animalistic dehumanization and human nature and mechanistic dehumanization. Leyens et al. (2001, 2003) extend dehumanization to the concept of infrahumanization, which is the tendency for people to see others in their ingroup as more human than those in outgroups. Thus, infrahumanization not only names perceived deficits placed upon the outgroup but also highlights the ingroup’s assumption of its superiority.

These social psychological theories of dehumanization and infrahumanization frame concepts like institutional racism and oppression experienced by people of color and ethnic minorities that explain traditions of racial supremacy (DeLuca-McLean & Castano, 2009; Pereira, Vala, & Leyens, 2009; Pettigrew, 2009), women’s rights issues like abortion (Merola and McGlone, 2011; Pacilli et al., 2018); and perceptions of immigrants and refugees as animalistic (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013; Utych, 2018). These are only a few illustrations of how the unjust undercurrents of suppressing the identities, values, desires, and rights of the out-group decreases opportunities for others to be fully human and seen as possessing tenets of human nature and human uniqueness.

Haslam’s (2006) framework of humanization and dehumanization provides a working conceptual basis for understanding critical issues facing urban education in America. Haslam (2006) argues that this framework applies to explaining conflict and underpins people’s social-cognitive processes and everyday functioning. The elements within human uniqueness and human nature and animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization offer broad strokes to
comprehend issues like race and ethnicity, gender and pornography, disability, medicine, technology, and education (Haslam, 2006). As a domain, the current landscape of standardized testing in America’s public education system presents conformity, rigidity, and a lack of personalization (Au 2009, 2010), all of which are elements within Haslam's (2006) framework’s dehumanizing ends.

Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte (2019) further extend Haslam’s (2006) notion of dehumanization to the urban classroom noting that educational systems enact dehumanization through “fake love. . . [one in which] white teachers, like white people in general, love on Black culture but do not love on Black people” (p. 54). Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte (2019) suggest that dehumanization in urban schools take on the forms of physical, symbolic, linguistic, curricular/pedagogical, and systemic violence toward Black children and argue that educators who show “fake love” (Johnson, Bryan, & Boutte, 2019) cannot enact a humanizing love if they are unwillingly to operate as critical historical readers of themselves and their world. To better understand dehumanizing educational practices, or “fake love” (Johnson, Bryan, & Boutte, 2019), I mainly reference how aspects of Haslam’s (2006) framework operate within the current state of education reform. I connect it to the research of critical educational psychologists and researchers’ examination of unfair practices and resulting consequences that are often detrimental to children of color, particularly African American children.

**Dehumanization: The Costs and Contemporary Ill-effects of Re-segregation in Schools**

The need to advance humanizing pedagogy is apparent. However, the question, again, is how to do this within the current political environment of standardization and high-stakes testing characteristic of today’s neoliberal education reform? With the deeply woven prevalence of dehumanization in the historical trace of U.S. public education revealed through the literature,
history teaches that those occurrences in education that moved the pendulum toward humanization were moments like the Reconstruction Era. During Reconstruction, legislation became the power broker to shift toward a more equitable social order to empower African Americans to co-create and self-create humanizing structures like schools that ultimately progressed the human experience and actualized American ideals of freedom and democracy for more Americans. History also teaches the dehumanizing consequences of what happens when the oppressed are not co-constructors of their liberation, whether in schools or society more broadly.

Kelman (1975) describes dehumanization as denying a person's identity and seeing a person as less connected and valued within a community. Given the Constitutional issues of personhood examined earlier in this chapter, the U.S. grapples with race, Whiteness, and power issues. These issues show up in all sociopolitical aspects of American life, including schools. Regarding the landscape of schools today, Walsemann and Bell (2010) make re-segregation clear:

Black students today are more likely to attend predominately minority schools than they were in the 1990s; in 1991 to 1992, 66% of Black students attended a school where 50% to 100% of the student body was non-White; 77% attended such schools in 2000 to 2004. Predominately minority schools are less able than majority-White schools to provide the full array of educational opportunities. (p.1687)

Additionally, with an increase in re-segregation, funding disparities within states across school districts with varying levels persist. Baker et al. (2016) suggest that only a third of states employ equitable funding models for school districts based on poverty levels. “In 2013, sixteen states had progressive funding distributions, down from a high of twenty in 2008, and only two more
than 2012. Eighteen states had no substantial variation in funding between high poverty and low poverty districts, and fourteen states had regressive funding patterns” (Baker et al., 2016, p. 3). The current re-segregation of schools and lack of intentional state education funding policies across all states to provide additional financial resources to poor communities, which are more likely comprised of people of color, perpetuate practices consistent with de jure segregation.

The policies that hover over and impact schools demonstrate inequity. Zooming into schools' social-cognitive anatomy also illuminates inequity that can be examined through the lens of humanizing and dehumanizing conceptions (Haslam, 2006). Given the re-segregation of schools, White teachers make up the overwhelming majority of educators in urban schools, and researchers have widely questioned the extent to which teachers’ beliefs about students’ abilities affect achievement (Andersen, 2018; Dee, 2005; Leung & Sy, 2018; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trusz, 2018). Consistent in the research is, what teachers believe about students’ abilities manifests in how students perform. Teacher efficacy and teacher bias are essential factors to consider in the historic academic proficiency disproportions that persist along racial lines.

**Teacher Efficacy and Teacher Bias**

Classroom teachers play a prominent role in forming students’ expectations and influencing students’ academic achievement. Education researchers (Brophy, 1983; Kim & Seo, 2018; Klassen et al., 2011; Reynolds, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Yoo, 2016) have demonstrated the power of teacher efficacy and teacher effect, noting that what teachers believe about their students has significant implications that matter. Scholars have demonstrated that students tend to be more successful in school when they report to have teachers who believe in them and support them, meaning these teachers typically hold efficacious beliefs about their students (Andersen, 2018; Dee, 2005; Diamond et al., 2004; Leung & Sy, 2018; Rosenthal &
Jacobson, 1968; Trusz, 2018; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomilson-Clarke, 2003). Research also demonstrates the reverse is true when teachers hold negative beliefs about students rooted in bias (Cherng, 2017; Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Cooper, 2003).

Based on what the literature demonstrates regarding systemic racism that affects Black and Hispanic students' schooling experiences, it is plausible to question the bias of teacher inputs versus student outcomes. Suppose White teachers implicitly or explicitly view students of color as possessing mechanistic dehumanizing characteristics (inertness, passivity/ fungibility, superficiality, coldness, and rigidity) or animalistic dehumanizing characteristics (lacking culture, childlikeness, coarseness, irrational, and amoral) (Haslam, 2006). In that case, negative teacher bias ascribes deficit-based thinking about who students of color are and what they can achieve as potential hindrances to their performance.

The intersection of teacher effect and examples of racial gaps in student achievement raises teaching inputs and student outcomes questions. Therefore, a reasonable question to ponder is the extent to which the noted achievement gaps and resulting policies are about teacher efficacy and self-fulfilling prophecies of African Americans' internalized inferiority. These persistent achievement gaps result from what Ladson-Billings (2006) coins the education debt, steeped in historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral debt that the U.S. has continued to accumulate since the onset of slavery. Looking at the NAEP (2019) results and other statistical data disaggregating student performance along with variables of race as evidence of an achievement gap, Ladson-Billings (2006, 2007), Milner (2012, 2013), Flores (2018), Carter (2009), Wiener (2006), Books (2007) and Irvine (2010) all warn that these data offer a shallow analysis and limit the broader scope of structural racism inherent in the numbers. These researchers signal that a focus on the achievement gap assumed by student outcome data like
those from NAEP creates a deficit-based positioning of student achievement. In her warning against this misconception of student outcomes, Ladson-Billings (2006) writes, “I want to argue that this all-out focus on the ‘Achievement Gap’ moves us toward short-term solutions that are unlikely to address the long-term underlying problem” (p. 4). Consequently, a testing gap more accurately defines the achievement gap, and the achievement gap results from the more profound historical influences of the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Akin to the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), Chambers (2009) posits the achievement gap unjustly focuses on students and their outputs versus in the inequalities of policies, districts, pedagogies, and pedagogues that create the inputs resulting in student outcomes. Chambers (2009) argues that the “more appropriate label, ‘receivement gap’ refocuses attention where it is due- on the educational institutions, personnel and policies, tracking among them- that create, perpetuate, and exacerbate differences among these students” (p. 442). With the opportunity and receivement gaps that have persisted in the age of neoliberal education reform, schools are less able to nurture and support the development of intellectually mindful, culturally diverse citizens and are more interested in increasing scale scores that neoliberal reformers think will prepare better employees for a competitive global economy (Hursh, 2005, 2007; Sleeter, 2018).

**Oppositional Culture**

In addition to Chamber’s (2009) assertion of a receivement gap which detrimentally hinders students of color from actualizing their full intellectual selves due to biased teacher inputs amid dehumanizing high-stakes testing education reform environments, students may also live out a self-imposed Golem effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) due to internalized collective identities. Ogbu (2004) clarifies his highly debated oppositional culture hypothesis and its
association with acting White. Ogbu (2004) situates the collective identity of African Americans within the history of racism, hence a collective internalization of “opposing” and not wanting to be like those who have historically degraded the cultural, physical, intellectual, social, and linguistic aspects of what it collectively means to be Black. Regarding the manifestation in schools, Ogbu (2004) explains that Black students carry the burden of “acting White” and risk being ridiculed or victimized by their Black peer community and that they also develop strategies to cope with these stressors.

This literature review demonstrates that urban schools represent White structural norms given that the power holders are predominantly White teachers and administrators (Andersen, 2018; Dee, 2005; Fordham, 1996; Leung & Sy, 2018; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trusz, 2018). Therefore, it is conceivable that some of the academic disparities among Black and Hispanic students are manifestations of students of color “opposing” those whose collective identities represent White dominance. It is conceivable that students of color choose consciously or unconsciously to resist what is presented as a White construct of academia, and if not, run the risk of being ostracized for not “acting black” or for “talking White” (James et al., 2016; Smith, 2016; Thelamour & Johnson, 2017). Ogbus’s (2004) oppositional culture hypothesis then reasonably explains a coping response that resembles a way of being that clashes with those whose collective identity represents collective acts of historical dehumanization. More simply put, Ogbu’s (2004) oppositional culture hypothesis demonstrates the dehumanization that students of color see enacted upon them by White dominant culture through their collective history and, in turn, present themselves to the world in ways that self-claim an identity in polar opposition to Whiteness.
Stereotype-threat

Others have asserted the internalization of threat based on negative stereotypes about one’s race, contributing to the gaps in student outcomes persistent along racial lines. According to Steele and Aronson (1995), stereotype threat is “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 797). In a series of four related studies, Steele and Aronson (1995) presented Black and White college students in test groups with the framing of “ability-diagnostic” testing as the purpose for the test, and Black and White college students in the control groups were told that the tests were not evaluative. In the test group, Black students consistently underperformed Whites; whereas this was not the case in the control group in which intellectual ability was not presented as the purpose for the testing. Steele and Aronson (1995) found the threat of stereotyping in the test group created deficits in students’ speed and accuracy “probably because of [students] alternating their attention between trying to answer the items and trying to assess the self-significance of their frustration” (p. 809). Although from a somewhat different angle, Steele and Aronson (1995) offer convergence with Ogbu’s (2004) notion of an internalized stance where Black students either through collective identity oppose what they view as Whiteness in schools or as with stereotype-threat, they internalize the negative views that the dominant culture places upon them, and it impedes their success.

Additionally, Steele and Aronson’s (1995) notion of stereotype threat suggests even more significant impact than the Pygmalion and Golem effects, which are ultimately about self and teacher efficacy regarding performance (Andersen, 2018; Dee, 2005; Leung & Sy, 2018; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trusz, 2018). Steele and Aronson (1995) noted that they stressed the test's difficulty in all conditions of their testing experiment and insisted that participants were likely to get only a few items correct. Even with this additional framing, the researchers noted
that these instructions “did not depress the performance of Black and White participants in the
non-stereotype-threat conditions,” stressing the “low-performance expectation, implied by the
stereotype would have been powerful enough, by itself, to lower performance among these
participants when a direct manipulation of the expectation could not” (Steele & Aaronson, 1995,
p. 809). For these students, the historical views, collective identities, and threat that their
performance would confirm negative stereotypes about their abilities are all social psychological
results of race and its impact on student performance.

Like Steele and Aronson’s (1995) concept of stereotype threat, Clance and Imes’ (1978)
research focused on impostor syndrome, characterized by feelings of academic or professional
fraudulence, is another social-psychological stressor that poses a risk for marginalized students.
Imposter syndrome is typically associated with internalized gender and race-based stereotypes
(Clance & Imes, 1978), and it can potentially impede African American children’s ability to
view themselves as academically inclined scholars. Edwards’ (2019) critical autoethnography
urges the need to reposition the definition of scholar for women of color and has implications for
enacting this with students so that they see themselves not as impostors held to a White standard
of scholarship, but existing within a definition of scholar inclusive of their collective cultural
identities. Okeke et al.’s (2009) research on academic self-concept and racial centrality converge
with the data regarding the impact of Black students’ internalization of negative stereotypes.
Okeke et al. (2009) found that for Black students, “endorsement of traditional academic
stereotypes was related to lower academic self-concept only among youth for whom being
African American was a central aspect of their identity” (p. 381). Per Okeke et al.’s (2009)
research, Black children who see racial ethnicity as primary to their identity are potentially at
risk of deficit-based conceptions of who they are and can academically be if they do not experience buffers to help them guard against self-deprecating mental constructs.

**The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)**

Notions of identity via oppositional culture, instances that threaten performance based on social identity, and teacher efficacy based on factors that include identity are all issues that become more apparent and heightened during re-segregated schooling where the teaching force is mostly White in urban centers densely populated with African American and Hispanic students (Taie & Goldring, 2018; USDOE, 2016). These are not limited to re-segregated schools; however, the historical trace of public schools' development, inclusive of African Americans, demonstrates the historical bias Black children face in schools. Psychologist Margret Beale-Spencer extends the work of PVEST theory, which is essentially a framework to investigate risk and resiliency within the context of identity development in young adults, to explain better the effects of racism in African Americans’ schooling experiences. Swanson et al. (2002) build a case using the school as the leading example of an ecological system in which African American children form an identity. Their work references salient research that points to the adaptive and maladaptive development results in African American students based on how they internalize teachers’ perceptions. Swanson et al. (2002) note that “the PVEST framework can help conceptualize how teachers’ perceptions of their students become a form of stress engagement for the students and why a predisposition for depression is a risk factor for this stress engagement” (p. 90). This onset of stress and its academic and social-psychological debilitating effects also converges with Steele and Aronson’s (1995) idea of threat in the face of academic performance based on race.
Whether through the lens of opposing what African Americans see as oppressive White culture in schools, the quest to not “act White,” or by internalizing the negative perceptions of teachers, the historical effects of racism sans the ecological system of segregation’s equilibrium (Irvine & Irvine, 1993) has the potential to impact African American students’ academic performance in schools (Clance & Imes, 1978; Edwards, 2019; Fordham, 1996; James et al., 2016; Ogbu, 2004; Okeke et al., 2009; Smith, 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Swanson et al., 2002; Thelamour & Johnson, 2017;). These social psychological theories must be considered given the achievement or opportunity gap because these theories are paramount in understanding the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) owed to African American students, especially those in poverty-dense urban schools, as the research consistently demonstrates the lasting effects of centuries of structural racism.

**Enacting Liberation Pedagogy Amid Contemporary Re-segregation and Neoliberal Education Reform**

Research on humanizing practices enacted within urban K-12 classrooms in the U.S. is limited, often falling outside of direct K-12 classroom spaces (e.g., teacher education and development) (Chen, Desai, & Knight-Manuel, 2016; Navarro, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Reyes, 2016). For instance, Navarro’s (2018) qualitative case study features twenty-five Los Angeles urban educators across different secondary schools. It explores how the participants enact social justice teaching, which is a critical aspect of humanizing pedagogy (Sleeter, 2014), amid the constraints of high-stakes testing environments using a framework for decolonization within the space of an inquiry group outside of their schools. In the inquiry group, teachers engaged in developing the social justice curriculum within the decolonization framework, giving
and receiving peer feedback, curating and sharing resources to strengthen the social justice tenant within their curriculum, and curriculum presentations of their refined work (Navarro, 2018).

Likewise, Pour-Khorshid’s (2016) *HELLA: A bay area critical racial affinity group committed to healing, empowerment, love, liberation, and action* is a case study that uses ethnographic methods through sustained participant observation. Pour-Khorshid’s (2016) findings speak to the need for critical educators of color to have space and legitimacy with grappling with, navigating, and decentering Whiteness within their personal and professional lives as a healing praxis. The study’s findings demonstrate the beneficial nature of educators of color engaging in a humanizing endeavor. However, the study does not name the humanizing practices that these educators enact with their students to create the same benefits that they sought through their engagement with HELLA or how their engagement with HELLA informed practices that they planned to incorporate, revise, or extend as an outgrowth of the teachers’ experience with HELLA.

Baldridge (2014) explores a community-based after-school program that focuses on enacting humanization with mostly Black youths by offering experiences that “nurtur[es] critical thinking, social awareness, and personal reflection” and go beyond academics and test-prep (p. 456). Baldridge’s (2014) findings describe the challenge of students gaining access to after-school programs that focus on humanization when many of their schools offer extended day programs that are sans humanizing practices and centered around fixing students’ perceived academic deficiencies. Baldridge (2014) makes a case for not “diminishing [after-school program’s] much-needed comprehensive approach to working with youth” (p. 467). Baldridge’s informative and instructive work supports humanization but falls outside of the K-12 classroom parameters of this study.
Tillis (2018) re-engineered a traditional first-year student seminar at a historically Black college or university (HBCU) to reflect a more humanizing stance. Traditional skills and tasks emanated from students' practices at predominantly White institutions like “syllabus mapping, organization skill-building, Cornel note-taking, deconstructing a writing prompt, annotating scholarly text, study tips” remained at the core of the seminar’s foundation (p. 315). However, Tillis’ (2018) redesign of the course included revisions like incorporating learning experiences focused on students understanding the role and contributions of their HBCU to their local community to reading texts that helped students better understand systemic racism through discriminatory housing and gentrification. Although outside of the scope of this study’s focus on humanization within K-12 classroom spaces, Tillis’ (2018) Education as a Practice of Freedom Project provides implications for how K-12 schools might re-think the typical neoliberal test-prep approach to academic student support.

Other studies published within recent years (Alvarez et al., 2020; Andrews et al., 2019; de Los Ríos, 2019; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019) offer insight into humanizing practices enacted in teacher preparation programs ranging from findings focused on teacher candidates to teacher educators. While important to the body of knowledge regarding how institutions prepare teachers to enact humanizing practices in urban schools, these studies' loci are not the shared classroom space between students and teachers.

