EMPOWERING STUDENT DRIVEN RESISTANCE: USING STUDENT-DIRECTED
LEARNING TO CREATE SELF-ADVOCACY IN THE CLASSROOM

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Ashley Lord Schlafly

May 2018

Acknowledgement

A project like this is never undertaken or completed alone. I would like to thank the members of my committee who gave tremendous feedback and support. Thank you to Dr. Shields for your amazing advice, constant feedback and ideas. You truly helped shaped this into a project that I am proud to say is mine. I could not have done this without your wisdom and expertise. Dr. Beaudry, thank you for agreeing to continue on this committee through March, even with the distance that now stands between you and Houston. Your questions helped me think about my topic from perspectives I do not think I would have considered on my own. Dr. Thompson, thank you for joining my committee at the end. I appreciate your help. Dr. White, thank you for being a wonderful sounding board and pure example of what a teacher as advocate should be. Finally, thank you to Dr. Hutchison, my chair, for your support, advice and assistance with this project, as well as all aspects of my doctoral journey. I am so fortunate to have you as both my chair and as a mentor.

I would like to thank my brother, Jordan Lord, for his assistance and his acting as a sounding board throughout the creation of my theoretical framework and beyond. Thank you to my parents, Albert and Deborah Lord for their encouragement of me to pursue my academic dreams from Tulane forward. I love you both. Thank you to Angelique, Darren, Hannah and Christian White for your love and support. Gratitude is also extended to my grandmother, Annette Carter. Thank you for always believing in me and reminding me I will finish one day. Thank you, as well, to my aunts, Jean Gladney and Marilyn Mack for their prayers and love. To my husband, Thomas S. Schlafly, thank you for your patience, unending belief in me and my ideas. I love you so, and I am so

lucky to be able to see myself through your eyes and for you to love me in the way that you do. To my son, Finnegan Thomas Schlafly, I know you are too young to understand this process, but I am so grateful for your patience when Mommy had to write. You are a light in my life, and I hope that one day my academic journey will inspire you to undertake your own. To my Eliana Annette Schlafly, you went through this process with me, and being pregnant with you while writing and defending was something truly special. I can't wait to meet you and share this with you one day.

I want to thank the educators over the course of my academic journey, especially Tom Dugger. Your dedication to literature, the passion you had for the material you shared and the care you took with all of us that passed through your classroom doors has certainly followed me through my years post-secondary. Thank you for teaching me to question, analyze and, most importantly, to express myself in written form. You are and will always be the greatest inspiration.

Finally, to Dr. Fred Mack, thank you for telling me at the age of six that I would have my doctorate one day. Every late night, every rewrite, every long research filled day, I have thought of you and the inspiration you were and will always be to me. I miss you dearly, but I know that your support and love followed me through this process. With every keystroke and every page completed, I wrote to both remember and honor you. I sincerely hope to one day discuss this paper and more with you again. Until then, please know I dedicate this project and my journey to you and the legacy of love, laughter and search for knowledge you left behind. It truly was an honor to have known you.

EMPOWERING STUDENT DRIVEN RESISTANCE: USING STUDENT-DIRECTED
LEARNING TO CREATE SELF-ADVOCACY IN THE CLASSROOM

An Abstract
of a Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

by

Ashley Lord Schlafly

May 2018

Abstract

Background: Student-directed learning is a teaching style that focuses on providing students with autonomy where the teacher and students share power so that both become equal partners in the learning process. Student-directed learning can promote high levels of academic achievement among students from vulnerable populations within urban and other types of school settings. **Purpose**: The purpose of this study was to examine the process of designing a classroom that promoted student-directed learning. This study posed the following questions: RQ1: What social factors regarding student voice exist to demonstrate the need for a pedagogical shift in the classroom, including my own? RQ2: How was my student-directed classroom run and what tools were needed to change to such an instructional framework? RQ3: What changes occurred in my classroom in terms of agency, engagement and achievement following the implementation of student-directed learning? **Methods**: This study used a case study of the researcher's classroom to explore the instructional implementation of a student-directed learning framework as well as an exploration of themes identified throughout to explore agency, engagement and achievement in the classroom. **Results:** Transitioning to student-directed learning proved to be successful at increasing the level of agency, engagement and achievement amongst students. **Conclusion**: Results suggest that student-directed learning is an instructional style that may prove to be successful with vulnerable populations. Results further suggest that there are potential barriers to large scale changes to such instruction, though, including a test-prep culture, state of public education and expectations of administration. Still, despite these barriers, further exploration into student-directed learning across

curriculums and grade levels is needed due to the potential benefit students from

vulnerable populations may experience as a result of receiving instruction in this manner.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter I

Introduction

"What if we were able to enable students to design and control their own education? What if instead of doing education to students, we actually allowed them to use the staff and school and the wider community to manage and design their own education?"

-Peter Hutton, Ted X Melbourne, November 20, 2014 (TedX, 2014).

A school defined by the questions asked by Australian educator Peter Hutton is one that some in traditional education might find troubling due to the power shift from teacher to student (McKenna, 2013). Despite this, Hutton's vision came to life in 2009 when the staff at the failing campus of Templestowe College decided to totally overhaul their school vision. Today, with about 600 students between the ages of 12 to 18, Templestowe College is the manifestation of the choice Hutton proposes. This institution allows for autonomy of choice amongst students that results in an individualized education for all that attend the public school. There are no grade levels, no required classes and no school bell at Templestowe College. It is literally run by the students that attend and the faculty and administration coordinate the administrative pieces and classroom interactions day-to-day. All 600 students create an individualized learning plan that is constructed from 150 electives offered on the campus that open up to all in attendance once the attendee has proven the ability to read and attain basic mathematical skills (TedX, 2014). For the past eight years, this commitment to personalized education has carried the school forward with an empowered student body that makes its own schedule, decides its own educational path and produced tremendous results for the school and community.