Current research that does focus acutely on classroom practices between teachers and students generally falls into three different categories in their illustrations of how teachers enact humanizing pedagogy amid the current landscape of urban school reform characterized by high-stakes testing, conformity, and standardization. There two distinct and overlapping categories
that capture three general areas in which the literature on enacting humanizing pedagogy in urban classrooms falls (see Figure 4).

![Figure 4](image_url)

**Figure 4**

*Research Categories for Humanizing Pedagogy Enacted in Urban Classrooms*

These are 1) humanizing pedagogy mainly within the context of or in service to academics; 2) humanizing pedagogy where the relational or cultural environment and academics are inclusive of the study; 3) and lastly, humanizing pedagogy focused on or in service to the relational or cultural environment of the classroom, excluding academics.

Regarding classroom-level practice, researchers like Camangian (2015) acknowledge that humanizing pedagogy “taps into student agency by facilitating their critical social consciousness and raising awareness of the sociopolitical context that it is embedded in [and] goes beyond equity discourses that have tamed explicit liberation agendas in social justice education theory” (p. 427). In his critical participatory action research study, Camangian (2015) studied senior English students in a poverty-dense Southern Los Angeles high school where 66% of students are African American, and 33% are Latino. The study found that using the humanizing pedagogical process of 1) politically agitating students, 2) arousing students’ critical curiosity, and then 3) inspiring humanization as a method of framing learning, students’ academic
performance improved as they demonstrated a more profound interest in practicing traditional academic literacies. Generally, students demonstrated stronger desires and abilities to interrogate issues more critically, consequently increasing their sociocultural awareness.

Camangian’s (2015) study acknowledges Paris (2012) and Ladson-Billings (2014) call for critical action as a means to culturally sustaining pedagogy as a humanizing pedagogy. Camangian’s (2015) study also furthers del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) call to engage students in the co-creation of humanizing pedagogy. Camangian (2015) notes that “urban educators must design assessments that develop and evaluate young people on the critical consciousness, compassion, and leadership qualities needed to transform unjust social conditions” (p. 443), revealing a conundrum that many urban teachers face as they are without assessment design choice or autonomy due to scripted curricula and standardization (Slater & Griggs, 2015).

Converging with Camangian (2015), Taylor’s (2019) research findings highlight how humanizing pedagogy is constructed in instantaneous interactions between student and teacher, citing that dehumanizing practices are both disrupted and reproduced within the confines of standardized testing (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Milner, 2013; Picower, 2011; Santoro, 2011; Slater & Griggs, 2015; Sleeter, 2012; Stillman, 2009). In an ethnographic study gathering data from over one hundred classroom observations of three urban elementary teachers’ literacy practices in writing, Taylor (2019) notes times where “temporal discourses (present-orientation versus future-orientation) and curricular discourses (standardization versus tailoring)” were simultaneously at play” (p. 25). Future-orientations in student-teacher interactions generally pushed teachers from more evident humanizing stances to pedagogical strategies that were aligned with future-facing testing requirements. However, teachers in the study who were philosophically aligned with humanizing pedagogy took opportunities to tailor their teaching to
their students' needs in ways that augmented or went beyond their assessment-mandated teaching practices.

Keeping with Taylor’s (2019) temporal discourses, recent research (Joseph, Hailu, & Matthews, 2019; Land, 2019; Taylor, 2017) explores ways educators enact humanizing practices with their students in service to improved performance in specific academic areas. Land’s (2019) multi-case study explores how teachers enact humanizing practices specifically in writing instruction. Joseph, Hailu, and Matthews (2019) shine a light on the humanizing practices that make Black girls’ humanity matter in their math classes. Focused on the experience of ten African American girl research participants in urban middle and high school classrooms, Joseph, Hailu, and Matthews (2019) find that,

Math teachers’ deep understanding of mathematics content coupled with commitments to learn about and problematize Black girls’ historical and contemporary realities of marginalization can provide a rich context and set of tools for empowering Black girls to experience a creatively self-determined and self-actualized life—a basic human right. (p. 147-148)

Other studies focused on enacting humanizing practices to engage and increase mathematical knowledge include: Rosa and Orey (2016) report findings from their implementation of ethnomodeling, which uses students’ cultural referents in mathematics; Gutiérrez (2013) highlights strategies and findings across studies conducted to increase students’ critical political stance of inquiry and demonstrates ways their teachers enact “creative insubordination” (p. 15) in service to humanizing pedagogy within math classrooms and throughout their schools more broadly; and lastly, Stinson, Bidwell, and Powell (2012) emphasize positioning social justice within math instruction focused on topics like racial profiling as a means of relevance, reflection,
and transformative action for students. In the case of the studies mentioned above, humanizing practices are in service to helping improve mathematical dexterity, acknowledging that these methods of challenging inequity in the context of math curriculum can promote transformation.

The literature offers insight into how educators push humanizing pedagogy amid the confines of dehumanizing educational banking systems (Freire, 2018); however, the political barriers can be immovable. Irizarry and Brown (2014) focus on teaching students critical qualitative research methods through high school elective courses in their research of several participatory action research projects in urban schools that position students as critical researchers. Irizarry and Brown (2014) signal similar political challenges affirmed in Land’s (2019) study, which occur when teachers and administrators are misaligned in challenging inequity in educational systems, as del Carmen Salazar (2013) mentions as critical to humanizing practices. Irizarry and Brown (2014) note that students “became increasingly critical of the educational opportunities offered to them, and as they developed a burgeoning sense of critical consciousness, they sometimes critiqued the practices of their teachers (p. 10). Hence, one administrator shutting down a project prematurely due to students’ increasing questions about inequities in their educational experience. Among these studies, teachers and their students acknowledge the political tensions, yet the capability to enact humanizing pedagogy in schools that serve marginalized communities where teaching expectations aligned with proficiency on state tests. Through various academic domains, the research reveals how educators take on elements of humanizing pedagogy in classrooms.

Aligned with Camangian’s research, Falkner’s (2019) critical ethnography study cites humanizing practices’ relational and academic aspects. Falkner (2019) studied a class of mostly Black and LatinX first graders in an urban school in Texas. Falkner (2019) found that the
students’ Black/ Afro Latina teacher created what bell hooks (1990) defines a “homeplace” in their classroom using “sense-making practices which drew on their racially specific knowledge and experience, they were able. . .to imagine possibilities for racial justice” (pg. 42). Falkner’s (2019) findings align with Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte’s (2019) humanizing pedagogical strategies to teach for liberation. The first-grade teacher in Falkner’s (2019) study welcomes multiple ways of knowing, question-driven pedagogy, and communal responsibility, all of which Johnson, Bryan, and Boutte’s (2019) present as asset-based practices that all teachers can use to counter “fake love,” in the research article’s push for revolutionary love that humanizes teaching.

Likewise, Osorio’s (2018) research on enacting humanizing pedagogy finds that relationships between teacher and student are primary to consider academic improvements when engaging students in a more critical teaching approach. Through action research, Osorio (2018) implemented culture circles to resist the mandated reading curriculum. Culture circles are relationship-building practices where teachers regularly engage students with the intention of students using their knowledge to “take action to disrupt the systems of oppression that society marks as normative” (Osorio, 2018, p. 8). Nestled within children’s literature reflective of her native Spanish-speaking second graders’ cultural experiences, Osorio (2018) found that culture circles promoted critical consciousness with her students using textual themes that included linguistic pluralism and Spanish not seen as necessary as English. The study (Osorio, 2018) demonstrates that to enact humanizing pedagogy, the researcher had to “learn to blur the lines between the teacher and student roles” and move beyond her school’s prescribed basal readers to engage students in literature discussion about the text “reflected her students lived experiences” (pg. 19). The relational nature of humanizing pedagogy affirmed in Osorio’s (2018) findings
capture the capability of one teacher-researcher to pursue a path toward “mutual humanization” (Freire, 2018, p. 56) among her students, which is an essential tenant of humanizing pedagogy. Osorio’s (2018) study is situated within a growing body of research that focuses on enacting humanizing practices to challenge linguistic racism in schools, specifically Spanish-speaking students. These studies on linguistic racism include authentic relationship-building to create safe spaces as a central humanizing practice in support of students’ academic achievement (de los Ríos, 2019; DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Franquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; Fránquiz, 2012; del Carmen Salazar, 2008; Seltzer & de los Ríos, 2018; Zisselsberger, 2016).

Without a specific focus on academics, there are studies on how educators enact humanizing pedagogy in service to the classroom environment, related to how teachers create and manage their classrooms' community and culture. Except for Ullucci (2009), I see the literature related to humanizing pedagogy in service to the classroom environment, leaning strongly toward culturally responsive classroom management to direct humanizing pedagogy. As previously noted, Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as teaching “to and through [students’] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (p. 26); culturally responsive pedagogy is purposed to “close interactions among ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement” (p. 27). However, with culturally responsive pedagogy’s asset-based approach to the classroom environment, culture, and management, it is essential to note the complexity of these somewhat interchangeable terms and their tension with humanization. Casey, Lozenski, and McManimon (2013) note that “the definition of classroom management, especially in the last twenty years, has shifted to include issues of the classroom environment, communication, and planning, discipline and order” (p. 41).
Casey, Lozenski, and McManimon (2013) go on to challenge the concept of management within humanizing pedagogy, acknowledging:

> Once understanding one’s students becomes a requirement to manage them, rather than a pedagogical imperative for authentic learning, we are caught in the dehumanizing rhetoric and practice(s) of neoliberalism: of structuring classrooms for the purposes of better serving the needs and demands of global capitalism rather than the needs and demands of students. (p. 51-52)

This tension is not as directly stated in the subsequent studies synthesizing humanizing practices in service to classroom culture and management but remains an essential consideration in examining the classroom environment and humanizing pedagogy.

Early studies in culturally responsive classroom management (Brown, 2003, 2004; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomilson-Clarke, 2003) note teachers' significance in developing respectful, caring, personal relationships with their students. Additionally, these studies demonstrate that teachers enact culturally responsive/humanizing practices by building caring learning communities where connectedness creates a safe place to learn and a vibrant classroom environment where students experience joy, take on challenge and risk, and exercise trust with their teachers and classmates. Ullucci’s (2009) study of humanizing classroom practices featured six white teachers grades second through sixth and found that their practices align with cultural relevant pedagogies (Gay, 1993, 2002, 2010, 2013; Hoff, 2018; Ladson- Billings, 1995, 2014; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Ware, 2006; Paris, 2012). Ullucci’s (2009) study's common threads are that they all had visible manifestations of diversity in their classrooms representing their students. Additionally, the teachers all brought feelings and emotions into their learning spaces; they openly acknowledged race and racism through everyday interactions
consistent with previously referenced studies focused on culturally responsive classroom management (Ullucci, 2009).

Aligned with Ullucci’s findings, Milner and Tenroe (2010) studied classroom management practices of urban middle school teachers and found that those with the most vigorous management practices were not classrooms of overrepresented teacher control, but ones that aligned with culturally responsive principles (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive principles (Gay, 2000) converge with tenets of humanizing practices, precisely the notion that is trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization Salzar (2013). Miner and Tenroe (2010) report that middle school teachers who effectively managed their classrooms of diverse learners all shared the values and practices of differentiating between equity and equality with management strategies and immersing themselves into students’ “life worlds” to leverage positive management. Furthermore, Miner and Tenroe (2010) suggest that teachers who created productive learning environments demonstrated a keen understanding of “intersection and divergence” along the lines of race, ethnicity, and sociocultural experiences concerning themselves and their students, and these teachers were also adept with building community by allowing students to have “voice and perspectives” in defining their shared classroom (p. 598).

The research demonstrates ways educators enact aspects of del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) humanizing pedagogy tenets. These are somewhat demarcated by humanizing pedagogy in service to academics, classroom environment or management, and studies with both elements included as a research focus. Additionally, the research signals the complexity, especially with classroom culture and environment. This complexity is rooted in that a teacher’s charge to “manage” students can present paradoxes to raising students’ critical consciousness in school settings to inevitably be able to challenge inequity in the educational system as a way of
promoting transformation (del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Casey, Lozenski, & McManimon, 2013). Ultimately, the research illuminates the possibilities to enact some aspects of del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) noted humanizing practices that honor students and elicit qualities of human uniqueness and human nature (Haslam, 2006) in the face of dehumanizing reform conditions. The research also demonstrates the significance of guiding school leaders and teachers to attend to students in humanizing ways in the face of high-stakes testing, which, as research presented in this section of the dissertation shows, will likely better position students to take on schools’ academic demands.
Chapter 3 Introduction: Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact amid dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform. Chapter 2 wove two different historical perspectives of education reform together—one driven by neoliberal legislation and policy and the other driven by liberation education and humanizing efforts—demonstrating the challenges that classroom teachers face with enacting humanization or liberation education. Therefore, this study investigated how classroom teachers in urban charter schools, amid current neoliberal education reform, enacted humanizing pedagogy. The study sought to understand how the teachers’ humanizing practices exist at a time when standardization, uniformity, and compliance (Au, 2009, 2010; Brathwaite, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hursh, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan & Heilig, 2008; Menken, 2006, 2008, 2010; Slater & Griggs, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Valenzuela, 2004), characterize the mainstream reform.

The following sections of Chapter 3 describe the study’s methodology and methods. The critical sections of Chapter 3 first explain the study’s case study methodology and how the methodology interacts with critical race theory and critical pedagogy. The remaining sections examine case study methods used to identify and select participants, choose the research site, gather and analyze data ensuring ethical and trustworthy means, and explain the analyzed data's representation.

Case Study Methodology

Case study methodology guided my research design, given its goal of exploring a bounded system or case. Humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools
represent the study’s bounded case. The origins of case study methodology are generally attributed to Le Play, a 19th-century sociologist and economist who examined working-class economic conditions. U.S. origins include pioneers of the Chicago Schools study in the early 1900s (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). Uniquely positioned, case studies serve to illuminate the phenomena under study; encapsulate the required research method, and use the case narrative to explain the analyzed data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). As a methodology, case study is:

- a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 73)

Building on Creswell and Poth’s (2016) definition of case study, Stake (1995) notes that a case study investigates and analyzes a single or collective case (also termed multi-case) to capture the complexity of the study’s object. Stake (1995) has written extensively about case study methodology and defines it as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). The case study served as a useful vehicle to understand each teacher’s classroom and how they saw their humanizing practices as supportive of or potential obstacles to their students’ achievement. The particularities and complexities of each teacher’s humanizing classroom practices were instrumental in moving toward the broader goal of understanding the implementation of humanizing practices within high-stakes testing environments.
Regarding the complexities and particularities of each case, Stake (1995) differentiates the three types of case studies: “intrinsic,” “instrumental,” and “collective instrumental.” I chose to employ a collective instrumental case study methodology, which means that more than one case (or teacher) in my research advances understanding humanizing practices in urban schools amid high-stakes testing environments. Stake (1995) maintains that a researcher can go beyond seeking an intrinsic understanding of each case. The collective instrumental case study involves studying “multiple cases simultaneously or sequentially in an attempt to generate a still broader appreciation of a particular issue” (Crowe et al., 2011, p. 2). With a case study, the phenomenon is referenced as the quintain and seen as conditions that researchers might study (Stake, 2013). Stake (2013) clarifies that collective case research starts with the quintain and notes that “to understand [a collective case] better, we study some of its single cases—its sites or manifestations. But it is the quintain that we seek to understand. We study what is similar and different about the cases in order to understand the quintain better” (p. 6). With a collective case study, researchers take a “particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. . . the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself” (Stake, 2013, p. 8). In this study, I will examine each case individually and then collectively evaluate them holistically as a single study.

Of additional importance, I adopted a narrative approach to supplement the collective instrumental case study to guide its methodology. Savin-Badin and Major (2013) argue the problematic nature of viewing case study as a methodology when many researchers pair other methodologies with case study without acknowledging its role. Savin-Badin and Major (2013) disagree with the view of case study as an outright methodology, and they argue “that case study researchers most often adopt methods from pragmatic qualitative research…grounded
theory…ethnography… phenomenology, narrative inquiry… and action research” (p. 157). I adopted narrative inquiry as a companion methodological approach to my collective instrumental case study methodology. As Connelly and Clandinin (2006) argue, the development and implementation of narrative inquiry are stimulated by understanding the human experience in which humans, solely and collectively, live lives that create stories. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) write:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)

Likewise, Selmo (2015) posits that the narrative approach can help “illuminate individual experiences located within broader social and cultural structures, facilitating self-reflection” (para. 10). Therefore, narrative inquiry presented an opportunity for research participants to offer their stories of how they enacted humanizing practices and pedagogy and validated their classroom-based practices to include the broader context of current education reform policies and practices.
Additionally, narrative inquirers should not “bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather… find ways to inquire into participants’ experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process… [narrative inquirers] too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2003, p. 47). As an African American woman educated in the deep South and a career educator, I have classroom experience in crafting curriculum and experiences for students based on my knowledge of our lives, locality, sociocultural context, and history instead of scripted curriculum. As a teacher educator, I have supported teachers in urban schools with scripted standards-based curriculum and whose effectiveness rested almost solely on student test scores. I appreciate the narrative inquiry approach. It permitted honoring the research participants' stories and acknowledged that I existed within the construction of the participants’ stories as the researcher.

**Theoretical Perspective: Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory**

The study’s methodological approach of narrative inquiry plausibly aligns with its theoretical perspective (Barnes, 2016; Bell, 1980). Both critical race theory (CRT) and critical pedagogy center narrative methodology as synergistic between these theories and sociological scholarship (Barnes, 2016; Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso & Solórzano, 2002) and educational research (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, Parker, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Narrative inquiry’s kinship with CRT and critical pedagogy was critical in my decision to adopt narrative inquiry to supplement the methodological approach to the collective instrumental case study.

The study highlighted the narratives or stories of classroom teachers who disrupted the neoliberal master narrative with their counternarratives (Harper, 2009; Harper & Davis, 2012;
Milner, 2013). They detailed how they enacted humanizing practices that challenged conformity and individual meritocratic practices of neoliberalism. Furthermore, Pizarro (as cited by Thomas, 2009) affirms the narrative approach, noting that,

Critical race theorists argue that it is only through hearing the stories and having access to the experiential knowledge of those who are victimized by inequities that we can better understand the socially ingrained and systemic forces at work in their oppression.

(Pizarro, 1998, p. 10)

The lenses of CRT and critical pedagogy are imperative to analyzing classroom teachers enacting humanizing practices in urban charter schools that disrupt neoliberal education's mainstays. Teachers become more fully human and meet the demands of high-stakes testing. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, teachers often resist neoliberal power structures in their attempts to enact humanization or liberation education.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided understanding how classroom teachers in urban schools foster humanizing classrooms environments in an era of high-stakes testing accountability:

1. What are the critical humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

2. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools engage in humanizing classroom practices with their students within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?
3. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools perceive humanizing practices as supportive of or as obstacles to academic achievement for African American students in high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

**Case Study Methods: Research Design**

The following section provides details regarding the research study’s design. The information that follows includes site selection, participant identification and selection, data collection, analysis and representation methods, and trustworthiness and ethics related to the study.

**Site Selection**

The research took place across three state or locally-authorized charter schools in Memphis. Two of the research participants teach in locally-authorized district charter schools, and one teaches in a state-authorized charter school. All of the teachers work within a Charter Management Organization (CMO) comprised of three-to-five schools within each charter organization. It is important to understand the authorization differences. The state’s authorized charters are part of the Achievement School District (ASD), which CMOs to operate “priority” schools (schools in the bottom 5% of the state’s Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) results) (Glazer & Egan, 2016; Horn & Wilburn, 2013). Glazer and Egan (2016) explain the criticism of the ASD:

The controversy surrounding the ASD includes more than the typical debates about charter schools and local control that dominate headlines in many cities. Deeply divergent views about the ASD are rooted in the historical experience of Memphis, and particularly the region’s highly charged racial dynamics that extend back into the 19th century. The experience of Memphis’ African American community with issues like
discrimination, segregation and desegregation, white flight, and the recent departure of six counties from the district shape the lens with which many residents interpret and understand the ASD’s mission. (p. 1)

These controversies underscore the complexities and complications of Tennessee’s state-run district.

Poverty levels for children in Memphis offer context regarding the research site. Delavega (2018) reports that as of 2017, 38% of children lived in poverty in Memphis. Of that 38%, approximately 25% represented non-Hispanic, Black children. The Tennessee Charter School Center’s (2020) 2020 Impact Report notes that of the 54 charter schools in Memphis serving over 16,000 children, African American students comprised 84%, and Hispanic students accounted for 12% of total students enrolled. Additionally, 65% of those students were designated economically disadvantaged. According to the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) (2019), the ASD authorizes 26 of the 54 charter schools in Memphis.

Participant Identification and Selection

Given Memphis’s complexities within my research setting, I sought participants who were currently teaching in the city’s charter schools and who had taught in a Memphis charter school for at least the previous three years. Additionally, participants had to be willing to participate in three 90-minute interviews and share examples of lesson plans or professional learning materials. As a collective case study, the selected teachers spanned grades K-12; the study’s participants included one elementary, one middle school, and one high school teacher. The number of participants aligns with the suggested number for a collective case study, and still, each teacher represents an individual case within the broader collective case (Creswell & Poth).
As Stake (1995) notes, “the first criterion [in case selection] should be to maximize what we can learn” (p. 4). Stake further describes specific inquiry as criteria for case selection: 1) Is the case relative to the quintain?; 2) Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?; and 3) Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts? (p. 23). I used purposeful sampling to ensure the study’s relevance to its quintain. Patton (2014) asserts that purposeful sampling focuses on “case selection strategically in alignment with the inquiry’s purpose, primary questions, and data being collected” (p. 264). Patton (2014) also suggests that purposeful sampling allows researchers to select “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (p. 265).

Through purposeful sampling, teachers from a teacher leader program pilot that I had the opportunity to observe offered a potential participant pool. The program pilot served to help charter leaders in Memphis support and retain their most accomplished teachers. Charter school leaders nominated teachers for the pilot whom they believed helped students achieve. The charter leaders also felt the nominated teachers had shown evidence of developing and maintaining strong relationships with students, families, and colleagues as criteria for their nominated teachers. During the pilot, teachers engaged in a seven-month collaborative where they worked together in monthly six-hour sessions to develop and improve a particular focus area with their students that ranged from academics to social-emotional health.

After engaging with participants over seven months and having periodic conversations with their school administrators, three participants stood out as classroom teachers who epitomized many of del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) tenets of humanizing practices. The stories they shared from their classrooms, their inquiry into learning more about topics like the perpetuation of oppressive practices in urban schools, and the classroom changes they
implemented demonstrated philosophical alignment and action with some of del Carmen Salazar’s tenets of humanizing pedagogy. Again, these humanizing tenets include:

1. The reality of the learner is crucial.
2. Critical consciousness is imperative for students and educators.
3. Students’ sociocultural resources are valued, and extended-curriculum is permeable, not static.
4. Content is meaningful and relevant to students’ lives.
5. Students’ prior knowledge links to new learning.
6. Trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization.
7. Mainstream knowledge and discourse styles matter.
8. Students will achieve through their academic, intellectual, social abilities.
9. Student empowerment requires the use of learning strategies.
10. Challenging inequity in the educational system can promote transformation. (del Carmen Salazar, 2013, p. 138)

To Stake’s (1995) point of ensuring diversity across the cases relevant to the quintain, and based on what I knew about these teachers, they all represented diversity in race, ethnic background, teacher preparation experience, years of teaching, and school location. Gender is one identity marker that the participants share in common; they all identified as women. As a purposeful sample of three charter school teachers teaching under high-stakes testing conditions, the selected teachers were well-positioned to articulate their experiences regarding specific actions to humanize their students' learning experiences.

Before reaching out to any potential participants, I obtained institutional review board (IRB) approval from my institution (see Appendix A). During the study’s enrollment phase, I shared the study’s flyer to provide more context regarding the participation criteria enumerated on the flyer (see Appendix B). Hallinan, Forrest, and Uhlenbrauck (2016) stress the importance of giving prospective participants time for questions and consideration before they sign the informed consent form during the study's recruitment or enrollment phase. During the enrollment phase, the selected participants had time to ask questions and seek additional clarification regarding participating in the study. As a matter of confidentiality, before conducting interviews,
I ensured that the participants read and signed the informed consent form, which included full disclosure, voluntary choice, and a notice of privacy and confidentiality in alignment with the University of Memphis’ ethics-focused Institutional Review Board guidelines for research involving human subjects. See Appendix D for consent form details.

Data Collection and Procedures

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative researchers engage in multiple forms of data collection. Once researchers review and assemble all data, they organize the data into categories or themes that consistently emerge across all study data sources. Regarding data collection for case studies, Creswell and Poth (2016) explain that case study is inclusive of diverse information sources, “such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials” (p. 75). For this collective case study, I used semi-structured interviews, documents/artifacts, and a research journal. As a reflection and follow-up measure after each interview, I requested documents like lesson plan examples, pictures, and descriptions of instances or activities that reflect how the teacher enacted humanizing practices with students in her classroom. All documents were shared electronically as a safety measure due to the COVID-19 health crisis. Additionally, I reviewed each participant’s school website, searched for social media postings, and published news articles about each participant’s school to understand more context regarding the teacher’s broader school environment. The combination of interviews, document review, and research journal reflections all helped to establish the participants’ experience with humanizing practices in the context of their classroom practices.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted three separate, hour-and-a-half-long semi-structured interviews with each participant. Seidman (2006) advises implementing the three-interview process suggesting that,
without context, there are limitations to exploring and understanding experiences and their meanings. Seidman (2006) asserts that the three-interview process allows the interviewer and participant to plumb the experience and to place it in context. The first interview establishes the context of the participant’s experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. (p. 17)

Seidman (2006) suggests centering the first interview through the participants’ life history, the second interview as a focus on present activities, and the last as an opportunity to reflect on the experiences shared, all of which focused on the quintain of the case study. The three interview protocols followed Seidman’s (2006) structural framework and question stems. I observed Seidman’s (2006) caution to respect each interview's focus, sequence, and structure. Additionally, Seidman (2006) stressed the importance of a suggested range of three days to one week between interview rounds to build a substantial relationship, momentum, and continuity throughout the process (for the interview guide, see Appendix C). Most of the interviews were at least a week apart.

The interviews were all conducted using Zoom, which has digital audiovisual recording capabilities. Some participants chose to use the audio-only feature; some used the audio and video features during their interviews. As the interviewer, I used the audiovisual features of Zoom during all interviews. The interview protocols guided all of my questions during each interview to ensure consistency and thoroughness across interviews. Table 1 presents a crosswalk between the general content of the questions and the session in which the question appeared.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Content</th>
<th>Sample Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal definitions of humanizing and dehumanizing practices in education more broadly and the school, the teachers’ classrooms (considering practices within and outside of the school’s control)</td>
<td>What have terms like liberation education or humanizing classroom practice meant to you in terms of your classroom? (Interview 1) Given what you have shared about the experiences that led you to teach and the work you’re currently doing in your classroom, what is your understanding of how you are enacting humanization or liberation education? (Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifts toward humanizing conditions within education more broadly, at the school level, and the teachers’ classrooms</td>
<td>Given what you have shared about the experiences that led you to teach and the work you’re currently doing in your classroom, what is your understanding of how you are enacting humanization or liberation education? How has this understanding developed over time? (Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions in education that hinder and that help teachers enact humanizing practices within schools</td>
<td>How do your school's policies, practices, protocols, and requirements promote or hinder you from challenging inequity regarding your students’ learning experiences? (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and rules of engagement to make school a more humanizing experience, what teachers, leaders, students, and families are doing and not doing</td>
<td>In interview one, you mentioned broader practices in education and society that support and create obstacles to liberation education. How do you think about the roles of oppression and privilege as they relate to your role as a teacher (critical consciousness)? How do you think about the roles of oppression and privilege as they relate to your students (critical consciousness)? (Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Content</th>
<th>Sample Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical humanizing practices that each participant enacts</td>
<td>Do you link your students’ prior knowledge to new learning? If so, share examples. (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you believe that mainstream knowledge and discourse styles matter? If so, why? (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me how your students achieve through their academic, intellectual, social abilities? (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me about the learning strategies that you use in your classroom. How do you see the strategies empowering or disempowering your students? (Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews, I remained cautious of Stake’s (2013) warning that the interview was “less about the interviewee than about the case… the way the interviewee sees the case operating is essential knowledge, and the researcher needs to find out a little about the interviewee to understand his or her interpretations” (p. 31). I was also mindful of Stake’s (2013) assertion to be respect each teacher’s voice and experience, per critical race theory (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004, Parker, 2015; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002), as instrumental to understanding the quintain. I ensured that the teachers’ narratives were prominent in shaping my understanding and interpretations of the humanizing practices the participants enacted within their high-stakes testing school environments.

**Documents/Artifacts**

In addition to the stories constructed through interviews, I asked participants to provide examples of documents that might further illustrate the humanizing practices. Scott (2014) recommends the following criteria to gauge the quality of documents used in qualitative research
1) authenticity, 2) credibility, 3) representation and 4) meaning. I evaluated the documents as authentic and credible if the documents were plausible, in light of what I learned and gleaned from the participants’ interviews. My judgment of authenticity and credibility also took into account logical errors, versions of documents, and potential exclusion from the documents into account (Scott, 2014).

Representation was essential documentation that teachers provided. With representation, I considered whether practices “represented” by the documents and interviews were characteristic of the teachers’ consistent practices or if the documentation and corroborated interview information represented isolated instances. Lastly, I considered the documents in light of the study’s intended audience of educators and policy-makers.

**Research Journal**

To capture reflections throughout the study, I entered notes and organizational sketches in a research journal that I maintained for the study duration. In addition, I used the journal to capture thoughts during the interview to use in crafting more detailed analytic memos. Ortlipp (2008) notes that critical reflection during the research process facilitates essential reflexivity and that journaling also helps researchers take a balcony view of the study and its elements, which might dictate needed changes to the research study’s design. Ortlipp (2008) writes:

One of the concrete effects of keeping and using a critically reflective research journal, in which I wrote about my emerging understanding of research methodologies and reflected on different views about gathering (or generating) data, was that changes were made to the research design. In some instances, critical self-reflection prompted me to change my approach during the research process, to use methods that I had not initially planned to
use, and to discard pre-planned ways of going about the research that I had included in my research proposal. (p. 699)

The research journal allowed me to reflect in ways that were discriminant, conceptual, and theoretical. For example, I found that my initial approach to data analysis shifted from following Stake’s (2013) guidance, as I originally proposed, to using Saldaña’s (2009) first and second cycle coding to understand the data. As mentioned, the research journal provided for reflexivity throughout the research process.

**Data Analysis: Interview Transcription and Documents**

I used Zoom’s automatic audio transcription feature to capture each participant’s interview verbatim during all interviews. I made slight transcript edits to ensure that all of the teacher and school information was de-identified. I read the entire transcripts and began creating and applying two types of first-cycle codes to the data—descriptive and process—for each case. First-cycle codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018; Saldaña, 2009) help the qualitative researchers draft initial generalized concepts from the data. I first applied descriptive codes that captured the main topic of data (e.g., “relationships,” “content access,” “reality of the learner”). The descriptive codes helped codify topics in the data more than actions; therefore, process codes became a part of the first coding cycle. The process codes, coupled with the descriptive codes, served to reduce the volume of data (e.g., “developing trusting relationships,” knowing students as individuals,” “making content relevant,” “challenging inequitable policies or practices”). These first-cycle codes laid the groundwork to reduce the data further.
Second-cycle codes and pattern coding specifically (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018; Saldaña, 2009) challenge qualitative researchers to group initial codes to identify emergent themes or findings. I drew patterns inductively from the first-cycle codes to examine more closely at each case’s themes (e.g., “pressures of standardization and testing,” “incorporating learning strategies that help students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities,” “understanding and using students' realities to help them access academic content”). The first and second coding cycles helped me to develop a balcony-level view across all of the data. This analysis also helped me locate specific information in the conversations and documents versus a static, compartmentalized view of the data. Figure 5 illustrates the coding processes employed to reach the study’s findings.

**Figure 5**

*First-cycle Single Case and Second-cycle Cross-case Analysis Processes*

Stake (2013) suggests that qualitative researchers compose the final assertions or findings before drafting the final report. This step of generating findings forms the basis of the case report or representation of the data. Stake (2013) stresses quality and complexity over quantity with the
number of assertions the researcher seeks, which I carefully considered as I arrived at the study’s findings discussed in Chapter 4.

**Trustworthiness, Confidentiality, and Limitations**

**Trustworthiness**

I used member checking to help improve the accuracy of the data and its representation. Stake (2013) stresses that member checking is a “vital technique for field researchers” and that after drafting a report, [researchers should] have participants read to flag instances of inaccuracy or misrepresentation” (p. 37). Stake (2013) notes that member checking also supports data trustworthiness as a form of triangulation for each case and then across cases—this process aids in clarifying meaning. To ensure transparency and assist in accurately representing participants’ views, each participant had the opportunity to review the data their interview generated.

Additionally, a peer review of the final dissertation drafts helped improve the inquiry's trustworthiness. Anney (2014) suggests peer debriefing to improve trustworthiness and insists that researchers share their “research process and findings with neutral colleagues… [and that the process] help[s] to identify the categories that are out of the framework of research questions…” (pp. 14-15). Member checking and receiving peer feedback helped me identify information requiring clarification to address the study’s research questions and enrich detailed findings. Lastly, I used a research journal to track and connect thoughts, note similarities in findings, and reflect on any emerging biases along the way. Through journaling, I kept track of my movements and progress throughout the research process.

**Confidentiality**

I considered ethical matters related to the dissertation’s methods throughout the study. With principles of a priori vulnerability, respect for persons, and justice, I used confidential
methods to ensure that I did not identify the participants or their schools. The study examines the classroom practices of teachers in charter schools located in Memphis. However, with over 75 charter schools in Memphis in the combined local and state-authorized charter sectors (Tennessee Charter School Center, 2020), the teachers’ subject or grade and gender identifiers are inconspicuous descriptors for a specific school.

**Limitations**

As with any research design, this study has limitations. The trustworthiness measures undertaken helped to improve the study’s overall design. However, a challenge with many qualitative research designs is generalization, which is the study’s primary limitation. While I looked across three different teachers’ classrooms in three different charter schools, the study’s findings remain specific to the participants’ contexts. The three charter school classroom teachers who participated in the study teach across the full span of grades K-12. This enriches the findings; yet, the classroom teachers are located in the same Southern region and have all been a part of a specific teacher-leader program. The cases presented in the research study are not widespread, universal narratives. The cases are also not directions or prescriptions for developing relationships with students or instructing students. Instead, the study’s primary goal was to offer insight into humanizing practices and how teachers in urban charter schools enact them to demonstrate that teachers disrupt the inherently dehumanizing aspects of teaching in high-stakes learning environments. This broader view should be useful across the K-12 landscape of U.S. public schools.

**Data Representation**

The study’s findings adhere to the traditional content of a case report. Stake (2013) urges that researchers go from an “explanation of the research and background ideas to a description of
the research, an interpretation [assertions], and a summary” (p. 79). While Stake (2013) notes the essential components of the case report, others stress flexibility. Baxter and Jack (2008) state:

It is important that the researcher describes the context within which the phenomenon is occurring as well as the phenomenon itself. There is no one correct way to report a case study. However, some suggested ways are by telling the reader a story, by providing a chronological report, or by addressing each proposition. (p. 555)

Baxter and Jack’s (2008) mention of the case report unfolding as a story aligns with the methodology of narrative inquiry, which helped create a continuum from data gathering to data reporting in the dissertation. The case report makes each teacher’s voice and experiences prominent with reporting flexibility, per critical race theory (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, Parker, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Each teacher’s story was instrumental to understanding the quintain of the collective case. The case report balances the narratives of each teacher’s experience through opening vignettes before delving into the cross-case analysis, which reveals the findings of the collective case. Next is the case report in Chapter 4, which explores the key findings in the data. Chapter 5 will draw conclusions from the data, assert the findings' implications, and suggest future research recommendations.
Chapter 4: Findings and Results

Introduction

The current study examined the humanizing practices that classroom teachers enact in urban charter schools amid neoliberal education reform, namely high-stakes testing. The study's purpose was to illustrate examples of humanizing pedagogy as they operate within the larger context of noted disparities along the lines of race and class within America's public education system. These are examined closely in Chapter 2 through a trace of historical developments focusing on America's intentional dehumanization of African Americans. Hopefully, this study provides insight into the humanizing practices of classroom teachers in charter schools, which are pinnacles of neoliberalism, and illuminate ways to disrupt the dominant reform thought of standardization, conformity, assessment, and ranking as means to improve student achievement.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What are the critical humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

2. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools engage in humanizing classroom practices with their students within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

3. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools perceive humanizing practices as supportive of or as obstacles to academic achievement for African American students in high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

The research questions offer a structure for the specific questions asked during the teachers’ interviews. The interview questions also guided the study as I engaged in note-taking and
reflected on the interviews and the documents that teachers submitted to highlight their humanizing practices.