Still, despite its success, Templestowe College remains a unique experiment that is not being replicated often throughout Australia or with the same commitment within the United States. In both countries, most schools still follow the Prussian model which Hutton describes as being, "designed around an assembly line production," where all students are taught in the same way (Tapp, 2015). Thus, the idea that a student body would be capable of self-determination where they are controlling all aspects of their schooling, including even the selection of faculty, is one that is pretty revolutionary, too much so for some, despite the data that such freedoms are working. Many within educational leadership continue to reject the idea that students can totally govern themselves, and, as such, the work of Hutton and his colleagues have yet to change the delivery of education or the student's role in it. The traditions of teacher-run, teacher-centered classrooms appear to run too deep, especially within the American education system.

My Instructional Story

Still, when I first read about Hutton in 2015, I found the work he and his colleagues were attempting intriguing. I decided in the early part of the 2016-2017 school year to try and apply the work being done at Templestowe to a classroom of my own in a large, urban district in the southwestern region of the United States. The challenge with this group of eighth graders in my English Language Arts and Reading classroom, though, went beyond typical issues of disruptive behavior. My students included a fairly large population of what the school labeled as behaviorally-challenged students, some of whom held formal diagnoses of emotionally disturbed. Emotionally disturbed students exhibit certain characteristics consistently and to a degree that affect

their ability to perform in an educational setting. These students have a combination of issues that include a lack of ability to maintain relationships with teachers and fellow students, a fear of school or personal issues that include physical symptoms related to such fear, an inability to learn that is not due to an underlying medical, intellectual or sensory disorder, general unhappiness and/or inappropriate behaviors or feelings when in normal settings and under normal circumstances ("Behavior Disorders: Definitions, Characteristics & Related Information"). Those emotionally disturbed students that enter into school with a combination of the issues outlined above are often considered to present some of the most challenging behaviors in the classroom and for the classroom teacher. Because of this, I found myself attempting to ameliorate a plethora of issues including large amounts of instructional time lost due to behavioral redirections, declining academic progress and daily discipline referrals. In an effort to positively affect my classroom environment, I tried traditional means of classroom management including positive-behavior support programs (Sugai & Horner, 2002), adherence to behavioral intervention plans drafted by the special education department on my campus and four drafts of seating charts based on both behavior and ability (Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Nothing was working, though. I decided then that I had to seek a solution outside of these traditional means of support and reject the status quo for how to handle classroom management issues. I decided I could not affect the change I wanted to see from my students simply because I had not asked them about what I was changing, how I was changing it or if it needed to be changed. I had made the mistake of many educators by making my classroom about me, when in reality, it always should have been about my students. As a result, I was doing education to them, rather than asking them if they

wanted to participate in the decision-making process. This lack of consideration is much like how Dewey (1916) talks about the difference between the living and inanimate. Dewey speaks of a stone and uses the stone being struck and not resisting the strike as the definition of an inanimate object, one that does not protect itself against the blow, so, when struck the stone is smashed into smaller stones made eventually into insignificant pieces. On the other hand, the living resists change by actively fighting against being hit. If the living are struck and unable to resist the blow, they are not only smashed into tiny bits, but their identity is totally changed as a result of the blow. They are rendered something different than they intended to be. That is what my students were like in my room. Some were inanimate and non-participatory, so as I would strike them with my type of teaching, they would not resist and be broken down into smaller pieces of what they already were, an uninterested body in the room. The students who were living, who resisted either through acting out or defiant interactions were more involved, but they were smashed when I struck them with my authoritarian take on my classroom. In this case, I rendered them submissive, but they were changed as a result. They were smashed into something I wanted to make them, not what they originally intended to be. When I realized that I was the one doing this rendering, this change without my students' consent, I knew I had to alter the way I ran my classroom. So, I made the decision to finally ask the question of what my students wanted and extended an invitation to discuss our room. The responses I received would change my entire perspective on education.

Purpose of the Study

As Hutton describes, under the framework of student-directed learning, there is an underlying belief that students shouldn't have education "done to them," but, rather, they

should be a part of the decision-making process about how learning is achieved and what exactly should be learned. When this occurs, the student's learning potential is realized, and students not only learn more but learn better (TedX, 2014).   Expanding acceptance of such beliefs, is a tall order for teachers and potentially school administrators, though. This is in part due to a widely-held assumption within the educational industry that students, especially those considered to be behaviorally challenging, cannot be given a large degree of freedom in the classroom because of the issues such freedoms would cause the educator. In short, if given autonomy, the students would be unable to control themselves and rendered incapable of learning. As such, the teacher is thought to be responsible for controlling student behavior and must approach the students with a strong framework of teacher-directed rules and strict, consistent classroom management procedures in order to maintain control. The teacher is intended to serve not only an instructional function but this managerial function simultaneously. Thus, the teacher is not only seen to be the source of information but the source of authority in the classroom that if questioned results in consequences for the student. Such a dynamic creates an ingrained power structure of authority (educator) and those subject to that authority (students). Any attempt to alter this arrangement is met with disciplinary action on the part of both the teacher and often the school administration. Secondly, there is a research-based belief that one of the many reasons students with behavioral issues are below grade level is due to the amount of time lost during instruction due to their behavioral problems. Time spent on redirection, management of the issues that arise from poor student behavior, takes away from the time allotted to actually teach these students causing them to fall below level academically.

While it makes sense that there would be a correlation between instructional time lost and poor academic performance, the means to ameliorate this lost time is still up for debate. Traditionally, the choice of how to manage one's instructional and classroom management falls into one of three categories: teacher-directed (or direct instruction), student-centered or student-directed. The first is teacher-directed. Under this instructional model, students are taught through direct instruction. The teacher lectures for the majority of the class (usually 75% or more). The information is presented from the teacher's perspective in this lecture style and students are tasked with taking notes and working as a whole class or individually following the instruction.   Contrasting this type of teaching are the more student driven models of student-centered and student-directed. Student-centered instruction focuses all aspects of lesson planning, lesson delivery and assessment with the student at the center of the equation. Responsibility for learning is shifted toward the student who is expected to take more ownership of their education than under a teacher-directed model.   Within the student-centered construct, the long lectures are gone and students become a part of the discussion when it comes to planning. There are small groups created within the classroom, and the teacher presents mini-lessons that are followed by student-driven activities. This style of instruction provides students the opportunity to have a voice in their own education, but the teacher still drives and moderates all aspects of the classroom. That is where student-directed learning comes in. Under a student-directed model, students gain further autonomy and the teacher becomes an equal partner with the students in the learning process. The student is allowed to decide alongside the educator about mentor texts, assessments, etc. Additionally, the student becomes a teacher of both themselves and their classmates

alongside the traditional teacher, thus empowering the student to be the champion of their own learning by being informed on all aspects of the curriculum, knowledge standards and content required by the state and federal Departments of Education. Under this instructional model, the teacher is often referred to as a "co-learner" alongside the students where the learning process is organic, every changing, democratic and ongoing.

As mentioned above, the latter of these instructional models would not be considered to be a viable option employed by some teachers due to the presumption of control issues that may arise. This loss of control is feared amongst many educators both with and without students with behavioral problems. Still, there is evidence to support the idea that students are able to flourish when given independence. Thus, this paper seeks to challenge the negative connotation of increased student autonomy and determine if there is a way to improve both behavior and academic performance by providing students with more freedom than rules. If proven to be successful, student-directed learning presents the opportunity to change pedagogical practice within the classroom in its most fundamental arrangement and distribution of roles and responsibilities, and, as a result, alter the way education is delivered and to whom it is delivered. Further, it would allow for the question of how might challenging the most widely held assumptions about power dynamics between students and teachers result in an increase in student voice. Before research can begin, though, one must first start by identifying how language is constructed around instructional frameworks. Certain concepts must be defined at the outset. Consider the following questions: What is a teacher? What makes someone a student? How are the roles of student and teacher codetermined by their relation to one another? And should these roles be mutually exclusive? Who has the power to determine

learning, and what arrangements are currently in place that define this power? Where does teaching end and learning begin? This study will argue that education occurs when dialogue is initiated between two parties. Both groups participate in a transference of knowledge as a result of that dialogue. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, teaching as it has traditionally been done under a teacher or student centered framework is defined as the remaking of the teacher's knowledge within the students. The body of knowledge is transferred from one body, the teacher, to an entire group of individuals considered to be one entity, the student body. The student-directed classroom changes these dynamics, though. Under this model, transference of knowledge is not controlled by one body, nor is it directed to an all-encompassing group. Instead, the student and teacher are equal partners that dialogue about a subject where each individual contributes and takes away something different from the exchange. Learning is shared, as is power, where everyone holds a seat of power, as well as a responsibility to not just learn but to teach others. This expectation applies to both the student, as well as the educator, where, if successful, the student-directed teacher learns as much from the students, as the students learn from them. Therefore, the transference of knowledge is held separate and within each individual which coalesces to create a diverse body of knowledge that is shared equally amongst the individual bodies within that classroom. The purpose of this study is to examine how to craft such a classroom that can produce student-directed learning where knowledge is shared equally between the teacher and students and all within the classroom work toward a collective learning environment where power is shared and learning maximized, as a result.

Research Design

This study is a qualitative study that is grounded in a case study completed during my time in the classroom during the 2016-2017 school year. It is told through reflections from my classroom experience, whereby my role as a participant-researcher was informed by my experience as a classroom teacher and is based on the qualitative data (observations and journal notes) gathered for this study. Additionally, I am the sole participant of this study, and I am focusing on my experience as an educator, as well as participant in my student-directed experience. This study will focus on the ways in which knowledge is transferred through student-directed learning in the most equitable and effective manner within the confines of a classroom that contains vulnerable populations, often with a high propensity of students of color. These rooms across the country are plagued with many challenging complexities including large class sizes, lack of resources, lack of funding and problems with student behavior, performance and growth. Thus, it creates a perfect environment for a study to be conducted on the effect of various instructional models within student populations that have been identified as "difficult" or "troubled." The problem with such labeling, though, is that it creates a space where the student is held responsible for "bad" behaviors, either real or perceived. In these cases, the full onus of both their actions deemed deviant and what is considered to be their inability or unwillingness to alter such behaviors falls solely on the student. Further, the identity of "deviant" is something that is cast upon the student and often accepted and acted upon by that individual. It is a role that follows the student and is often accepted and acted out by that student throughout their time in school. For example, Chassin, Eason and Young (1981) write about the stereotypes that plague students with behavioral designations. In their 1981 research, the authors describe how students labeled as BD

(behaviorally disturbed) or ED (emotionally disturbed) are categorized as deviant alongside these labels. Chassin, Eason and Young (1981) compare this type of label to those such as "popular teen," "juvenile delinquent," and "disturbed." The study looks at how the students themselves identify and how deviant the behaviors of these students are followed by such self-identification. Basically, the idea is that student's bad behavior follows the identification sometimes rather than precedes it. Because of this, it is important for educators to understand the psychological impact being labeled as emotionally-disturbed (ED) or behaviorally-disturbed (BD) has on a student. When labels are not issued, students are more capable of regaining self-confidence and changing their behavior in the classroom. The researchers believe this is in direct reaction to the label being removed because once the BD or ED diagnosis is made, the stigma begins to follow that student and changes the perception of their behavior both with the educator and themselves. (Chaissen, Eason, &Young, 1981)

Research shows that the stigma associated with BD and ED diagnoses identified in the work of Chassin, Eason and Young (1981) may also extend into the ways teachers interact with the students during class time. Slate and Saudargas (1987) looked into the way teachers respond to students with learning disabilities, average children and those children diagnosed emotionally disturbed. All of these groups of students (52 in total) were observed in classrooms for 80 minute segments. The study determined that those students diagnosed with an LD or as ED were treated differently than their regular education counterparts. When students with an LD or diagnosed ED were on track in the classroom (defined as doing their work and not acting out), teachers did not interact with them. Those students were left alone and did not have any dialogue with the teacher.