Four main sections organize the current chapter. The first section presents vignettes as single cases that offer a glimpse of each humanistic teacher and feature the most prominent humanizing practices in their classroom stories. The first section also aligns with the study's first research question in that the vignettes name the paramount humanizing practices in each teacher's practice. The next section of the chapter discusses the key findings that emerged in the data through a cross-analysis of the teachers’ humanistic practices and includes accompanying documents that showcase their cross-cutting practices. The second research question organizes the next section and represents a critical aspect of the study's collective case. In addition to identifying the themes of humanizing practices across the teachers, the second section provides a nuance of how each emergent theme is situated within the teachers' collective practice or collective case. In alignment with the final research question, the third section deals with the collective themes that surfaced related to how the teachers perceive their humanizing practices as helping or hindering their African American students in achieving academically. Lastly, I conclude the chapter with a final summary of the major themes that emerged via collective case analysis.

**Classroom Teachers’ Humanizing Practices**

March 13, 2020, marked the start of the United States' official state of emergency due to COVID-19, and in response, the nation's schools closed the remainder of the academic year. The southern region in which this research study takes place saw the bipartisan reopening of schools for in-person learning in the ‘20-‘21 school year, where most schools in urban areas of the region in which the study takes place opened virtually, and suburban areas opened schools for in-person
learning. It is important to note that teachers interviewed for the study all work in entirely virtual classrooms with their students, which adds a new layer of knowledge regarding how teachers in urban charter schools enact humanizing practices. The following section profiles a glimpse of each teacher's critical humanizing practices enacted in their classrooms with the backdrop of teaching during a pandemic as a notable aspect and addresses the study’s first research question, “What Are the Critical Humanizing Practices That Classroom Teachers in Urban Charter Schools Enact within Dehumanizing High-stakes Testing Environments Characteristic of Neoliberal Education Reform?; Profiles of Humanistic Classroom Teachers in Urban Charter Schools?”

**Anna: The "Ride or Die for My Students" Humanizing Teacher**

Since a little girl, Anna always wanted to be a teacher. She grew up in the Midwest to parents who never went to college but instilled in her a love of learning and the importance of post-secondary education. After what Anna calls a horrible experience in calculus, which she found ironic because of her love for math and history of academic success as a math student, she found herself second-guessing teaching. This speaks to the power that every teacher has in the lives of their students. This power is something that Anna does not take lightly, as one high school math encounter shifted her dream to teach.

Once she entered college, Anna majored in Peace Studies and French, a major that afforded her travel abroad opportunities, and what she defines as "some pretty amazing internships that really [dove] deep[ly] into systemic problems in other parts of the world." Anna's experiences abroad pushed her to reflect on how she grew up as an American citizen and rekindled her teaching interests. She entered teaching through Teach for America (TFA), a national teacher recruitment corps with its supporters and critics. However, Anna saw TFA as a
means to a desired end- becoming a teacher. Given her experience in rural communities, similar to where she attended college, she applied to one of TFA's rural regions and remained at her placement school for four years, which is two years longer than her required commitment.

Anna has been a classroom teacher for ten years. Currently teaching at The Garden Middle School, the school is located in one of the Southern city's highest poverty areas. Anna, who identifies as a white woman, teaches 100% African American students, and her school is one of the twenty-seven schools within the state's "takeover" district comprised of schools that have been in the bottom 5% of the state's academic assessment program. Except for four schools that the state directly manages, charter management organizations manage the remaining portfolio of schools, all of which were once thought to be the answer to improving academics in these schools. At The Garden Middle School, almost 99% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. Currently teaching middle school math, Anna has the unique experience of teaching many of her students as 5th graders in the community's nearby elementary school, where Anna taught before coming to The Garden. This experience connects to one of three critical ways in which Anna enacts humanizing practices with her students. She builds trusting relationships with students and families; she creates a safe space for students by remaining consistent and reliable, and she knows and treats her students as individuals.

**Building Trusting Relationships**

Anna tells a story of two students who had given her a "run for her money" when she taught them in 5th grade. These students were receiving special education services to support emotional disturbance, and they taught Anna much about creating a culture and enacting practices that support emotional safety and regulation in her classroom. Anna worked with these students consistently to understand their behavior in class and motivate them to do their best
academically. Most recently, she also taught these same students as 7th graders at The Garden. Anna described when she sat near the two students as 7th graders in an awards assembly where the coveted teacher of the Quarter award was being announced. The award was for the teacher who had gone above and beyond her regular duty to support students academically, socially, and emotionally. Even with past turbulence, Anna had formed strong relationships with these students, and they jokingly told her that she would win the award. This was Anna's first year at the new school, although she taught some of the students at their previous elementary school, so she did not expect to win the award as a newer teacher. She was touched that the two girls were so confident that she would win the award, and she won. In Anna's reflection, she said, "for them to be the two to announce that [I should win the award] was [a] testament to how when you build relationships with kids, they never fail you." In reflecting on these students, Anna went on to say,

   As a teacher, you're always going to feel imperfect. . . and you're always going to feel like a bad teacher [at times]. And so I think it's just the testament to children. How forgiving and loving they are; like, even when you have failed kids, they remember more of the positives than they do the challenges. And so I think [for the students who told me I was going to get the award], just recognizing neither of us gave up on each other [is important].

   During the research project's data collection phase, schools across the world were in unprecedented remote learning modes, and Anna's school only offered a virtual learning option for students. Anna's focus on relationships, especially during a pandemic, is noteworthy. She explained,
The pandemic has definitely allowed us to, I think, work smarter not harder and divide and conquer and develop really deep relationships with specific groups of students. [At The Garden Middle School] you are responsible for this group of children [in addition to the students I teach] and guiding them to success. And I love that experience because it creates family in the school building. And that's another thing I remember growing up, my teachers feeling like my family. . .Teachers do get called mom, and I called my teacher [mom]. It's like I [am] someone who is more to you than just someone who gives you a grade or someone who teaches you. So, that is very important to me. . . I have that partnership with [students'] famil[ies], like we are the community, we are the tribe.

Another aspect of Anna's relationships with students and their families stems from Anna's residential proximity. Anna chooses to live in the same community where she teaches and, as previously mentioned, has had the unique opportunity to teach many of her current students a few years ago at an elementary where many of her students attended before coming to The Garden Middle School. Regarding forming relationships with students by living in community with them, Anna proudly shared,

I live in the neighborhood that I teach in so I live two streets behind The Garden. Living in the community definitely helps me to know what's going on in the community that my students live in. [I know] what life is like in the community. I know about the good parts about the community. I know about the challenges of the community. It allows me really close proximity and access to students and families. So, even during the time of COVID and social distancing. I delivered incentives to students. Also, since I have taught some of my students before, I know that my phone number is programmed into almost every family's; I am like a very accessible person. So, I do get calls and text messages. I'm like,
the first point of reference [for some families]. If they need something related to school, I think I've built that relationship through always answering my phone or always returning a call. . . [My] proximity both [with] phone [accessibility] and then actual physical proximity, I think allows me to see closely into the world of my students, whether I see them outside, whether I see them at their home with their families. I know where they [live and] who they live with. Now, this isn't everyone, but [for] a lot [of my students], I know my students who really have a tight-knit family unit and who have the supports and everything they need to find their own way through life in the school system. And then I know my students who, for whatever reason, do not.

Lastly, Anna attributes her ability to form strong relationships with her students and their families to the school community's overall culture and the school leader's expectations.

Regarding the support with building relationships with students that she receives from her school, Anna shared that "the thing that's really amazing about The Garden School is that the. . . strongest focus is on building community and. . . breaking down the school/community barrier."

Anna offered that even during the pandemic and virtual learning, the school continues to host community meals and distributions of food donations for students and families.

**Remaining Consistent and Reliable**

Stuit and Smith (2012) demonstrate in their research that charter schools have attrition rates twice as high as traditional public schools and that this coincides with increased percentages of inexperienced and uncertified teachers along with lower union membership rates. To Stuit and Smith's (2012) point, Anna sees consistency and reliability in her classroom practices and remaining at her school for multiple years as humanizing for her students. Anna notes,
Consistency and reliability are extremely important to humanizing and liberation practices when we talk about teaching the students that I teach because they have experienced years of school where they’ve had teachers to leave in the middle of the year. They’ve had years of school where their schools switched from being a [schooled governed by the local district] to being a school [taken over by the state] and from being a [traditional] public school to being a charter school and those years of transition lead to inconsistency, both in teaching and staffing in the adults that surround them. And for students who have a lot of stability in their families and around them in their friendships and in maybe other caretakers. . . If you are a student who has inconsistency outside of school and then also experienced that inside of school. It's very, very challenging to manage that constantly. The inconsistency [challenges trust]. Trust equals ability to learn. [Students] don't care until they know you care.

In contrast to some of her students' experience with inconsistency, Anna contemplates students' experiences in schools where teacher attrition is not as stark as in charters. She asserts,

When I think about school systems where students don't have to worry about that from year to year. That's just already given them a leg up because they have maybe a school that's had this same principal for 12 years and that principle's routines and culture [are] consistent amongst the staff from year to year [decreases] changes, adoptions, and shifts for the children each year. You know, they may be evolving within the staff but it's what's going to be best for the kids, and the kids aren't having to constantly adapt and change and just really train their brain [in] new ways of thinking. Continual adaptation to trying to hit a moving target [is], I think, sometimes what we put our kids through in education.
Except for teaching at one school for a year, where Anna was not aligned philosophically with the leadership's approach to school culture and professionalism, Anna has been at her previous schools for 3-4 years. The current school year is Anna's second year at The Garden, and she is adamant that she no plans of leaving soon.

**Treating Students as Individuals**

Anna's work to build trust with her students and her consistency with them guide her to treat her students as individuals. Discussed in the literature review, criticisms of charters and neoliberal education reform, in general, challenge the promotion of conformity, uniformity, and standardization (Au, 2009, 2010; Brathwaite, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hursh, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan & Heilig, 2008; Menken, 2006, 2008, 2010; Slater & Griggs, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Valenzuela, 2004), and position these as dehumanizing practices in schools. Anna names her ability to see and treat her students as individuals as a critical aspect of how she enacts humanizing pedagogy. She explains,

> [humanizing pedagogy] looks like knowing and treating every student as an individual.

Whether it's a student who has an individualized learning plan or the student that I know super, super well [because they spend] a lot of their time outside of school with me in different activities or different mentorships, they're still as much of an individual in my classroom as a student who just showed up yesterday. I've got less time to get to know [my new students], but I still need to get to know [them] on a very deep level... relationships and individuality really ground [my practice].

Teaching during a pandemic in an entirely virtual space adds new dimensions to relationship-building and understanding students as individuals. While remote teaching and learning can create obstacles to developing relationships with students based on their
individuality, Anna does not allow physical distance in her classroom to deter her from connecting with individual students and notes various ways to know and treat her students as individuals. She shares, "it's through doing a student interest survey, asking questions that encourage [students] to share [information] about themselves, about their families about their relationships about their interests about, you know, their communities, their histories." Anna still maintains a practice that she calls Circle, which she started in previous years during in-person learning. She describes Circle as an opt-in time for students to build a collective community by sharing their thoughts, feelings, and wonderings about topics they generate. Anna uses Circle to learn about each student and takes what she learns to allow, as she says, "students space and time to engage in class in a way that they feel comfortable." Anna describes Circle as a critical time for her to learn from her students so that she positions herself to teach them as individuals.

**Marissa: The "Noticing is My Superpower" Humanizing Teacher**

To make an extra $300 a week to support her family, Marissa came into teaching as an instructional aid and has been a lead teacher in her kindergarten classroom at Bridge Meadows Elementary school for three and a half years. Marissa's choice to work at Bridge Meadows Elementary School was intentional and beyond her desire for extra money. Bridge Meadows is within a network of charter schools that she sought out for one of her children whom she did not feel was getting the differentiated attention needed to support him as a reader. As a distinction in charter management, the local school district authorizes Bridge Meadows, which is not within the state's turnaround schools portfolio. She appreciated what she saw in the school as it related to her son's academic improvements and, similarly, wanted to be a part of helping other children succeed. In her reflection on how she came into teaching, Marissa says that early experiences
planted seeds before becoming a mother. She has always loved to work with kids and teach in other capacities.

Bridge Meadows is a special place for Marissa. She sees her presence there as an answer to a prayer. Bridge Meadows offers the blessing of being in a place that feels like home and space where her "gifts and talents could be utilized." Marissa sees Bridge Meadows as a place where she and her colleagues are "for each other" and a place where kids are genuinely "greeted with hugs and smiles." To give additional context, Marissa notes that her families are lower-income wage earners and that the school's location is in a section of the city plagued with higher crime rates. More specifically, Marissa appreciates that Bridge Meadows is intentional about providing whole child supports to students. Marissa notes,

Our families are either unemployed or they are working jobs that might be in warehouses, factories, restaurants, serving as waitresses. And then we have a percentage, you know, that are more middle-class families. A lot of our families live in the community of our school. We have a majority, I would say maybe 93% African-American and maybe the other seven or 6%, uh, Hispanic. Um, and 1% will be other. . . So we go from kinder all the way up to high school. So the entire family, if there's a household of four, everybody is in our schools. Um, and our babies come. . . Our school, and I think all of the schools in our city, public schools in our city, students receive free lunch and that sort of thing. So [when] they come [to school], everything is met for them. All of their needs are met. So school supplies, meals, uniforms, initial uniforms are provided for them so that all they need to do is show up.

Marissa expressed fear that her young learners' first significant entry into their K-12 schooling experience is virtual. However, as she shared ways in which she enacts humanizing
pedagogy, especially within remote teaching and learning spaces, it quickly became apparent that her superpower is her ability to see her students because of the particular care that she takes to notice them and be attentive to them based on whom she sees before her as individuals. A second critical way that her superpower of noticing shows up is in her advocacy for her students and her growing confidence to challenge her school's power structure when administrators make decisions that are not best suited developmentally for her early learners or that are not considerate of their cultural identities.

**Noticing and Attentiveness**

As Marissa talked about Bridge Meadows, she beamed as she described her school’s collective work to ensure that students are known, loved, and educated. She noted these as core values that her entire school community works to embrace. In her reflection on how she notices and knows her students, Marissa shared,

You know, I think that I am more of a cheerleader, um, to them. And kind of a mom in a sense as well. [My students] call me their school mom. Um, because I do care about them first. I care about, you know, when I see them in [the] threshold, whether they've had enough sleep, whether they are hungry, whether they are sad, um, noticing how they come into the hallway. What are they wearing? Are they wearing the uniform? Is it the same uniform from yesterday? Has it been washed? Um, is it, is it torn? What condition is it in? So noticing them, um, and, starting right off the bat, you know, how are you, how was your morning, how was your night? Did you sleep well? Um, and really just getting to know them on a personal level. You know, their siblings' names, their birthdays, their nanas, and TTS, you know, really just becoming a part of their family in a sense, extended family. Definitely, but [this virtual environment] really doesn't change it. The
only part I think for me, that changes is the, um, is the contact, not being able to put my
hand on their shoulder.

Marissa was clear that her aim is not to minimalize the challenge of remote learning. She named
many ways that a lack of shared space and proximity are challenging, especially for her
kindergarten students. However, she consistently leaned into her superpower of noticing to
make the best of physical distance with her students.

So in this, in this virtual space, I take the same approach, you know, when, when students
are logging on, um, I say my greeting, you know, hello, and I'm already, I'm already
looking, I'm already looking [to see] who's coming on sleepy. Who's probably still in
PJ's, who's crying. Who's holding onto the blanket whose camera is, you know, in a
different direction. What am I looking at? How are they, how are they presenting
themselves in the camera? You know, are they ready to learn? And so I can kind of gauge
who is, who's not, [and] who needs a little bit more time.

The power of noticing while teaching remotely cannot be underestimated. If a student's camera is
on (and sometimes the challenge is simply having the camera on), a teacher only has the space of
a small square and whatever appears in that space and is audible in the space to understand a
student at any given moment. Marissa is expected to ensure that her kindergartners know letter
sounds and names, begin recognizing and writing sight words, read and comprehend grade-level
text, understand base-ten counting methods (to name a few) solely based on what she can share,
show, say, or instruct from the space of a small camera window. Marissa had numerous
examples of how her ability to notice is absolutely critical to helping students learn and be
emotionally well.
I noticed one of my scholars kept coming to the camera. Each day, she could come into the camera a little bit less engaged. And to the point where she came with her blanket and basically covered her shoulders and just put her head down. So I'm thinking, Are you bored, are you, you know, what's going on? But she's a, you know, top performing student, but she's not engaged in the class, and I really could use her voice to help push the other students to answer questions; kind of like, you know, be a leader in classroom so. . . I just turned it on, you know, I went for her so strong [until] she turned [it] around like 100%. I was like, ma'am, I need your brain. Come on, let's, let's do this. So I just targeted [her] and went for her until she gave me what I knew what I knew that she could do. Um, And I just didn't settle. I just, I did not settle. And that's tiring for me, honestly.

Marissa communicated that her "looking" and "seeing" are how she approaches knowing and loving her students, which she views as foundational to, yet always in tandem with, educating them. It is not lost that Marissa's care to notice and respond is taxing, even to a teacher with these as superpowers.

**Advocating and Challenging Inequity**

Humanizing pedagogy requires teachers and students to disrupt suppressive hierarchies that maintain asymmetrical power structures (Keet et al., 2009; Nieto, 2003). del Carmen Salazar (2013) argues that educators must consider challenging inequity in the educational system to promote transformation as an application of humanizing pedagogy. Marissa reflected on the unique inequities that the pandemic has exacerbated, particularly with schools choosing full remote and others choosing hybrid learning options for students. As recent as the start of the second semester of the pandemic's full school year, Bridge Meadows kept school doors closed to
all students. Marissa challenged her administrators, questioning their full remote policy. She argued,

We're doing the best we can in this [virtual] space, but it's, I don't think it's fair. It makes it very difficult for me to work with a student who I know. If I just could have them in front of me, you know, I know that if I can just stand there and say, come on, let's do it together. You know, if we're on the carpet, you know, and I'm in front of the board and we're all doing it together, just that, that live interaction, those chants together, you know, the energy. You know [teaching remotely] is very difficult and extremely frustrating, and I've voiced this to my school leaders.

Marissa explained that she understands the disproportionate adverse effects of the pandemic on African Americans and Latinx people. However, her challenge to her administrators was that they were not making a choice available to families and teachers who said they desired in-person instruction, especially for their youngest students for whom virtual learning has presented the most significant challenges and is most misaligned regarding developmental appropriateness. During the member checking phase of the research to ensure accuracy in the data presented, Marissa provided additional context noting that her school “reached out to survey parents and teachers several times to get a feel for who would attend in-person. As of today, about 20% of kindergarteners are now receiving in-person instruction. The remaining 80% are still receiving virtual instruction.”

Marissa sees it as her responsibility to continue amplifying her voice to advocate for her students. She had not won the in-person learning fight at the time of her participation in this study, but she had made inroads with other challenges she brought to her administrators' attention regarding the expectation to have all students in a virtual classroom at the same time
and the length of time that her students were expected to sit in front of their computer screens.

Marissa asserted,

I basically gave [administrators] the feedback that... we need to decrease the, the class size. Um, I have 18 students. I cannot engage with 18 students per question, per skill, [per] concept. I can't get a feel [for when] someone’s left out. So, um, with that, [I was] able to create a group A and a group B. The way I decided who was going to be in my group, was basically, what do I remember about student A. They are really sleepy when they come on at 8:00 AM, maybe better at 10:15, some of those students that needed a little extra time, um, understanding the concept or if there was a language barrier or anything. So I decided who would go in group A and group B based on [what I noticed about my students]... really knowing a whole lot about them initially, but just kind of getting a feel for that, uh, students that I felt like needed more attention than others.

During the research’s member checking phase, Marissa added additional context regarding practices inconsistent with her students' best interests. She argued,

While scholars have been provided with the technology to use at home, that is not enough. Families have poor internet access and the school's choice for security reasons to switch from a platform that was child friendly, to one that is corporate America friendly, requires more internet power in the home. This has an impact on quality of on camera interaction between students and teacher. Again, it is not fair. Scholars who are in the virtual space have lacked learning manipulatives, writing material and engaging digital resources which have historically been purchased by the school for in-person learning.
These examples are among many that Marissa shared, which demonstrate how she extends her noticing to action—action with her students' needs at the center, action that challenges what she sees as inequities holding her students back.

**Earlene: The "It's Not Real, If It's Not Relevant" Humanizing Teacher**

What do ranch dressing, banging speakers, and grilling ribs have to do with high school physics and Advanced Placement Chemistry? In Earlene's science classes, they have everything to do with students using experiences from their daily lived lives to enter the complex and sometimes intimidating content of higher-level science courses and master it. Earlene has been a science teacher within Justice Prep's K-12 charter school network for seven and a half years. She spent her first six years teaching seventh-grade science at one of Justice Prep's middle schools, and the current school year is her first year instructing upper-level high school science courses and chairing her school's science department at Justice Prep's high school. After only a few short moments with Earlene, her love for science and desire for her students to love science leap out with boldness. She shared that "AP Chemistry is like my dream position. I really enjoy it. When I was a student, [I] spent a lot of time studying chemistry in college. So I just really enjoyed chemistry and want to share that love with our Black and Brown students."

Earlene's mother played a major role in shaping who she is as a teacher in that her mother insisted on Earlene's participation in an over-a-century-old national youth development organization throughout most of Earlene's youth and teenage years. The leadership program focuses on diverse learning experiences that range from agriculture and gardening to poetry writing and public speaking, which are all designed to engender leadership and service among its members. Earlene's mother led programs within the organization. As Earlene explained, "My mom knew how interested I was in science. So anytime she was leading any science programs,
she would bring me along. She would have me help with those programs. So I might be leading the station of kids, talking about science in some capacity." Earlene's love for science led her to major in Interdisciplinary Studies, where she designed her undergraduate major of mostly math and chemistry courses. At the advice of her academic counselor, who recognized her gift for connecting with people and explaining information, Earlene pursued teaching as a way to combine many of her interests and talents. As a classroom teacher, Earlene enacts humanizing pedagogy in numerous ways; two critically important ways are making content meaningful and relevant to her students' lives and incorporating student choice as a tool to empower them as learners.

**Making Content Matter, Making Content Relevant**

Relevance is a crucial humanizing practice in Earlene's classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) and Gay (2010) center on honoring students' culture as an authentic means to leverage academic excellence. Ladson-Billings (2014) writes, "culturally relevant pedagogy is the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of an appreciation for culture" (p. 7). Earlene ensures that science content is relevant to students by creating entry points and consistent referents that are relatable and relevant to her students' lives and interests. Earlene communicated that she,

gives them those scientific experiences, just real-life experiences [that] they, like, they never saw as scientific. . . I would teach diffusion by talking about how my dad grills ribs. And how I can smell the ribs all the way inside the house, even though he's great grilling in the backyard, and they're able to put those scientific terms to real-life things. So, by the middle of the year, [my students are] using these [scientific] terms in real life. . . Using examples that are culturally relevant [is important]. Like one of my [scripted]
lessons [on waves] asked students if they had been to the beach before. . .[the curriculum] wanted me to ask if students had been to the beach before? [Out of] 30 kids in a classroom, maybe five [had been to the beach. That's] not going to help them understand what waves are. But [when] I asked them, how many of you have felt the thump from speakers. They related to that. They know what that feels like. I'm like what you're feeling [from the speakers] are sound waves. So being able to use examples that relate to students and being able to just show them that science is cool. Science is not just old white men in a book. Science is every day. Science is real life, [and] being able to show them that and experience that with them is the best.

Earlene finds ways to make her content relevant because she takes time to get to know her students and uses her relationships as motivation. When thinking about her students, whom she calls "resilient," she reflected, "There [are] some students that need motivation, and the motivation comes when you show them that you care. . . I use my relationships with students to push them because[science] is a subject that does not come naturally [for] a lot of students, especially the upper sciences." Earlene demonstrates that when her students know that she cares and when she makes content relevant, she creates mirrors and windows for her students - mirrors that reflect the value and importance of their lives and windows that help them acquire new knowledge to understand how science is real in their worlds.

**Incorporating Choice as a Learning Strategy to Empower**

Earlene sees culturally relevant teaching and the authentic relationships needed to teach in this way as equally crucial to giving students space and opportunity to manage what and how they want to learn. Among del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) tenants of humanizing pedagogy is the notion of student empowerment, which requires the use of learning strategies that "provide
students with reflective cognitive monitoring and metacognitive skills that facilitate student independence and enable students to self-monitor their own learning and progress" (del Carmen Salazar, 2013, p. 141). Aligned with this tenant of empowerment, Earlene describes a team charter that she had students develop to support their work in groups when she was teaching in-person and is currently trying to figure out how to adapt during virtual instruction.

The way the contract works is students decide on what they expect of themselves as a team. . . And they kind of created a list of things that they were going to hold themselves to and each student on the team has a role. So even if there is a team leader, everyone is still very responsible for everything in the group's project. If you are in charge of materials, you still have to get your notes copied if even we have someone whose primary job is making sure all the notes are copied and taking down all of the data. Everyone still needs to have all of the data. [The team charter requires] working together and sharing the load, but also giving my students a chance to, like, think about who they are individually and who they are as a team.

Earlene explained that she used inquiry to help students think about the work they accomplished and had them reflect and respond to any revisions or additions they needed to make to their team charter based on their work as it related to the teams' strengths and opportunities for improvement.

I just put people in groups. [I would ask students,] 'Of the three of you, who do you think should be working on different roles] within their groups. They [would] kind of vote, and I kept them in the same groups all year. . . Because I kept copies of the charter,. . . I kept constant active track of all of the charters, and I would hand them back and [ask] is there anything you want to add? Is there anything you need to change? . . [I would tell
students.] 'You’ve shown that you know what I expected of you; what do you expect of yourself[ves]?

Figure 6 below is an excerpt from the charter template that Earlene gives her students to manage how they interact and assess their roles and the work they individually and collectively produce.

Figure 6

Earlene’s Team Charter Template Excerpt

Earlene provided examples of how this process of giving students space to choose how they learn and opportunities to monitor, reflect and self-assess their progress to adjust for the future encourages confidence and increases students' willingness to be more vulnerable yet tenacious learners.
Collective Case Analysis of Classroom Teachers’ Humanizing Practices

The previous section's glimpse into each teacher's practices demonstrates richness in their focus on creating humanizing learning environments for and with their students. As a collective case study, great importance lies in naming the critical humanizing practices that emerged as broader cross-cutting trends. The processes of first-level coding, second-level coding, and reviewing my research journal notes throughout the analysis process guided my ability to see three clear-cut practices consistent among each teacher. The humanizing practices classroom teachers in the study, as a collective, enact within the contexts of their high-stakes testing environments are 1) developing authentic, trusting relationships with their students, 2) using the knowledge they gain through their relationships as assets to incorporate learning strategies best aligned to their students' strengths and sensibilities, and 3) consistently using the relationships they form to understand the realities of their students' daily lived experiences as information for their teaching. The previous section identifies these and other humanizing practices that emerged through the study's data analysis process. However, the following section will focus on the three critical practices that emerged as themes across the collective case and delve into the nuance of how each teacher enacts the three humanizing practices representing their collective case. The following cross-analysis sheds additional light on the study’s first research question and provides data to answer the study’s second research question, “How Do Classroom Teachers in Urban Charter Schools Engage in Humanizing Classroom Practices with Their Students within Dehumanizing High-stakes Testing Environments Characteristic of Neoliberal Education Reform?”
Humanization Inextricably Links Learning to Trusting Relationships that Honor Students' Individuality

The relational nature of learning is a critical finding that emerged across each teacher in the study. In reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, each teacher presents the premise that relationships and learning are inseparable, and they each shared a host of strategies that ranged from structured surveys and scheduled classroom practices to organic and less formal methods that they intentionally employ to get to know their students as individuals and to develop and deepen trusting relationships with them.

Anna holds what she calls "Circle" consistently in her classroom. Anna describes Circle as a time that "encourage[s] [students] to share about themselves, about their families, about their relationships, about their interests, about their communities, their histories." Anna sees this as a time to build community and relationships across the entire class. She never forces students to share, which she sees as an even deeper humanizing aspect of her classroom practice. She also creates this space, which deepens relationships and trust within the context of students' academic work. Anna amplifies "students’ voice and also the ability to choose how and when they engage." She shared,

I may have a student who raises [his or her] hand every single question, and I may have students who wait to show me all of their work, um, you know, by writing it out in their assignment, and they may never raise their hand. [I] just have to know. . . I [am] going to get evidence from a student of their learning. . . If I'm not, how do I work with that student to make sure that we get it for both them and for my knowledge of where [a student is]? That's, again, just knowing students on a very individual level, I think, is what that comes back to.
The idea of not forcing a specific way to engage in class is paramount with Anna. This belief and practice speak to her intention around what Freire (2018) describes with humanization as an instructional approach that "ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves" (p. 51) and speaks to Anna's quest for mutual humanization with and for students.

Likewise, Marissa echoed the invaluable nature of relationships and getting to know students as central to how she sees herself enacting humanizing pedagogy within her classroom. As a kindergarten teacher, Marissa's view of building relationships tended to be more inclusive of practices that engage students and families slightly more than the other secondary teachers in the study who focused more on relationships with students but still included families. Marissa shared that teaching remotely during the pandemic has allowed her classroom to exist, literally, within her families' homes like never before in her teaching. Marissa noted,

I actually do get to know the families [with remote learning]. I asked them to come to the camera, whether it's a problem I'm having with the scholar, or if I just want to say, 'Hi,' to them, you know. I let them interrupt me. They know that they can come into the cameras. [They'll say,] 'Excuse me, Miss!' I'll talk to them right then and there. I don't make [families] feel any [bad] kind of way [when they need to interrupt briefly]. They say, 'I'm so sorry,' 'We logged on late; I overslept'. . . I say okay [for] attendance, and [your child] is good to go. [Parents will ask if their child] needs to stay for group B and make up the skills?' I say yes, she sure does. Or they'll come on at the very end of class. I can see them sitting because the kid is writing the Nearpod code for the day and see the parents sitting there. And they'll say they just want to say hi to you, you know, thanks for what you're doing. I had a parent come on [camera]. She was like, oh my goodness, my daughter is
learning so much. So, those [are the] types of things and kind of the way, so far, that I've reached out to them and kind of made space available for them to just come in and talk to me anytime.

While Marissa remains a staunch advocate of her students’ safe return to in-person learning, the newfound dynamic of partnering with families daily in "on-demand" ways is something that she wants to capture and figure out how it appropriately remains once students return to in-person learning.

With attention to building trusting relationships and knowing students as individuals, there also emerged this notion of longevity in relationships across different points in time as a lever to the depth of relationships that these teachers experience with their students. Both Anna and Earlene's experience with teaching many of their students at earlier points in their schooling experience brings a unique lens to their perspectives. They have a gap of a two-to-five year range between the times they taught many of their students, which has similar benefits as looping grades with students. Earlene shared, "it's truly an amazing experience being able to see them growing into young adults, seeing them grow out of habits. Seeing them taking themselves seriously is just so beautiful to see. Yeah, it's like, man, you've really grown up! You see what we were talking about! [My students are] like, yeah, I didn't get it then, and now [I'm] trying to go to college." Earlene currently teaches students in high school that she previously taught as 7th graders. She acknowledges having been with her students at different points in time as a bonus and critical aspect of the trust she feels with her students.

Anna expressed similar sentiments about teaching many of her middle school math students when they were 5th graders in elementary. She insisted, "the coolest thing is, as I have taught the children a second time; they're the ones that I had in fifth grade [and their] conceptual
understanding [in math] is there, and that is that has brought me a huge source of joy." Again, the inseparable dynamic between relationships and learning is prominent in what both Anna and Earlene highlight in their uniqueness in working with students at different points in their development.

Like Marissa creating a welcoming space for parents to communicate with her during remote learning, Earlene also capitalizes on unstructured, on-demand opportunities to build trusting relationships with students and get to know them as individuals. Earlene notes that her connections with students deepen "anytime [I] have a moment to just check on kids. . . by asking them small questions that aren't invasive." She went on to add,

Once the kids trust you, they open up, and they'll share anything. Sometimes they share too much. It's like, I don't need to know all that, but even today, I had a lot of good conversations with kids, and we had a lot of fun in class today because they were able to, like, be open about how their week was going and that openness was there because they trust me.

Earlene ensures that she carves out space for students to offer input regarding their learning and feedback on how they experience her class. Throughout the year, Earlene reviews survey data that she compiles from a questionnaire devised for her students. Earlene uses these data points from her students to make improvements to support the whole class and individual students. Figure 7 captures an excerpt of recent responses from her students and reveals their perceptions of her teaching style, hinting at the authentic relationships she has with them.
Additionally, Earlene warned that with close relationships comes responsibility. She shared that as she builds trusting relationships with her students, she is also transparent about her professional role as a teacher, which requires reporting any information that jeopardizes student safety. Additionally, Earlene understands that her role in enacting humanizing practices is always to help students understand their power. She sometimes struggles with pushing students to a greater level of self-awareness around their abilities and capabilities but sees this as a necessary struggle for students to come into and own their power. Earlene recounted that she has,

...had students [who] thought I was picking on them. And I'm like, No. Do you know how brilliant [you are?] You could do so many great things, but you're stuck; you're stopping yourself because of your actions. I just want to see the great, and when they hear that, they're like, oh, she does care. Sometimes students come in with a bad reputation
and as teachers, even when we hear about the bad reputation from other people that may have previously taught them. It's our job to not hold that against students. There are some students that I have that need motivation, and the motivation comes when you show them that you care. I just use my relationships with students to push them personally because these are subjects that do not come naturally to a lot of students, especially the upper sciences.

Here, Earlene affirms that relationship building is continuous and happens not only in service to learning but is also a catalyst for students to understand their abilities and capabilities.

A cross-analysis of the teachers in the study demonstrates that relationships and learning support each other. Each of the study's participants unequivocally sees and pursues relationships with their students because their interviews all demonstrate that in order to learn, students need to be seen, known, and valued. Additionally, understanding how these teachers build relationships and get to know students personally during a pandemic that forced all of them to teach remotely is critical. They all acknowledge that relationships are crucial during times of stress and uncertainty. Trusting relationships have the power to safeguard students from some of the damaging effects resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic's myriad stressors and distresses.

**Humanization Necessitates Prioritizing Learning Strategies That Help Students Achieve through Their Social, Intellectual, and Academic Abilities**

A second imperative finding in the study's quest to understand how classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact humanizing pedagogy is they incorporate learning strategies that help students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities. As a collective case, the teachers all demonstrate that incorporating learning strategies in humanizing ways requires a high level of attention and planning. The learning strategies that emerged in the data analysis
range from creating collaborative work environments to finding ways within and sometimes outside of the teacher's mandated curriculum that provide students with opportunities for choice.

During in-person learning, Anna often used learning strategies that incorporate a fair amount of collaboration, which attends to her students’ social abilities. With remote instruction, she described how she quickly planned and implemented collaborative learning strategies using her instructional technology platforms because she believes that humanization is deepened when learning is socialized, meaning students can engage in discourse, share their ideas, and question their and their peers' thinking. Anna reflected,

The thing that excites me most about teaching is seeing students collaborate to learn. So obviously, as the teacher, [I] have to [guide] instruction for them to, you know, be able to then take what [I]'ve instructed and to really put it together. This . . virtual setting really taught me a lot about student collaboration and the importance of that, like, as a part of the lesson plan, and so I very purposefully decided from the beginning of this school year that and I mean we use Zoom. So that's a huge benefit that I wanted students to spend time each day in a breakout room working together. . . Because I knew when I was on zoom, I was not paying attention when I was just being spoken at, and that's not anything critical of any specific event. It's just less engaging. So I knew even though there are different challenges with putting students in breakout rooms. I knew it was still going to be extremely beneficial. And I think that also translates to the classroom of, like, you know, having students working in groups as a very purposeful part of the lesson. . . That is what excites me the most because it's great for me to teach you something, but if you teach yourself or you teach someone else something, you're gonna remember that way more than me teaching you.
The breakout rooms require an intentional layer of planning as Anna is thoughtful about whom she assigns to different rooms daily, and she monitors each room carefully so that she can follow-up with students, address any misconceptions, and gather information about where to go next with guiding her students' instruction based on their collaborative work and conversations.

Marissa uses what she knows about students as individuals to guide the learning strategies that she incorporates to help students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities. As a kindergarten teacher, she teaches students with a range of pre-kindergarten experiences. English is a second language for some of her students, so language barriers exist. Marissa understands that students' interests, affinities, experiences, and cultures are assets, and as a keen noticer of her students, she uses these as tools in her teaching. Marissa explained,

When I'm trying to teach, I want to make sure that I can reach each student. I know that some like to write, I know that some like to move, I know that some have to have hands on. I know there's some [who] just need me to call their name. Um, and, and even with visuals, um, [I] try to reach those students that are [visual learners].[Some students] may have a language barrier. So not only do I have a word, I have a picture. Not only do I have a picture, I have a video. Not only do [I] have the video, we're going to get up and we're going to move while we're doing that.