The only time the teacher did speak to these students was when they broke class rules or became off track. Compared to regular education students, these students with an LD or diagnosed BD had fewer instances of teacher support, and, rather, their only experience with the teacher was that of a negative connotation due to the teacher only using redirection when dealing with those students (Slate & Saudargras, 1987).

Such negative instances can lead students diagnosed with behavioral impairments to feel as if they are actually a challenge for the educator exerting authority over the classroom, and, as such, the student acts accordingly becoming a "problem" for that teacher. David Strahan (1989) compiled three sets of articles that focus on students labeled as "at-risk." Students with behavioral diagnoses are a part of this category and are, as such, labeled as problems within the classroom. When they are classified as a problem, though, these students become disconnected from their school and all aspects of the learning environment. Strahan (1989) writes that the solution is to break the cycle of disruption caused by the feeling of disconnection. In doing so, ED and BD students can see an increase in self-confidence and ability in all of their classrooms (Strahan, 1989). If Strahan's research is correct, though, then students that are diagnosed with behavioral issues become disruptive and/or disconnected, leading to negative interactions within the classroom. Such behaviors are compounded by the teacher, though, according to the work of Bender and Evans (1988). These researchers looked at what happened after students with behavioral diagnoses were mainstreamed into classrooms with the advent of inclusion. BD students, according to Bender and Evans (1988), universally lack internal control and have poor self-image. Because of these issues, academic achievement is negatively affected, causing students that are BD to perform poorly both

in terms of classroom management and academic achievement, further compounding the lack of self-confidence experienced by this population. This vicious cycle causes many issues both in and out of the classroom, presenting an interesting conundrum for the teacher of behaviorally designated students (Bender & Evans, 1988).

The vulnerability of being labeled behaviorally challenging creates an innate power struggle in the classroom between the classroom teacher and the student, and by extension the student and the school administration. These power struggles are rooted in much more complex issues derived from society at large and the interactions between agents of power and those over which such power is exerted. Authority figures such as the police, agents of the judicial system, heads of financial institutions, housing agencies and more are rooted in hostility between these seats of power and people of color. Such negative relationships within these multiple facets of society carries over into the realm of education, creating an antagonistic interaction between the authority figures and vulnerable students in the classroom. The fact is that the state of education for these students is one that has been arrived at due to generations of policies that create a space for systematic cycles of discrimination and the segregation of vulnerable populations. From the failure of school integration in the early 1960's to the realms of housing, education and economic inequalities, the plight of these students is one that is rooted in oppression.

It is my argument that there is a distinct reason for the behavior issues that plague many classrooms in this country that guides interactions between authority figure and student, as well as peer-to-peer groupings. The students are not "bad" or "deviant," but they are often labeled as such. The result of this is a further conflict with yet another

authority figure, the teacher, where the relationship can become volatile, unstable, and, as a result, the social norm deficit continues to grow. Moreover, when the teacher and student clash in this way, a power struggle begins between the teacher who is attempting to exert total control over their classroom and the student that rejects such control. A byproduct of this struggle is an ever-expanding gap between what we would like education to accomplish and what it renders itself capable of accomplishing. Rather than being a source of empowerment where students are taught how to become both autonomous and free thinking, the education system begins to mimic other social systems where distinct authority structures are crafted and conflict created by those who resist such structures.

Definition of Terms

With these problems plaguing education as it is presently constructed, perhaps it is time for a major shift in power to begin to change the issues within the classroom. At its core, the movement toward student directed learning is an example of such a shift. Like the school Hutton created in Australia, the student-directed classroom will look much different than the traditional rooms we are used to seeing. Student direction requires a full reversal of the way learning has traditionally occurred in American public schools since their inception. It is a major undertaking, though, and, as such, entry into the student-directed world should not be taken lightly or without consideration of all potential effects of these changes. To begin then, a theory-based argument must be sketched out describing why such a power transfer should occur and the significance of such transference. A few terms must be defined at the outset, though:

Table 1

Basic definitions

Term	Definition
Student-Directed Classroom Model	The student becomes the agent of control in the classroom, instead of the teacher. The classroom is transformed into a learning community where the responsibility of learning, as well as the construction of the learning framework, is shared by the student and teacher. A community is created where collective effort creates a space for collective knowledge and the potential extensions of that knowledge (Warren, 1988).
Role of Student in a Student-Directed Room	The student begins to occupy an autonomous but interdependent role within the classroom where each individual student occupies their own seat of decision making while operating alongside and in conjunction with the other students and the teacher.
Student Voice	The empowerment and agency to make decisions about not just what is learned but how it is learned and by whom it is taught (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).
Role of the Teacher in the Student-Directed Room	The teacher will facilitate day-to-day classroom interactions while acting as a co-participant in the learning process alongside the students.

Further, it is worth mentioning that I am not speaking to what has been traditionally defined as an urban education classroom. Much research has been constructed about what the word urban means. I argue here that it is not just school districts in urban or large cities where these issues of authority and oppression occur. Instead, it is a matter of vulnerable versus privileged populations. Thus, the problems identified within this paper can occur in large cities, as well as more rural areas such as those schools found within Appalachia. It is a problem that infects all aspects of our current public-school system because of the issues that exist within society at large. Thus, the issues of authority identified and solution of student-directed learning offered is meant to assist all students of all color that fall into any cycle of oppression explored and

as a result, find themselves vulnerable to not just oppression but the perpetuation of such discrimination.

Research Questions

With the above in mind, three questions will be explored moving forward.

RQ1: What social factors regarding student voice exist to demonstrate the need for a pedagogical shift in the classroom, including my own?

RQ2: How was my student-directed classroom run and what tools were needed to change to such an instructional framework?

RQ3: What changes occurred in my classroom in terms of agency, engagement and achievement following the implementation of student-directed learning?

In order to answer these questions, the below sections will follow:

Table 2

Breakdown of chapters

Section	Content to be Explored
Chapter Two	Theoretical framework and literature review
Chapter Three	Methodology
Chapter Four	The student-directed classroom
Chapter Five	Conclusion and looking forward

To begin, it is understood that a curriculum outlining a change to student-directed instructional delivery will pose a challenge to both student and teacher, but, as the literature review in chapter two will show, the benefits of moving to student-directed learning where emphasis is placed on increasing the value and inclusion of student voice are potentially great.

Chapter 2

A Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

I am a black man number one, because I am against what they have done and are still doing to us; and number two, I have something to say about the new society to be built because I have a tremendous part in that which they have sought to discredit.

-C.L.R. James, *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work* (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 25).

The above quote comes from historian and journalist C.L.R. James. James describes the plight of the black man in American society often defined first and foremost by the color of his skin and the cycle of oppression entered into as a result of his race. As mentioned in chapter one, there are many systems in place that perpetuate the oppression writers like James allude to including, but not limited to, housing inequality, inequality in earning potential and job opportunities and the gap in educational opportunities and student performance. Beginning with the Jim Crow era ushered in after Reconstruction, power has been stripped from the black population within the United States in a systematic cycle of racially influenced policies at the state and national level, as well as a lack of understanding amongst more affluent citizens about the plight of their lower income counterparts. The result is the silencing of the voice of an entire subset of the population, or discrediting, as James describes it.

This chapter seeks to explore the cycle of oppression African Americans are subjected to, as well as other minority groups found within the high poverty classroom. A story can be constructed to show the effects at a macro level on the power structures at the micro level of the traditional school room. This involves an exploration of a variety of topics in order to understand the interconnection of historical policy decisions at the federal level, the transference of power within our society and how systematic power

structures have been created and can eventually be broken down within an educational

setting. The below table provides a brief synopsis of the sections and following topics

that will be explored in detail throughout this chapter.

Table 3

Overview of chapter two

The Urban Education Classroom	How educational decision-making beginning in the 1960s has left a tradition of inequality and ineffective policies (Stecher, Vernez & Steinberg, 2010); ("A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools," 2015)
The Cycle of Oppression at a Macro Level	Defining oppression and looking at how oppressive cycles are formed and perpetuated (Agamben, 2003), including those in the classroom (Alexander, 2012)
The Consequences of a Failed Integration	Looking at the way schools have failed to integrate since *Brown v. Board* and the consequences of such a failure (Alexander, 2012); (U.S. Department of Education, 2014); (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2012)
The Psychological Impact of Being Held Apart	Exploring the work of writers W.E.B. Dubois (1903), Gloria Anzaldua (1987) and others that describe the psychological harm of being oppressed and held apart from the majority
Systems that Define Power	Discussion of the work of Louis Althusser (1970), Juliet Hooker (2009) and Michel Foucault (1990) in an attempt to define how power structures are formed at the macro level, as well as in the classroom
Changing the Role of the Teacher	How could the role of the teacher change in the classroom and what benefits would there be from such a change (Friere, 2014); (Hooks, 1994), particularly a change in cultural competency on the part of the educator (Diller & Moule, 2005)
Research Supports Student Voice	An exploration of both qualitative and quantitative educational research that show support for including students in the decision-making processes of their classrooms (Brophy, 1985); (DiGangi, Maag & Rutherford, Jr., 1991); (Douglas & Morris, 2014)
Current Student-Directed Examples	Looking at current examples of student-directed learning that exist worldwide, including the Sudbury model here in the U.S., and contrasting those models with the type of student-directed learning I am proposing (Summerhill); (Houston Sudburry School)

The Urban Education Classroom

To begin, we will turn to the realm of educational programming within vulnerable populations. There is a distinct need for the cultivation of student power in the vulnerable classroom. Students here are those that are considered the consequence of the American educational system's achievement gap. Defined as the disparity in student performance between low income, high minority school districts and more affluent student bodies, the achievement gap has been addressed since the 1960's at the policy level. The first policy initiative to deal with inner city schools was implemented in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) introduced by Lyndon B. Johnson. ESEA created the Title I designation for schools that experienced extreme economic disparity within its student body. Johnson and his administration identified poverty as one of the greatest barriers to education and spoke of wishing to ameliorate the gap between minority and majority students and low and high income areas (1965). Once implemented, ESEA was evaluated a multitude of times over the next thirty-six years but remained in place unchanged as the achievement gap continued to grow. It would take President George W. Bush's administration to offer another solution, his policy, No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

NCLB was passed into law in 2001 as the major educational reform policy from the Bush Administration. The program decided to tackle the achievement gap Johnson first spoke of by directly addressing teacher qualification. The belief was that if teachers were more qualified, there would be a significant improvement in quality of classroom instruction and, by proxy, school performance. To meet these ends, NCLB introduced the term "highly qualified" to signify an educator that exceeded minimum standard.

These highly qualified individuals were intended to be the most skilled and successful classroom teachers, and, as such, the more highly qualified educators you had within a school, the better that school should be. Additionally, NCLB introduced a new era of standardized testing. School accountability was directly tied to performance on tests given in conjunction with the federal standardized test schedule. Those schools that did not perform were penalized with a shortage of federal money. Thus, schools began to work to help students perform on these tests, and, as a result, nationwide a push for test prep within the classroom began.

NCLB received its first official program evaluation in 2010. The report assessed whether or not its focus on teacher credentials made a dent in the gap between low-income and middle and high income school districts. Performed by the Rand Corporation's education wing and written by Stecher, Vernez and Steinberg (2010), the evaluation entitled "State and Local Implementation of the NCLB," aimed to assess the progress states and districts had made in implementing NCLB standards since 2002. The Rand Corporation's evaluation reported that there were two large disparities in the number of highly qualified educators across campuses nationwide. First, many of the teachers not rated highly qualified were special education (SPED) and limited English proficiency (LEP) educators. In fact, only 39% of elementary level, 61% of middle school level and 53% of high school teachers that taught these types of classes were categorized as highly qualified under NCLB (Stecher, Vernez & Steinberg, 2010). Further, the evaluation reported that there was a large disparity in the low number of highly qualified individuals teaching in high poverty and high minority schools versus their more affluent counterparts. The Rand Corporation's report (2010) specifically

states, "teachers who were not highly qualified were three times more likely to be teaching in high-minority schools than low minority schools." Further, highly qualified teachers within these low-income and high-minority areas were more likely to have three or fewer years in the classroom than those high-income highly qualified teachers. Finally, to make matters worse, 4% of total classroom teachers were unable to even determine if they were highly qualified or not when polled during the evaluation period of 2004-2005 (Stecher, Vernez & Steinberg, 2010).