Marissa shared that her kindergarten students respond to the differentiated ways that she approaches instruction with them and know when she is presenting something that excludes their interests, abilities, and affinities. In jest, Marissa described a time during virtual instruction when her administration gave her less freedom in creating her student materials. Instead of creating her
students’ materials, she downloaded and presented resources that her administrator provided. She
shared,

I had one student to [ask] me, um, uh, had [I] created the test, but I just uploaded it from
one of the school leaders, um, one of the first tests. And so my students are used to seeing
the level, I guess, of work that I put in front of them. I pulled up a test from a school
leader. They [said], Old, that's some, old, pictures. I don't like those colors, it's kind of .
.old, that's kind of . . what is that?

The administration-created materials were off-putting to Marissa's kindergarteners, so Marissa,
laughing, exclaimed that she quickly adjusted after that incident. She shared,

I decided that since I [later] had the liberty to create my PowerPoints for my lesson plans,

I could put the faces that I want. So I represent my students. I represent African-
Americans, you know, ballet dancers, and I I'll show dads hugging their kids or I'll show,
you know, life, real life images. Um, In addition to clip art and cartoons, but I want them
to see real things, you know. And so I'll put those real life images, you know, in my
presentations, um, so that they can see, Hey, it's more to, it's more to it than, you know,
big bird or it's more to, you know, a cartoon character. There's, there's life out there. And
so just really kind of creating that hunger for them to identify with real life things. And to
see that there is more out there for them.

Figure 8 below is an example of how Marissa incorporates her students into her instructional
materials.
Figure 8

Marissa’s Virtual Lesson Material Example Demonstrating Representation

The student pictured is one of Marissa’s students and provides an opportunity for her students to see themselves and their classmates in what they learn. Marissa also explained that what might seem like small inclusions like this example go a long way with engaging students, especially during remote learning.

Like Marissa, Anna also provides opportunities for students to see themselves within the curriculum by connecting their experiences, interests, affinities, and cultures to their learning.

Figure 9

Anna’s Middle School Math Word Problem Featuring a Student’s Experience
Figure 9 is an example of a math word problem that Anna created, which features one of her student's football sweatshirts. Not only does the shirt represent her student, but the school's football team won a state championship, so many of her students were motivated and engaged because the math content focuses on people and an event that was a point of pride for them.

Anna takes instructional strategies a step beyond representing her students in the content to allow her students to use their experiences and intellectual abilities to create their math word problems. Figure 10 features a math word problem written by one of her students.

**Figure 10**

*Anna's Student-Created Middle School Math Word Problem*

Not only do Anna's students have entry points to access math content that Anna creates using representation and inclusion of people and events of interest to them, but Anna also gives her students power to write the curriculum for themselves. She uses this practice of challenging students to narrate the content within the context of their worlds. Practices like this help students understand that they own the content and can situate it as they choose. She gives them
opportunities to create their narratives with their knowledge, a practice situated within humanizing pedagogy.

As with Anna and Marissa, Earlene sees providing choice as an essential learning strategy that helps students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities. Her school did not host a science fair for students, so she presented a plan for an annual science fair to her administration, who at first dissuaded her. She described feeling devalued because her administrative team did not feel like she could handle the fair's logistics and ensure students had a quality learning experience. After all, students would be self-directed and teacher-facilitated throughout the process. Given the time that it would take for students to do meaningful work, Earlene’s administrators questioned whether the idea would be the best use of instructional time.

Drawing from her organizing skills from years of youth leadership involvement, Earlene was able to submit an approved plan for her students to participate in her charter school network’s first and now annual science fair. Earlene explained,

Students chose their project . . . [which had to be] testable, so [my students] were not building volcanoes. This [was] not an arts and crafts project; [it could be] anything [to] actually test. I [got project proposals from student like] natural lip gloss vs store bought. . . I got mechanical hands. I got solar powered cars with kids taking apart calculators to get the solar panel out to make the solar panel the solar powered car. Wow kids went nuts! So like I just took them through the [scientific] process. [Students] gave me [their] topic, [I’d] approve it, or [I’d] give [them] some pointers, some websites. . .[I told students,] 'Don't choose a topic because it's easy, [you'll get] bored.'
Earlene wanted the science fair to serve as a way for students to understand that their ideas are powerful and worthy of others hearing about and learning from their research. She made sure the community had an audience with her students and their scientific research. She shared,

I got judges. I just reached out to people, like, hey, if you know people in whatever industry, no matter what, if they're free and they want to judge, [have] them to email me. I ended up with retired engineers, people that taught on college campuses. So college professors came. One of the student's parents works for a steel company here, and she came along with, like, five members of her staff as well. So, [I] was able to build relationships with people... My mom even came to judge, who was great. Every single judge afterward emailed me, like those kids were so prepared. I would have never known, had you not sold us beforehand, that this [was] probably their first time [presenting] to strangers. I would have never known.

With the science fair and the opportunity for Earlene's students to choose their path within their learning, she tapped into her students' intellectual abilities and affinities to motivate and engage them. Earlene jokingly, yet pridefully noted,

Students that may have been lacking [academically] throughout the year. Once they got a chance to choose a project, [I] was like, well, I [haven't] seen [you] talk this much all year and [I haven't] seen this much work from you. Like if someone ask[ed] me what your handwriting look[ed] like before the science fair, I would have no clue. Wow, it was like really motivating for them and like they did so well on it... Because when kids are able to make sense of a concept for themselves, they do better with it.
Earlene's fight for a school tradition like a science fair, which had not previously been within her students' learning experience, was an opportunity to incorporate choice as a learning strategy that helps students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities.

**Humanization Requires Understanding and Using Students' Realities to Help Students Access Academic Content**

A final key finding that emerged in the cross-analysis of the study's data regarding how teachers enact humanizing pedagogy is they consider their students' realities and diverse contexts as learners in school. The teachers also consider their students' lives outside of school as a tool to aid students with accessing the academic content. Additionally, the study's teachers demonstrate flexibility based on what they learn about their students, which they use to understand better what nuances they need to enact, ensuring students meet and exceed expectations.

Anna and Earlene expressed that understanding and using students' realities to help them access content are critical, especially within the confines of teaching remotely. Anna's account of how students face a host of different scenarios while learning in their homes' physical space is a reminder of the importance of understanding students' realities. She also signals a reminder about the teacher mindsets needed to see their students' situations as assets or funds of knowledge as Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) describe in their research focused on how teachers better support students through gaining more context of their accumulated life experiences outside of school to inform their teaching. Anna shared,

> I mean, I have students who the entire time, they're on Zoom [and] have a younger sibling right next to them. I mean it may be like a one or two-year-old that they are watching and doing school at the same time. Some people don't like that, [but] I am like
the fact that they're doing both is absolutely amazing. . . . They're at home trying their best to learn. So, I encourage that. We do silly things like if a baby comes on, like we all see if we can get the baby to wave and, you know, not too much of a distraction [from learning]. But recognizing that family is extremely, extremely important and like the more support and love and appreciation we give to family, the better it is. Now, I know some teachers would say something about not [having] other siblings in the video or no holding babies during the video. . . . For me, I'm not one who's a big regulator. Instead of attempting to regulate what happens in her students' homes, Anna uses these moments to celebrate families' assets and applaud her students' ability to navigate learning virtually from home while still taking on responsibilities required of them because they are home.

In a more targeted way, Earlene conveyed a similar sentiment that demonstrates how she is intentional about understanding what students face as they are learning remotely to defend undue rules and requirements that school administrators impose on teachers and students. Earlene named not knowing and using students' realities to shape how educators approach schooling as dehumanizing. She poignantly noted,

I think humanizing education to me means that you're teaching the students as they are. You're with them. You're making conscious decisions for your students because you understand that their [reality] is key. [Administrators] want us to give a lot of asynchronous homework. About 80% of my students have jobs. They leave class and go to work. They may work till five o'clock or they may work till 10 o'clock at night, and I'm supposed to give them more work? . . . They may have three chapters to read, math homework, [and] social studies homework. And I'm supposed to also give them homework on the same day as all of these other people? That does not make sense;
they're kids. Do we want to like teach our children at a young age, how to be stressed out because that that's where we are? Our kid, unfortunately, know how to handle stress as a way to live because they've been trained to deal with more things than necessary. Like homework can be helpful? But if you're suggesting that teachers give an hour of homework at night, and they have seven teachers, who is sleeping?

Earlene described times when administrators had reprimanded her for not requiring students to show their faces on camera or allowing students to be on camera in certain places in their homes (e.g., beds in bedrooms). In these cases, she has challenged administrators on their audacity to regulate and dictate to students in their home environments and called for them to understand better what learning virtually during a pandemic means when they enact power structures that presuppose what they think students should be able to do in their own homes. Because of the trusting relationships that Earlene has built with her students, they are open to sharing issues of home insecurity, increased responsibilities at or for their home, or other circumstances that might make turning on a camera, unmuting a computer microphone to answer a question or wearing a Justice Prep polo shirt during remote learning impossible sometimes for some students.

**Classroom Teachers’ Perceived Obstacles to Enacting Humanizing Practices**

The findings presented in this chapter's above sections inform the current study's first two research questions. Before concluding Chapter 4, the next section addresses the tension between enacting humanizing pedagogy within neoliberal reform environments where the mere preface of the reform is antithetical to many humanistic practices. The study's final question asks, "How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools perceive humanizing practices as supportive of or as obstacles to academic achievement for African American students in high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?" This question deals less with the
"what" and "how" regarding humanizing practices, which are essential. However, the third question grapples with the reality of what it means to be a humanistic classroom teacher within educational structures that have dehumanizing teacher and student success measures. The teachers all see the long-term benefit of the humanizing practices they enact with students but recognize that they, too, operate within a system that dictates conformity, standardization, and the commodification of teaching and learning, particularly given their work in urban charter schools where the mere promise of their existence has been increased test scores.

Three sub-themes emerged concerning the final research question, and they illustrate the juxtaposing tensions and limitations of enacting humanizing pedagogy within high-stakes testing environments. Teachers in urban charter schools named the following as obstacles to enacting humanizing practices and academic achievement for African American students in high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform:

1. School expectations that are overly reliant on compliance and silence present obstacles to African American students' achievement.

2. Inconsistencies in education reform present obstacles to African American students' achievement.

3. High-stakes testing as a measure of learning presents obstacles to African American students' achievement.

The following sections offer more details from the teachers' perspective on each sub-theme.

**Overreliance on Students’ Compliance and Silence Perpetuates Dehumanization**

The review of relevant literature in Chapter 2 of the current study presents the extent to which structural oppression and racism have sought to confine and control the bodies and minds of African American people. The overwhelming majority of students served in the region of the
study's location is African American. A theme that emerged in the study as one not supportive of humanizing pedagogy and presenting obstacles to African American students achieving is the notion of over-reliance on compliance and silence. This notion feeds into the demeaning, dehumanizing practices that seek to control black bodies. In her reflection on a previous charter school where Anna taught (not her current school, The Garden), Anna painfully offered,

It's like an emphasis, there is a strong emphasis in many charters on silence and compliance, and that is something that I do find dehumanizing to children. I understand like there is a time and a purpose for, you know, being quiet in a building of, like, oh, that class is still like in session, still learning, like we can't disrupt that, you know, that sort of thing. But one school in particular that I worked in had it to like a very prison like feel. . . [I thought] this is not right. This has like a bigger purpose of teaching compliance for compliance sake in that particular school. . . If, as an adult, I have a hard time enforcing this because I was expected to enforce it. I mean, I, I'm an adult and I can rationalize more things than, you know, some children can so that I just knew at that point that it was it was going to be something that was tough for me as an educator.

Additionally, Anna highlighted the inequity with an overreliance on compliance and silence when comparing urban charter schools in the study's region that serve predominantly African American students to her experience with schools serving more racially mixed or predominantly white student populations. She challenged that success in school looks different for different populations of students.

This idea that success looks orderly, but only it doesn't look orderly, the same way for everyone because you can go to an affluent school that's predominantly white and. . .[at] first appearance not look at all, orderly, um, But then it's like in charters, where you have
a predominantly student of color population,. . . [what's considered] success or like a good school and I'm saying. . . what people perceive to be a good school would look like. I'm like, classrooms are quiet. I have literally been told my classroom is too loud. Many, many, many, many times. And yeah, like classrooms are quiet. Hallways are quiet. You know, like that's literally a measure of what people look for, like, are [that] the hallways [are] quiet. And like for me, it just seems like at a certain point, that eliminates some of the joy that children bring into the building. Like they have to leave a part of themselves outside at the door. . . they don't get to fully participate as. . . their full selves during the day.

Earlene articulated a similar obstacle in her push against her administration for reprimanding her and her students if they did not look a certain way on camera, have their camera on, or log-on from specific spaces in their homes during remote instruction. Both Earlene and Anna have resisted either by challenging their administration or, in Anna's case, leaving a school because these were practices that they both believe create obstacles to their students, who are mostly African American, achieving in school.

**Instability in Education Reform Destabilizes Teachers’ Ability to Enact Humanization**

A second sub-theme that emerged in the study as working in opposition to humanizing pedagogy, presenting obstacles to African American students achieving, is the instability of education reform efforts. In the study, teachers saw these reform instabilities operating both at their local school level and from more distant state and federal levels. Marissa named that in her network of charter schools serving kindergarten through high school, the charter management organization has had less time with the elementary schools. Marissa explained,
A lot of the systems in place, were [put] in place when the school started, which was with the middle school. And so from middle school, it went up to high [school]. And so all of those [systems that] work for older students [came] back down [to the elementary school]. And this is year five . . . for elementary, but elementary has never gotten that good momentum going with any type of programs or processes or anything. It's constantly been. . .let's stop. Let's do something else. Let's do something else [in the elementary schools]. So there's no momentum. Everything is changing all the time.

Marissa shared that for teachers and students, the inconsistencies and instabilities year-over-year with different approaches and systems ultimately challenge her ability to get good at a practice long enough to determine its effectiveness with her students, which hurts student achievement. She also mentioned that these inconsistencies increase teacher turn-over and that some teachers are not willing to remain because their voices regarding these inconsistencies go unheard.

Remote teaching has exasperated the tension of unstable reform efforts. Marissa named consistent changes in virtual learning platforms and management systems during the pandemic as a significant stressor that challenges teachers and has inadvertently hindered student progress in learning. Marissa notes that remote schooling has

. . . constant demand and a constant change. And when I say constant, I mean, weekly changes. So there was never a time where we think, now we've got. . . our footing; we're sure [of] we're doing, let's go into this week. These are things that we, you know, tweaked last week. Now we've got some momentum going. . .[Administrators will shift to], oh, well, wait, let's do this now. And so what, I don't understand if it changes, I don't understand a lot of the things that we're being asked to do. [Administrators will say,] 'Do this, um, put your data in, put your data here. No, put your data there. Upload your lesson
plans here.' Well, for this, uh, for this school leader, we upload our lesson plans using, um, the Google drive. Well, this school leader wants us to upload our plans to Schoology. Well, just a couple of days ago, we get an email that says, now you're all gonna upload your, your lesson plans to Mastery Connect. . . So, they don't have a handle on what they want to see, or they don't have the understanding of how can [they] simplify the administrative things for teachers so that [we] can teach; so that [we] can focus on the students.

Marissa acknowledges the instabilities that she experiences within her school's charter network. However, Anna posits that schools are in pawn positions because of the larger state and federal mandates connected to funding that tie the hands of charter leaders, reducing the impact of their inherent autonomies. Anna speculates,

I have seen [inconsistencies], I guess I can just say [in] recent years in the American education system. . . My theory is that [what's] affecting all schools is that we switched, with No Child Left Behind, to heavy, heavy, heavy tests for every kid. Where you go to school, depends on how much time you spend prepping for that test, but it also depends on [schools'] funding and all of these different resources. . . In that first big shift, everybody needs to take all these tests, but then we began to assess [if] the tests [were] rigorous enough. . . So like, again, you're trying to hit a moving target. And so that kind of goes back to what I was sharing before. It's like at the end of the day, if our targets are changing as the teacher, you have to keep the bigger picture in mind. I know in my seventh-grade math class, you have to be ready to solve equations and I have to really study my curriculum to understand what that looks like, including levels of rigor. And then prepare [my students] to do that really, really well. So when [they] go to eighth
grade, [they’re] able to expand upon that knowledge [they] already have, even if [they] come to me behind. Let's say [a student] come[s] to me on a fourth grade level. I still have to find a way to get [him or her] solving equations.

As Marissa and Anna articulate, the nature of the work presented in education reform efforts focuses on the urgent versus the important in ways that do not allow teachers to develop the knowledge and skills required to implement certain strategies and programs long enough to see success.

**High-stakes Testing as a Measure of Learning Requires Dehumanization and Limits Humanization**

The main driver related to the instabilities that teachers in the study highlight as a sub-theme working in opposition to humanizing pedagogy, presenting obstacles to African American students achieving, is high-stakes testing as a measure of learning. All teachers in the study teach grades or subjects that mandate school-based or state-based assessments to determine important outcomes like grade-level proficiency and grade-level progression. To that end, Earlene questions the whole notion of high-stakes testing during a global pandemic, which has increased the negative impact of home and food insecurity and challenges to mental health and wellness.

Testing, especially this year with how different and stressful everything is. . . Why is the push pro-testing? [I] understand all the politics behind it and the financials behind it, but just realistically, what are students going to be learning this year that they're going to hold on to [in a testing environment]. Because what students remember in stress, they don't actually hold on to. . . And this year is going to become like a blank in [some] kids'
minds. Overall, I still feel like there are ways to know what kids have learned without testing them to know it.

Anna echoed Earlene's sentiment. She warned that the pressure teachers feel about testing creates stressors that also create obstacles for students. She explains,

I'm not teaching my curriculum because of the test, I'm teaching that because I know as a human, we have to understand this before we can move to the next level. And so that's what I think about when I'm when I'm planning. It's like if I only teach you this basic level math content standard, you're never going to get to the next level. So I have to make sure I cover all aspects of it. . . Numbers paint a picture, true, but experiences, I think paint a much more vivid picture. And I think when [teachers are] so focused on the number, [they] miss out on the learning experience. . . [Students] know what we think is important. They pick up on our spirits about testing.

Lastly, Anna argued that more innovative ways to view assessments could reposition assessment as more humanizing and supportive of African American students. She shared that she wants to give group assessments because they more closely mirror how adults work to accomplish tasks in many industries and job sectors. She mentioned revising the testing calendar for state assessments to have more time to teach students content. Currently, the study's region tests students in early April, but schools do end for summer until late May or early June.