The results of the evaluation were accepted by NCLB critics to show that the program was not meeting the goals it set out to achieve. The achievement gap had not been closed, but, rather, the discrepancy quantified in a new way, teacher qualification. Schools were simply not performing at higher standards. Still, despite the negative report, NCLB was not amended, and, rather, remained until it could be replaced by an ideological shift with the Obama administration. In December 2015, at the close of NCLB's most recent reauthorization, then President Barack Obama proposed his own program to replace NCLB and bridge the gap between low-income and more affluent districts. Specifically targeting the same low-income, underperforming schools identified since the Johnson administration, Obama announced the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which would replace NCLB moving forward. Under ESSA, schools and districts would no longer be penalized for not meeting federally set achievement standards, but, rather, states would take over as the deciding body for teacher and school accountability evaluations. In a direct response to what the Obama administration labeled over testing, ESSA encourages states and school districts to work to assist students in growing in the classroom, not studying for a test.

While this program has not been formally evaluated yet, due to its newness, the issues inherent to program evaluation can already be identified. For example, ESSA is meant to solve the issues it identifies with NCLB by finding new ways to intervene and support students from low-income areas, but the trickledown effect of some aspects of ESSA will result in the same issues experienced under the policy is it intended to replace. For instance, ESSA still requires adherence to a federal standardized testing window, and states can choose to use this data as they see fit. This does not prevent the reliance on standardized test scores because some states are still analyzing accountability at the school level by using test results. For instance, in the state of Texas, the new accountability system relies heavily on the Texas state test, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Schools are still bound to both achievement and growth on the STAAR, and a push for test prep culture within Texas schools has not decreased. Further, the ability for states to decide how to reach their students may complicate things in a new way. A Southern Education Foundation report published in 2013 showed that the highest percentage of low-income students stem from Southern and Western states. For example, 71% of students enrolled in public school in Mississippi, 65% in Louisiana and 68% in New Mexico are all low-income ("A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools," 2015). Further, as of 2013, nationwide 51% of students in public schools were classified as low-income ("A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools," 2015). This means that for the first time ever in the history of American public schools, the number of low-income students outnumbered all other classifications, with the disparity continuing to grow each year since.

The economics of school funding contribute further to the achievement gap described above. As reported by The Hamilton Project in March 2016, there is a distinct difference in resources for education found across the United States. Funding for education has increased steadily over the last fifty years (up almost 274% per student since 1960), but the way this money is spent is "highly uneven" (The Hamilton Project, 2016). The project reports that, for example, northeastern states spend almost double what states in the Western and Southern sections of the United States spend on their students. Part of the problem is the way schools are funded. The monies allocated for educational programming come from local and state revenues for the most part. Across most of the nation, about 81% of school funding comes from property taxes. Thus, the socioeconomic makeup of a school district affects the amount of funding and resources that district receives. Wealthier families live in more affluent areas, which means higher tax payments due to higher home appraisal values. These school districts within the affluent sections of our nation's cities raise sometimes significantly more money to pay for educational costs for the upcoming school year (The Hamilton Project, 2016). One example The Hamilton Project cites is the difference in funding between Fort Sam Houston Independent School District and Alamo Heights Independent School District in the state of Texas. The latter is a much more affluent area, and, as such, the Alamo Heights tax revenue results in an average of $13,007 spent per student, compared to the $265 spent per student in the lower income, Fort Sam Houston District (The Hamilton Project, 2016). While federal funding can be used to make up the difference in some cases, it does not guarantee all districts, like those mentioned above, will begin their school years with equal money, nor does it account for the additional expenses low

income districts must plan for including federal free lunch money, additional

transportation expenses, and more. Further, equality at the level of funding does not

ensure equality in growth for the student bodies. Because the schools in the lower

income districts are starting at a deficit (the result of the achievement gap), these schools

need more funds in order to catch up. Better teachers, teacher professional development,

school counselors and counseling programs for the population, as well as remedial

education programs for those students that are by and large significantly behind are all

expensive and often overlooked necessities for these schools to "catch up" and that gap to

begin to be closed. As a result, the lower income districts still begin at a deficit, fail to

meet the needs of the groups that are already behind, and the achievement gap continues

to widen as a result, absorbing the students within these districts into an oppressed class

that is denied resources and the tools needed to rise above the disparity within which they

operate.

The Cycle of Oppression at a Macro Level

The cycle of oppression described above that occurs in urban education is part of

a larger social cycle that encompasses all aspects of life at or below the poverty line.