Conclusion

The current study examined how classroom teachers in three different urban charter schools enact humanizing pedagogy amid neoliberal reform environments characterized by high-stakes testing. The methods for collecting the data included interviews, document analysis, and the use of my research journal. Three themes emerged from the overall data collection. These
themes both identify and demonstrate how classroom teachers inextricably link learning to trusting relationships that honor who students are as individuals; incorporate learning strategies that help their students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities; and lastly, understand the realities of their students and use this understanding to help their students access academic content.

It was determined from the collected data that classroom teachers engaged in critical humanizing practices that are at times consistent with the larger culture and expectations of their schools and administrations, but that there are times when teachers challenged inequities in support of their students' well-being that were not aligned with administrative expectations for teachers and students. The findings demonstrate that the humanizing practices teachers enact are micro-progressions that hopefully manifest into a fuller existence of humanizing practices and experiences for teachers and students over time. However, these progressions still do not remove the pressures of operating in school environments that require regimented learning and teaching to standards in limited ways that are not responsive to who students are or allow students to demonstrate their interests, affinities, and accumulated knowledge within their schooling experiences.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research findings that emerged from the data as part of this study's collective case. The discussion also weaves in and makes connections to the relevant literature examined in Chapter 2. Given the depth and value of what emerged in the study's findings, the current chapter also includes implications and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

The problem driving the study is the underlying discriminatory issues of race and class, which have historical roots in dehumanizing economic, political, philosophical, and psychological practices for which African American people have carried the burden since America's founding. More specifically, the study explores how these dehumanizing practices manifest in America's foremost socializing space—its schools. Neoliberalism characterizes the nation's current education reform efforts with its free-market approach to school choice. However, its premise of applying market principles to schooling is problematic and perpetuates dehumanization that, as a result, further characterizes African American children as less smart, less capable, and in need of controlling, compliance-based learning environments (Bartolome, 1994; Haslam, 2006; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Sleeter, 2018). Therefore, this study's purpose was to examine the humanizing practices that classroom teachers have enacted within the current high-stakes testing environments of urban charter schools. Charter schools have come to represent pillars of neoliberalism in education (Booker et al. 2007, Hanushek et al. 2007, Sass 2006). Their mere premise in many states has answered the neoliberal call for increased test scores to combat inequities in student learning outcomes, especially for poor children of color. In the region where this study is situated, the charter school student population is
overwhelmingly African American children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals (Glazer & Egan, 2016; Horn & Wilburn, 2013).

In this narrative inquiry case study, I interviewed classroom teachers from state and locally-authorized urban charter schools to learn how they enacted humanizing practices within high-stakes testing environments. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the critical humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

2. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools engage in humanizing classroom practices with their students within dehumanizing high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

3. How do classroom teachers in urban charter schools perceive humanizing practices as supportive of or as obstacles to academic achievement for African American students in high-stakes testing environments characteristic of neoliberal education reform?

The study found that classroom teachers acknowledged the problematic nature of the high-stakes testing and accountability environments in which they operate. Critical analysis of the data elicited three specific hindrances that the teachers recognized as obstacles to the humanizing practices and environments they work to create. Specifically, the study cites the challenges as overreliance on compliance and silence, instability in education reform, and high-stakes testing as a predominant learning measure.

The study participants’ resistance to dehumanizing environments focused on their relationships with their students and families as a humanizing aspect of their work. Critical analysis of the data found teachers inextricably link learning and trusting relationships that honor
students' individuality; incorporate learning strategies that help students achieve through their social, intellectual, and academic abilities. They understand and use students' realities to help them access appropriate academic content. The study found that the teachers' relationships with their students are foundational, paramount, and primary; their trusting relationships are catalysts to understand how best to teach their students. Their deep, trusting relationships with students are what the teachers continuously build and leverage to help students engage with the academic content or re-engineer the content in ways that demonstrate ownership of what they know and can do.

**Major Contributions**

The study’s findings ultimately contribute to knowledge in the K-12 educational field regarding how classroom teachers enact humanizing pedagogy within high-stakes testing environments. Although COVID-19 was not a central focus of the study, it was a reality for the teachers interviewed as research participants. The teachers shared experiences from their teaching careers more broadly concerning the study’s research questions. However, teaching during a global pandemic also positions the study’s findings to serve as a current and future reference for school leaders and teachers regarding how to best support students, strengthen classroom relationships, and center students within their learning experiences during a pandemic or time when a physical connection is not an option for teaching and learning to occur.

Additionally, the study’s findings contribute more examples of K-12 humanizing pedagogy, specifically within the historical, political, and social context of the American South and within the contexts of charter schools, representing pinnacles of neoliberal ed reform. These humanizing examples are nestled within situations and constructs that have been oppressive to African American children, yet the research participants’ humanizing practices offer liberatory
counternarratives. Specifically, the research offers practical examples of how teachers enact del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) tenets of humanization, explored through Chapter 4’s data analysis and discussed further within the current chapter’s conclusions regarding the findings’ theoretical applications to humanizing pedagogy.

A final contribution and scholarly note that should not be overlooked to ensure qualitative data accuracy is the member checking process. The power of member checking was evident in the study. Two out of three participants embraced the process such that it produced additional data, clarified data, and provided more context where the original data might not have captured the depth of the participants’ original intent. Seidman’s (2006) structural interview process aids in this contribution of member checking in that his suggested focus on participants’ life history, present activities, and then reflection on the participants’ overall experiences shared helped enlist and invest participants in the interview process, such that they were more apt to review their data during the study’s member checking phase. The member checking process was approximately two months after the final round of interviews, allowing participants to return to their interview data after some reflective distance. The two participants who participated in member checking noted that they had both reflected on the interviews and that member checking provided an opportunity to process their reflections through a final review of their data’s presentation and representation.

Conclusions

Theoretical Application: Critical Pedagogy

The study’s key findings related to identifying the critical humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact are in accord with the critical pedagogies examined in the study's literature review (Bartolome, 1994; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson,
A useful aspect of the research was a practical, contextualized description of seven of del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) tenets of humanizing pedagogy. They included: 1) the learner's reality is crucial; 2) students' sociocultural resources are valued and extended curriculum is permeable, not static; 3) content is meaningful and relevant to students' lives; 4) students' prior knowledge is linked to new learning; 5) trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization; 6) students will achieve through their academic, intellectual, social abilities; and 7) students' prior knowledge links to new learning (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). Table 2 below links examples of the research participants’ humanizing practices related to del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) seven noted tenants.

**Table 2**

*Research Participants’ Aligned Practices to del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) Humanizing Tenets*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) Seven Humanizing Tenents Noted in the Research Findings</th>
<th>Examples of Research Participants’ Aligned Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The learner's reality is crucial</td>
<td>Anna understands some of her students have younger family members to care for during remote instruction and does not view caregiving as an infraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earlene creatively disregards her schools’ homework policy when she knows that her high school students understand a skill or concept and must work after school to support their family, especially during a global pandemic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) Seven Humanizing Tenents Noted in the Research Findings</th>
<th>Examples of Research Participants’ Aligned Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2) Students' sociocultural resources are valued, and extended curriculum is permeable, not static</td>
<td>Marissa consistently revises and re-enginvers her curriculum materials for her kindergarten students to include representations of her students and their interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anna consistently uses information about her students' lives, interests, community, and sensibilities within her enhancements to her math curriculum, so that her students see themselves in their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Content is meaningful and relevant to students' lives</td>
<td>Earlene brings in experiences relevant to her students' lives to explain scientific concepts, like diffusion and its relationships to cookout grilling when the food’s aroma travels and booming rap music, her students’ favorites, to explain how sound waves travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Students' prior knowledge is linked to new learning</td>
<td>Anna consistently has her middle school math students represent their understanding of skills and concepts using math story problems from their worlds and lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Students' prior knowledge links to new learning</td>
<td>Anna creates Circle at the start of her classes to give students time to check-in and share thoughts and feelings with the class. The time is opt-in and never forced, giving Anna and her students opportunities to learn more about each other and develop deeper relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Trusting and caring relationships advance the pursuit of humanization</td>
<td>Marissa uses remote learning to her advantage by forging more time to get to know her students’ families. She also establishes small group and individual remote check-in times with her students to facilitate more robust relationships with students, given that their first K-12 schooling experience has happened mostly via remote learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) Seven Humanizing Tenents Noted in the Research Findings</td>
<td>Examples of Research Participants’ Aligned Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Students will achieve through their academic, intellectual, social abilities</td>
<td>Earlene allows students to work collaboratively and encourages discourse because she understands that her students’ social abilities are a strength, aiding how they learn, process, and investigate information and new concepts. She provides time for individual and group reflection to support students’ academic and intellectual abilities. Additionally, she ensures that she provides choice in how students approach their learning as much as possible as another way to attend to the individual interests and nature of students’ diverse academic and intellectual abilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

del Carmen Salazar (2013) describes these tenets of humanizing pedagogy as a direct response to critics who charge that Freierian ideology is too theoretical for practitioners to move to pedagogical methods. Critics have challenged educators to construct a framework to enact humanizing pedagogy (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010). Dale and Hyslop-Margison (2010) argue that conceptualizing or compartmentalizing Freire’s notion of humanizing pedagogical theory reduces and undermines humanizing practices. Dale and Hyslop-Margison (2010) assert that “although there are not precise technical methods emerging from Freire’s pedagogy, its potential application is limited only by our creativity and imagination” (p. 74). The findings that emerged from the research participants’ classrooms demonstrated how they enacted the humanizing practices. According to the study's findings, the reduction or undermining of humanizing pedagogy was less a function of the classroom teachers and the humanizing
practices they enacted but more a characteristic of the broader high-stakes testing environments in which they work.

To confront the broader conditions that operate within their high-stakes testing cultures, the teachers in this study demonstrated del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) tenet of challenging inequity in the educational system to promote transformation. While not noted as a predominant finding of the collective case study, it appeared in the case’s data. As data in Chapter 4 shows, there are instances where teachers confront administrative decisions they believe to be inconsistent with their students' best interests based on their knowledge of their students' realities and learning sensibilities. Such instances of teachers challenging their administrators were often in response to policies attempting to control learning environments, most specifically students’ home spaces during remote, virtual learning.

What is less evident in the data relating theoretical alignment to humanizing pedagogy is how teachers use their critical consciousness to position students to challenge inequity in the educational system, or more broadly, to promote transformation. For example, there was little data on how teachers aroused critical consciousness in students to the point of engaging them in posing social justice problems and solutions related to their school or the broader community. The challenge of humanizing practices that lead to transformative student action is reminiscent of recent research findings seeking to answer related questions (Buenrostro, 2016). The reality remains that teaching and learning to achieve transformative change or social justice in public schools requires teachers to continue to work in a contradictory space bound by neoliberal guidelines of federal, state, and local policies and practices related to students scoring well on tests.
The transformational nature of humanizing pedagogy lacks prominence in the study's findings, but the classroom teachers' deep, trusting relationships introduce students to more meaningful class content. Moreover, the relationships revealed in the study are more than genial, mutual, and respectful. While care is undoubtedly an essential element, Camangian (2021) contends that "humanization as a response to colonial and intersectional dehumanization requires much more than a historic, interpersonal affection, empathy, and kindness" (p. 5). The study's findings demonstrate that teaching from a position informed by students' realities, interests, and sensibilities encourages exploration and explanation as students see themselves as subjects in their studies. The findings further elucidate Camangian's (2021) point that "if students learn to become the subjects of their own analysis rather than the object of miseducation, they begin to engage in a socially transformative struggle by articulating their own interpretation of themselves and the world around them" (p. 9). The study’s findings produced evidence that the participants' humanizing practices supported students to make sense of their experiences, desires, challenges, strengths, and aspirations, which are all critical aspects of humanization.

**Theoretical Application: Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory was foundational to the study’s theoretical orientation. Critical race theorists argue that racism is normal in U.S. society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, the study’s conclusions are not sans the discussion of race. As previously established, a central tenet of critical race theory is the “meritocracy myth,” which downplays historical injustice and discriminatory practices in favor of believing that all people get what they deserve based on merit. (Bernal, 2002). As the study established, the overwhelming majority of students served in state, and locally-authorized charter schools where the study took place are African American.
Each study participant mainly taught African American students; all identified most of their students as economically disadvantaged per their school’s demographic data.

On a macro-level, one must understand that the meritocracy myth applies to society, at large, to appreciate the counternarratives to neoliberalism within the environments that neoliberal education reform is situated. The research questions guided the study to support understanding how humanization is enacted in dehumanizing learning spaces, explicitly targeting the high-stakes nature of testing within public schools. As previously noted, Guinier (2015) signaled that "testocratic merit assumes that test scores are the best evidence of [students’] worth. . . hereby ignor[ing] biases that privilege those who are already quite advantaged” (p. xi). The research participants understood that the mainstream indicators of merit, or test scores, do not measure what they purport. In other words, teachers know that when test scores are used to indicate merit or worth, that is not what they are doing. The challenge of test scores equating to merit is particularly true during a pandemic, and the research participants pushed back against these narratives and an over-reliance on tests.

This study’s findings demonstrated that teachers enact practices that encourage a more holistic view and a deep understanding of their students. The findings acknowledge the various ways that the participating teachers nuance and revise mandated curriculum, recognizing that students need more representations of their identities, interests, and realities as points of entry to access more relevant content and motivate hard work. Participants’ attempts to refine and revise their curriculum also demonstrated an understanding that merit encompasses more than students mastering the content and that the notion of merit does not exist in a vacuum.

Continuing with the findings’ alignment to critical race theory, a sub-theme that emerged was the view that overreliance on compliance and silence presents obstacles to African American
student achievement. This finding demonstrates that merit within schools requires more nuance for African American children than just working hard. The teachers in the study reported that overly compliant school cultures thwart students’ ability to work hard, engage in discourse, and learn to interrogate and challenge thoughts and ideas through the practice of intellectual acumen. The teachers understood the critical nature of cultivating autonomy in their students’ decision-making and creating choices in how students learn by using relevant strategies as critical humanizing practices, which focusing on compliance and silence negates. Placing African American students, whose collective history includes controlling minds and bodies through enslavement, in an overly compliant learning environment and then assuming they should show evidence of achievement or merit on test scores aligns with critical race theory’s myth of meritocracy (Lack, 2009). “No excuses” charter school models typically have strict rules and discipline policies that have deleterious effects (Dishon & Goodman, 2017; Lack, 2009). As the study’s participants argue, overly compliant learning environments defy the notion of individual merit and counter the independent thinking and critical consciousness that the study participants worked to help their students develop.

**Implications**

Per the study's conclusions are implications for key groups within various education sectors. The study's research questions specifically targeted classroom teachers in charter schools; however, the findings are writ large across the entire K-12 spectrum of schools—charter, traditional public, and independent. Nevertheless, specific implications for charter management organizations and single-site charter schools, teacher education preparation programs, and education policymakers are particularly noteworthy and outlined below.
Charter Schools

Charter school and charter management organization leaders sit at a precarious crossroad. Many charter schools, particularly those that function as state turnaround or state takeover schools, were intended to improve student outcomes. They were created in the spirit of neoliberalism and enjoy state and local funding to spur innovation and autonomy with a promise to increase test scores. Data presented in Chapter 2 show that charters operating within turnaround portfolios have generally not demonstrated significant increases in student achievement. This study's findings inform leaders that more space and opportunity are needed for humanizing practices to permeate the schools' norms, values, mission statements, graduate aims, desired characteristics in new hires, appropriate professional learning and development, and curricular goals that respond to the needs of oppressed communities with students appropriately positioned as subjects in their learning.

Plentiful research and frameworks are available to guide charter schools, network leaders, and teachers in shaping their K-12 curricula to develop students' critical consciousness and tap their knowledge to address problems of significance within their larger communities (Adamian, 2020; Camangian, 2015; Carnero, 2017; Curammeng et al., 2016; Drake & Oglesby, 2020). There is also research outside of K-12 classrooms regarding specific humanizing frameworks and practices transferable to K-12 curriculum (Baldridge, 2014; Tillis, 2018). Additionally, the research illuminates teacher learning and development opportunities that charter school leaders can implement to deepen educators’ knowledge and praxis regarding humanization (Chen, Desai, & Knight-Manuel, 2016; Navarro, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Reyes, 2016). The findings of this research and available literature encourage leveraging of charter schools' relative autonomy to innovate. Humanization might very well improve academic outcomes more than test scores
and demonstrate gains in the hyper-focused academic assessment arenas in which all public schools find themselves within today's neoliberal reform agenda.

**Teacher Preparation Programs**

One implication for charter schools, as noted above, suggests that they look for mindset, disposition, and practical evidence regarding alignment with humanization as part of the requirements for teachers they seek to hire. It is insufficient to ask charter leaders to develop humanistic professional learning experiences that inspire and develop critical consciences in teachers. Charter schools require support to choose teaching candidates trained in traditional and alternative teacher licensure programs that treat humanization as a definitive pedagogical approach. Considerable scholarship exists on the topic of humanizing pedagogy as a critical focus for teacher educators and the preparation of preservice teachers (Carter-Andrews et al., 2019; Bartolome, 1994; Carter-Andrews et al., 2016; Carter-Andrews et al., 2018; Reyes III, 2016; del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2019). A consistent theme presents a challenge noted in this study. Neoliberal education reform regime places similar expectations on teacher education programs akin to producing teachers that can help students excel on standardized tests.

The messiness of standing firm in humanizing pedagogy as praxis is not a trivial pursuit for schools of education and teacher licensure programs. However, if K-12 schools, as the customers of education preparation programs, increase demands for teachers who have humanization as the foundation of their professional studies, teacher preparation programs will position themselves to turn the neoliberal tide. They will offer teachers who enter the profession with a lens to evaluate success in the development and evidence of students' empowerment derived from their critical consciousness and ability to affect change through the academic work they experience and produce in school. Humanization as praxis in teacher preparation programs
requires the constant, political intention to unlearn and resist cultural conditioning that marginalizes certain groups. Teacher educators and the teachers they produce need to understand how to do this work personally and in ways connected to schools and communities with the end goal of helping their students enact social transformation that upheinds oppression as they see it.

**Federal, State, and Local Education Policy-makers**

K-12 charter school leaders and teacher education programs would undoubtedly find the work of centering humanizing pedagogy as praxis less daunting if the broader policies and practices that drive behavior, curriculum, student success measures, and funding for schools were more expansive. Instead of relying solely on critically conscious teachers and school leaders to circumnavigate the system, federal, state, and local departments of education have the opportunity to design policies that affirm schooling’s critical nature as democratic and broader than test scores. Camangian (2021) reports that in 2019 the San Francisco Unified School District’s board of commissioners wrote a resolution to implement humanizing learning experiences for all of its pre-kindergarten–12th-grade students as a district-wide policy. San Francisco Unified’s policy focuses on the learning experience, which aligns with humanization as the current study’s scholarship and literature define it.

Similarly, the historical roots of federal policy presented in Chapter 2 highlight the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of Education (ESEA) of 1965 as the United State’s first significant equity-focused education act tied to funding. DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) remind that “ESEA of 1965 enshrined an equity rationale at the heart of federal education policy—the national government would provide states with supplemental funding and programs in the hope of equalizing educational opportunity for poor and minority students” (p. 4). Given
the increased segregation of predominantly African American children in the current study’s region and the lack of evidence demonstrating gains as described in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), now is a time of reckoning. There is presently an opportunity for federal, state, and local policies to get back to the original intent of the United States’ focus in extending additional funds to topple segregation and drive equity across public education. If San Franciso Unified School District’s board commissioners had the will to enact policies that drive humanization as praxis in its district's teaching and learning experiences for all students, undoubtedly, the nation’s federal government should not shrink from doing the same.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to examine the humanizing practices that classroom teachers have enacted within the current high-stakes testing environments of urban charter schools, which are characteristic of neoliberal education reform (Au, 2009, 2010; Baldridge, 2014, 2017; Brathwaite, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Dumas, 2013; 2004; Hursh, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; Menken, 2006, 2008, 2010; Slater & Griggs, 2015; Sleeter, 2018; Valenzuela, 2004). While the current study addresses this purpose, many research opportunities remain specifically for charter schools, teacher preparation and licensure programs, and for local, state, and federal policymakers.

**Charter Schools**

Charter schools are designed to have greater autonomy and flexibility than schools in traditional districts; therefore, a recommendation for charter leaders is to pose questions similar to those in this study as an internal learning agenda that might elicit findings from their teachers to inform more humanizing policies and practices. Additionally, the current study poses a
limitation in that students’ voices and perspectives are not central to the research. Charter leaders might research to study the impact of humanization per their students’ perceptions. Student perspectives regarding their experiences when taught in humanizing ways were not as plentiful in the research. Therefore, future studies of this nature would add more knowledge to the field regarding humanization in schools.

**Teacher Preparation Programs**

As addressed earlier, this study acknowledges the body of research specific to humanization as praxis within teacher preparation programs (Chen, Desai, & Knight-Manuel, 2016; Navarro, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Reyes, 2016). Analysis of the current study’s data contextualizes enacting humanizing practices while teaching remotely during a global pandemic. Given these present realities, research to illuminate shifts in teacher preparation programs to deepen humanization remains instructive and supportive of those grappling with making similar shifts.

To understand if and how teacher preparation programs deepen humanization as praxis, plausible research considerations include longitudinal studies that capture pre-service teachers who progress to in-service as graduates of preparation and licensure programs steeped in understanding and enacting humanization as a credentialing expectation. Studies comparing teachers graduating from programs with humanization as praxis to those teachers whose preparation programs lacked the established humanization-focused criteria are needed. Qualitative and quantitative opportunities to understand questions similar to those posed in the current study from a comparative aspect would offer valuable information to the field.
Federal, State, and Local Policymakers

As previously discussed, in 2019, the San Francisco Unified School District’s board of commissioners voted in favor of Resolution 196–25A, which made implementing humanizing learning experiences for all of its pre-kindergarten–12th-grade students a district-wide policy. A query into similar district-level policies demonstrated a focus on humanization related to school climate and culture; there are references to social-emotional learning and restorative justice concerning discipline policies. These are limited and do not account for the full scope of student learning experiences. Therefore, research opportunities related to San Francisco Unified School District’s Resolution 196–25A exist to help educators and policy-makers better understand the resolution’s structure, content, and district-wide ramifications and implications.

Research findings related to unearthing the policy might support other districts if they consider their local contexts and possibilities of enacting similar district-wide humanizing learning policies. Another research opportunity related to San Francisco Unified’s Resolution 196–25A is understanding how the district has defined humanizing learning experience and codified associated practices at all levels and with all stakeholders—leaders, academic coaches, counselors, teachers, students, and families. For each of the noted stakeholder groups, research opportunities exist to capture their perspectives, perceptions, development, challenges, successes (to name a few) with coming to understand, engage in, and enact humanizing learning experiences per the parameters and definitions of the resolution’s policy. These are only a few opportunities related to future research specifically around district-level policy that drives enacting humanizing learning experiences.

Whether in the arenas of charter schools, teacher preparation programs, or public policy, educational institutions that directly or indirectly impact K-12 classrooms must continuously
reckon with African American children continuing to carry collective, multigenerational post-traumatic slave stressors (DeGruy, 2017). Current neoliberal reform efforts, specifically those targeting marginalized communities marked by economic disenfranchisement, take African American children whose collective U.S. history is rooted in dehumanization and further subjects them to dehumanizing practices via their schooling experiences, which this study well-documents. The findings demonstrate how classroom teachers in urban charter schools leverage relationships with students and families, alter curriculum to better center their students within it, and incorporate student-centered learning strategies to disrupt the conditions that stifle them given neoliberal efforts like high-stakes testing, mandated curriculum, and overly imposed cultures of compliance. Suppose the true position of public education in the U.S. is aligned with the nation’s aspirations of democracy and justice. In that case, more voices must join with those amplified throughout this study to challenge the perverse nature of neoliberalism’s dehumanizing effects, which are in stark opposition to having students actualize liberation through their K-12 learning experiences.
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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

2020-10-14

PI Name: Michelle Armstrong
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Beverly Cross
Submission Type: Initial
Title: How Do Classroom Teachers in Urban Charter Schools Enact Humanizing Pedagogy Amid Neoliberal Education Reform? A Case Study from the American South
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2021-28

Expedited Approval: 2020-10-13

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis
Appendix B: Study Flyer

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

How Do Classroom Teachers in Urban Charter Schools Enact Humanizing Pedagogy Amid Neoliberal Education Reform?: A Case Study from the American South

The purpose of the study is to examine the humanizing practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools enact amid high-stakes testing environments. The research includes three 90-minute interviews over the course of approximately two months.

Eligible participants:
- are currently teaching or have taught in a K-12 school for at least three years.
- have taught in a charter school within the last three years (local district or state-authorized).
- are willing to participate in three 90-minute interviews.
- are willing to share examples of lesson plans or professional learning materials.

Participants will receive up to $30 in the form of a Target gift e-card after completing the three interviews as part of the research study. All interviews will take place via Zoom or phone.

To learn more about this research, contact Michelle Armstrong, Doctoral Student at 901-550-7722 or email at pbrantly@memphis.edu. This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. Beverly Cross, Instruction and Curriculum Leadership
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

The interview protocol derives from del Carmen Salazar’s (2013) key elements, which comprise a working frame of humanizing pedagogy as the main content of the questions. Additionally, the structure of the three-interview process (Seidman, 2006) is incorporated to guide the focus of each interview, and Diefenbach’s (2008) assertion that interview questions give way to epochal ideologies. Structural contexts of society are also operating within the design of the semi-structured inquiry.

Interview Protocol 1: Life History in Teaching

1. How did you become a teacher?
   a. What are memories of experiences that shaped your desire to become a classroom teacher?

2. How long have you been teaching?
   a. How long at each school (if multiple schools are referenced)?

3. Describe the different school communities and the students that you have taught.

4. Please walk me through one of your favorite days you have ever had teaching at your current school.
   a. What happened?
   b. What made it such a great day for you?
   c. How would you describe your relationships with your students on this day?

5. What currently excites you most about your teaching?
   a. What sorts of things make it difficult for you to feel this kind of excitement more often than you do?

6. What have you found most challenging about your teaching?
   a. Who or what contributes to these challenges?
   b. What are some ways you have worked through these challenges in your teaching?

7. When you hear terms like liberation education or humanizing classroom practices, what do they mean to you in your classroom?
8. What are some broader practices in education or society (legislation, policies, practices) that support what liberation education or classroom humanizing practices mean to you?

9. What are some broader practices in education or society (legislation, policies, practices) that hinder what liberation education or classroom humanizing practices mean to you?

10. As a follow-up to this interview, are there any documents that you have to illustrate further the information you've shared with me today (e.g., lesson plans or professional learning materials)?
Interview Protocol 2: Present Experiences in Teaching

Part 1

1. In Interview 1, you described your students as. . . Tell me how you understand the reality of your students now.

2. Describe to me how you are trying to build trusting and caring relationships with your students?
   a. How do you know when this works in your classroom?
   b. What happens when your relationships with your students aren't built on trust and care?
   c. Can you share any specific examples of the kind of caring relationship you have with a student you wish you could have with more students?

3. What do you understand and know about your students' social and cultural characteristics and resources - by this, I mean their customs, traditions, histories, collective and individual interests?
   a. Based on what you understand and know about your students' social and cultural characteristics and resources, how do you honor and extend these in your curriculum?
   b. Based on how you honor and extend these in your curriculum, do you see this helping or hindering your students' academic achievement in high-stakes testing environments?

4. Tell me how your students achieve through their academics.

5. How do they achieve through their social abilities?

6. Tell me how you make your content meaningful and relevant to your students' lives?
   a. How do you do this within your curriculum?
      i. Can you give me a specific example?
   b. How do you make what goes on in the classroom, aside from the formal curriculum, relevant to your students' lives?
      i. Example?
   c. How do you see these efforts at connecting what happens in the classroom to your students' lives outside of the classroom, influencing their achievement in high stakes testing environments?
i. If they help: Why do you think it helps?
   ii. If they don't help: Why is it important for you to continue to make these connections even if they are not helping the test scores?

7. Can you please share some examples of how you link your students' prior knowledge to new learning?

8. Tell me about the learning strategies that you use in your classroom.
   a. Are there any strategies that you're required to use but disagree with? Why and how are these strategies that you disagree with dictated?

9. In interview one, you mentioned broader practices in education and society that support and create obstacles to liberation education. How do you think about the roles of oppression and privilege as they relate to your role as a teacher (critical consciousness)?
   a. How do you think about the roles of oppression and privilege as they relate to your students (critical consciousness)?

10. How are teachers uniquely positioned to challenge inequity in the educational system?
    a. Tell me about a time when you have seen yourself as a challenger of inequity, given your current role as a classroom teacher.
    b. (If applicable based on 10.a.) Based on your previous response, how can your actions promote transformation?
    c. In your opinion, how do you see your efforts at challenging inequity helping your students?
    d. Do you see any obstacles?

11. What aspects of your school make it hard for you to challenge inequity in ways that are important to you?
    a. When you think about your students' learning experiences, how do your school's policies, practices, protocols, and requirements promote or hinder you from challenging inequity?

12. As a follow-up to this interview, are there any documents that you have to illustrate further the information you've shared with me today (e.g., lesson plans or professional learning materials)?
Part 2

1. Let’s discuss the documents that you sent after our first interview. What do they represent?
2. How do they help me to understand how you engage in humanizing pedagogy?
3. Is there any additional information that you’d like to add about these documents?
Interview Protocol 3: Making Meaning of Teaching Experiences

1. Given what you have shared about the experiences that led you to teach and the work you are currently doing in your classroom, are there ways that you make liberation education or humanizing practices real in your classroom? If so, how?
   a. How has this understanding developed over time?

2. Are there any ways that you think your classroom practices might be detracting from what you see as liberation education or humanizing practices?

3. What's your vision of your future self as a classroom teacher?

4. As you reflect on our conversations, are there ways that you might think about building relationships with students differently in the future?
   a. As you reflect on our conversations, are there ways that you might think about structuring your curriculum differently in the future?
   b. As you reflect on our conversations, are there ways that you might think about implementing teaching strategies differently in the future?
   c. As you reflect on our conversations, are there ways that you might think about having students demonstrate their learning differently in the future?

5. Given any examples of what you might do differently from the previous questions, how do you see your classroom practices challenging inequity in the educational system?

6. Given any examples of what you might do differently from the previous questions, do you see these challenging inequities?
   a. If so, what policies, practices, protocols, and requirements would help you challenge these inequities?
   b. If so, what policies, practices, protocols, and requirements might hinder you in challenging these inequities?

7. As a follow-up to this interview, are there any documents that you have to illustrate further the information you've shared with me today (e.g., lesson plans or professional learning materials)? Because this is our last interview, please share with me what the documents will represent in terms of humanizing practices in your classroom?
Part 2

1. Let’s discuss the documents that you sent after our second interview. What do they represent?
2. How do they help me to understand how you engage in humanizing pedagogy?
3. Is there any additional information that you’d like to add about these documents?
Appendix D: Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Title: How Do Classroom Teachers in Urban Charter Schools Enact Humanizing Pedagogy Amid Neoliberal Educational Reform?: A Case Study from the American South

Researcher(s): Michelle Armstrong, University of Memphis

Researchers Contact Information: pbrantly@memphis.edu 901-550-2277

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of three to four people to do so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Information for You to Consider</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Consent: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.</td>
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| Purpose: This research aims to understand the practices that classroom teachers in urban charter schools in a mid-south region enact to promote tenets of humanizing pedagogy within high-stakes testing environments due to state assessment requirements. These humanizing tenants deal with developing trusting relationships with students and increasing knowledge of students' lives outside of school, to then use this knowledge in ways that deepen learning. Humanizing pedagogy also focuses on teaching practices and curricular content that help students better see global inequity, including their own schooling experiences. Humanizing practices help teachers use instructional methods and allow students to use strategies that best promote their learning, given their identities and affinities. |

| Duration: It is expected that your participation will last approximately two months. |

| Procedures and Activities: It is expected that your total participation will last approximately six hours. You will be asked to complete three 90-minute interviews. As part of the interview |

Institutional Review Board
315 Administration Bldg.
Memphis, TN 38152-3370
Office: 901.678.2705
process, you will also be asked to provide documents, such as lesson plans and teaching and learning materials, to illustrate the information you share during the interviews. Documents can not include your name, school name, or the name of any organization. No images will be accepted that include students. After you have completed the interview process, you will have an opportunity to review a draft of your narrative for the study's findings to check for accuracy of excerpted interview excerpts and my interpretations of your excerpts any documents that you share. This opportunity will be outside of the three 90-minute interviews.

**Risk:** There is no more physical risk involved for you than there is in daily life. The study merely aims to understand your daily practices in teaching as they relate to humanizing classroom practices. To maintain minimal risk, you may refuse to answer a question that makes you feel uncomfortable, and the researcher will not pressure you for answers.

Given the current COVID-19 health pandemic, no interviews will be in-person. For each of the three interviews, you will choose a video platform like Zoom or a phone conference line for an audio-only interview, and I will record and transcribe the interviews. While many teachers teach from their homes due to the health pandemic, I recognize that your school might be a desired location for the interview. Therefore, I will ask you to engage in the interview from a location that offers privacy and minimizes identity risk. In the first interview, you will choose a pseudonym for your identity and your school name to use for the entire study. Additionally, the interviews' audio and video recordings will be destroyed after completing the study as protection. The interview transcripts will not include your name or school name and will be kept indefinitely.

**Benefits:** Study participants will benefit from up to $30 in the form of a Target e-card. The gift card will be emailed to you after the third interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study before the final interview, you will receive $10 for each interview completed, and your confidential data from the interviews you did complete will be included in the study.

Who is conducting this research?

- Michelle Armstrong, a doctoral student at the University of Memphis, Department of Instruction and Curriculum Leadership, is in charge of the study. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Beverly Cross. There is no significant financial interest and/or a conflict of interest related to the research.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?

- If you agree, your participation will involve three interviews, approximately 90 minutes in length. Your interviews will be scheduled approximately three to seven days apart; however, the researcher will be flexible based on your schedule. All interviews will take place via Zoom or phone. During the interview, you may skip any questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can stop the interview at any time.

You will also be asked to submit teaching materials that you have already produced to inform the information that you share in the interview. Examples of documents include lesson plans and professional learning materials that might illustrate the information you share during the interviews. Lastly, you will have a chance to review a draft of your narrative in the findings presented in the study. This review will allow you to check your interview excerpts' accuracy and my interpretations of those excerpts and documents you provide.
What happens to the information collected for this research?
The researcher may report, publish, or present the results of this research; however, your name and other identifying information will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in any published reports, conference presentations, or other documents.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?
- I promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best I can. Although, you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures I will take include:
  - using pseudonyms to protect your identity. At the start of the interview process, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym, which will be used in any published material.
  - Using pseudonyms for other identifiable information. Your school name, location, and specific grade level/subject you teach will not be identified to honor your confidentiality.
  - Conducting interviews via Zoom to protect your health during the COVID-19 pandemic and to protect your identity from school affiliates. You will be asked to sign on to Zoom or join by phone from a location that offers you privacy to protect your identity. The researcher will also sign on from a location that ensures privacy during the interview.
  - Emailing documents. For your safety, I will ask that you email via scan or picture any documents that support the information you share in your interviews. The documents can not include your name, your school's name, or the names of any organizations; all identifying information will need to be excluded or completely marked-through all documents before emailing them to me.
  - Storing the collected data on the researcher's passcode-protected computer using password protected files. Only I will have access to the data. The transcription files will be stored indefinitely after the publication of the research.
  - Storing the de-identifiable documents. Documents will also be kept indefinitely after the publication of the research. Again, the documents can not include your name, your school's name, or the names of any organizations.
  - Individuals and organizations that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information any documents you submit during the data gathering process. This individual and organization include:
    - Institutional Review Board, University of Memphis
    - Dr. Beverly Cross, Faculty Advisor to Michelle Armstrong

Please be advised that the researcher is required to report the following if she suspects child abuse or neglect, or suicidal thoughts. TN Laws may require this suspicion be reported. In such case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information.

What other choices do I have besides participating in this research?
- If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.
What if I want to stop participating in this research?
• It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also ok to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. None of your data will be reported to your school or school district. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of Memphis. If you ever choose to withdraw from the study, please notify the researcher via email. Your confidential data from the interviews you did complete will be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?
• There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?
• For taking part in this research, you may be compensated up to $30 in Target gift e-cards. You will be paid in $10 increments for each interview completed (a total of 3 interviews). The gift e-cards will be emailed directly to you after all three interviews. If you withdraw from the study before completing all three interviews, you will receive $10 for each interview completed before the final interview.

Who can answer my question about this research?
Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Michelle Armstrong, at 901-550-2277 (pbrantly@memphis.edu) or the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Beverly Cross, at 901-678-4965 (becross@memphis.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. I will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT
I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, you will be audio/video recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio/video recorded information will be used for transcribing the interviews. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio/video recording as described.

_____ I agree to the use of audio/video recording.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Adult Participant</th>
<th>Signature of Adult Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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**Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)**

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Research Team Member</th>
<th>Signature of Research Team Member</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>