These social factors cannot be overlooked or their effects underestimated when

discussing the student in an urban education environment. The oppression felt in school

is a larger consequence of power dynamics at the macro level of interactions where

individuals within a low socioeconomic class are held outside the bounds of normal

society. Theorist Giorgio Agamben (2003) describes such a state of exception where

society and the laws that bind it allow for certain groups and classes of individuals to be

left out of "normal" society. Agamben (2003) describes this state of exception as the

point at which a person is completely incorporated into the laws that exist. The basic

idea is that the state of exception can create exceptional processes, as well as create

subjects within that exception. For Agamben (2003), one of the consequences whether

intentional or not of the state of exception is that it allows for an "entire category[y] of

citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system," (pg. 2)

They move from a qualified life to a naked life, stripped of their rights as citizens

Certain sectors of our current education system feature entire classes of students

that are subjected to such a bare life, as Agamben describes it. Due to lack of resources,

inexperienced and often unqualified teachers and other issues, students from vulnerable

populations are placed in a classroom where they are rendered powerless as a result of

their circumstances. The effect can be disastrous. In the introduction to their 2016 report

entitled *Fourteen Economic Facts on Education and Economic Opportunity*, The

Hamilton Project writes:

> Education is a powerful force for advancing opportunity, prosperity and growth.
> Educational attainment is a significant determinant of a range of measures of
> well-being, including an individual's likelihood of marrying, owning a home, or
> living a long life, as well as her likelihood of being arrested. Educational
> attainment is also a key determinant of economic success. A strong education
> system is fundamental to ensuring that all Americans have the opportunity to
> acquire the skills they need to thrive. (The Hamilton Project, 2016)

The fact is that students in these low-income areas are more likely to come out

unprepared, ill-equipped to enter into secondary degree programs and statistically more

likely to not finish school at all. As a result, they are more vulnerable to continued poverty cycles that result in lower earning potential, lack of access to upgraded housing due to credit issues and problems with financial literacy and an increased likelihood of incarceration.

With regard to the latter, in *The New Jim Crow,* Michelle Alexander (2012) outlines future effects of our unequal education system describing the problem of mass incarceration within the United States. Alexander (2012) describes the explosion in prison population within the U.S. stating that if current trends in the prison population continue, one in three African American men will serve at least some time in prison, while more than 50% of young African American males are currently incarcerated, on probation or parole within some of the country's larger cities. These incarcerated individuals are part of a system of oppression that begins at the school level, the prison pipeline. The idea behind this pipeline is that students of color, particularly blacks, are disproportionally arrested for crimes while on school grounds than their white counterparts. The American Civil Liberties Union reports that despite only making up 16% of the public-school population, 31% of on campus arrests are of black students. Further, black students are expelled or suspended multiple times in one academic year three times more often than white students. Those suspended students are then put on a track where they most likely will encounter the legal system and juvenile courts within a year of their suspension from school (Student to Prison Pipeline Infographic, ACLU). Once in the system, students begin to move toward their inclusion in the mass incarceration Alexander warns about.

The people of color Alexander (2012) describes are labeled as an "undercaste," or subset of the population. This group is systematically oppressed and held outside of the bounds of "normal" society, echoing the description of bare life given to us by Agamben (2003). For Alexander (2012), though, this setting apart is based solely on racial boundaries. Much like the time of Jim Crow, there are large disparities between low-income and highly affluent areas today. These divides are often accompanied by a segregation of race, with minorities living in large number within the lower income sections of our cities and towns. Alexander (2012) writes about the world as it was under Jim Crow to provide context for today's segregated sectors of our society:

> ...Jim Crow laws mandated residential segregation, and blacks were relegated to the worst parts of town. Roads literally stopped at the border of many black neighborhoods, shifting from pavement to dirt. Water, sewer systems, and other public services that supported the white areas of town frequently did not extend to the black areas. The extreme poverty that plagued blacks due to their legally sanctioned inferior status was largely invisible to whites- so long as whites remained in their own neighborhoods, which they were inclined to do. Racial segregation rendered black experience largely invisible to whites, making it easier to maintain racial stereotypes about black values and culture. It also made it easier to deny or ignore their suffering. (p. 195)

While Alexander (2012) uses the above to draw a parallel to the prison population, it can also be used as a way to describe the consistent inequalities found within the education system. Despite segregation policies being overturned in the 1960's, the actual integration of schools is something that never occurred. By 1964, only 1% of black

children were attending schools with white classmates, ten full years after the passage of

Brown v. Board of Education (Alexander, 2012).

The Consequences of a Failed Integration

In 2017, there is still a struggle to ensure equal access to education through

integrated schools and school programs. One such example occurred in 2014. In South

Orange Maplewood, New Jersey, the school district came under fire for "tracking."

Tracking is the practice of designating educational paths for students based on their

performance in previous grade levels. Basically, if a student is performing well, they are

placed on an advanced track and given access to accelerated courses which prepare

individuals for post-secondary opportunities. If the student is underperforming, though,

they are put on a separate path that does not include the opportunity for advanced

placement. The problem with such practices is that by and large the low performing

students are minorities, while the higher performing students are not. After an

investigation into the use of tracking in New Jersey, the U.S. Department of Education's

Office for Civil Rights released a statement about the South Orange Maplewood

District's actions asserting that the District's "nearly 2,500 black students are

significantly underrepresented in advanced and higher-level learning opportunities at the

district's elementary, middle and high school levels" (U.S. Department of Education,

2014). The report goes on to discuss how only 18.7% of the 800 spots for Advanced

Placement courses were African American, despite the black students making up over

50% of the school's population (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). As a result, the

Department of Education entered into an agreement with the District to assist officials in

making changes that would ensure equal access for all students, regardless of color.

The problem of tracking is but one issue that prevents true integration of schools. The University of California at Los Angles' Civil Rights Project released a report in 2012 that shows the increasing issue of segregation across the nation. For Latino students, the largest examples of segregation appear to be in the Western part of the United States. UCLA's Civil Rights Project reports that in this region the average Latino student attends schools where less than a quarter of students are white, while nearly 2/3rd are also Latino and 2/3rd are impoverished. The report goes on to say that the states of New York, Texas and California are the worst examples of segregation for Latino students in both the areas of race and poverty (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2012). Further, for African American students, the average black student attends a school where 64% of their classmates are low-income, with New York, Illinois, Michigan and the Southern part of the United States presenting the biggest challenges to integration for African Americans based on both race and economics (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2012). As referenced earlier, various administrations have approached the issues of racial segregation within schools, as they have with the achievement gap, but sometimes the assistance offered makes the problem even worse.

For example, as another way of attempting school reform, the Obama Administration showed great support for charter schools. Heralded as the chance for student choice, charter schools are meant to help integrate populations of students from failing school districts and those from more successful districts. Unfortunately, though, such integration has yet to occur. Frankenberg, Wang and Siegel-Hawley (2011) published a paper entitled, "Choice without equity: Charter school segregation" where the three authors report that charter schools are actually more "racially isolated than

traditional public schools in virtually every state and large metropolitan area in the nation," (p. 2). Since their creation in the early 1990's, charter schools have been presented as the key to helping to bridge the achievement gap and failures of Brown v. Board of Education to truly integrate schools. Banking on this belief, the Obama administration made the charter school initiative a major component of the 2009 Race to the Top program, with charter school focus and cultivation a major piece of the funding aspect of Race to the Top for all school districts (Frankenberg, Wang & Siegel-Hawley, 2011). As a result, states began opening charter schools in droves. The charter school model is unique in that charter schools receive public funding, like their public school counterparts, but they are also supplemented by private funding. These private groups provide funding for the charter models based on their mission, vision and population served. Thus, the charter schools must work to create a brand for their school, which very much includes the student body serviced within it. The picture of the inner city, high-minority, low-income school may achieve more donor dollars than the integrated or mostly white campus. As a result, the charter school may create a plan that includes, "targeted recruitment of students" to potentially "help charter schools accomplish achievement promises made to these private funders," (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hwley & Wang, 2011, pgs. 4-5). The population then often remains the same as the public schools, isolated and segregated. The fact that it is a charter, only makes the type of school different, not the actual problems being dealt with within the classrooms.

In Houston, Texas, there is a perfect example of the similarities between charter and public schools. In one of the larger school districts, the district and the charter school Yes Prep have an arrangement where the charter school campus shares a building with a

middle school and a high school. The back half of the middle school's main building, as well as a set of temporary buildings outside, are rented by the Yes Prep campus. The two schools operate within the same building, but they are independently run, have a different schedule, including arrival and dismissal times, and their teaching staffs do not work together, but operate independently. It is truly two different campuses housed in one location. If an outsider visited the school, though, they would have a hard time differentiating between the two groups. The Yes Prep and the public school's student bodies look exactly alike (almost all Latino and African American), and the test scores are almost the same. The students are underachieving when compared to district scores, as well as when compared to the state and national achievement data for students in the seventh and eighth grades. The charter school option for those that attend Yes Prep's campus does not make a difference for the student body in terms of achievement or location. The population of the school is still immensely segregated, and the academic proficiency of the students remains well below level. It is a charter school, but the issues of segregation abound, none the less.

The Psychological Impact of Being Held Apart

The larger issue at play here with segregation, though, is the oppression experienced by those being held apart. Writing after Reconstruction began, W.E.B. DuBois (1903) argues in *The Souls of Black Folks* that the struggles of African Americans are a struggle against the exclusionary policies of white supremacy. He writes at length about what he identifies as the "Negro Problem" where blacks were completely separated from general society due to their skin color and segregation policies. He identified this as the greatest issue black Americans faced, and he pointed to a need for

the black race to be assimilated into modern American society (DuBois, 1903). The

Negro problem most often could be observed in the realm of economic, social and

educational disparities. Existing within this segregated framework is a lack of agency for

those trapped within its cycle of oppression. To this end, DuBois talks about double-

consciousness or second-sight. He describes this process as "this sense of always looking

at one's self through the eyes of others, or measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that

looks on in contempt and pity" (DuBois, 1903, p. 38). He identifies the fallacy of

consciousness that African Americans developed by seeing themselves through the eyes

of the white perspective that was held dominant in the time of Jim Crow. Blacks judged

themselves as inferior because the whites in power characterized them as so. Therefore,

the white concept of inferiority of the black masses was reinforced by the blacks own

submission to the dominant opinion. Because of the segregation between these two

groups, such disparities were allowed to continue, cycle forward and cause gaps in

achievement in education, economic earning and more within the black community that

are perpetuated today. These gaps, in part, may have been accepted because of what

DuBois claimed was black citizens simply not being able to assess their own

circumstances (Balfour, 2007). Such inability leads to a total loss of power where double

consciousness renders the person of color subject to a white reading of the world, and, as

such, subject to the power of the group providing the interpretation.

The Latino experience is one that may find common ground with DuBois' theory

of double consciousness. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) writes about the idea of a borderland

that is both literal and figurative. While marking a definitive split between the United

States and Mexico, for Anzaldúa the borderland is also place of existence that is both a

space that can be occupied and one that renders the occupier nonexistent. Those found within these lands are "prohibited and forbidden," sentiments that echo the *bare life* described by Agamben (2003) and the *undercaste* defined by Alexander (2012) (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25). Occupants of this space experience a conflict of identity dating back to the taking of Mexican lands by white Americans following the Mexican/American War. Anzaldúa (1987) describes the consequence of this land transfer where people that once lived in these areas were cast as outsiders from their own homeland by an imaginary border put in place by those in power. Separated from the land that once defined them, the residents of what was now the northern border of Mexico were cut off completely from all that made them a people, made them an individual.

On the opposite side of the border, a further conflict of identity began for the new Americans. Suddenly, new aspects of identity were cast upon this group from a different culture, a white culture. The result was a muddled mix of Mexican, Indian and White cultural aspects combining to create what Anzaldúa (1987) labels "the new mestiza," or half-breed. Identity in this space is confused as it is not created by the self, but, rather, defined in part by outside forces. After all, how is identify crafted? I argue that it is a combination of language, history and tradition. Therefore, the person who holds the power is the one who decides what language history and tradition a people will remember and ascribe to. In this case, the power source rested in white culture. As Anzaldúa writes, identity is rooted in culture, so the dominating culture will be the one that dominates identity formation. It is here that the oppression of the Latino people begins (Anzaldúa, 1987). As an example, Anzaldúa (1987) talks about the demeaning of the

spirit world of Indian tradition. Typically, white, western anthropologists deem the

pagan aspects of Indian religious practices and experience "primitive." They label the

spirit world that is so fundamental to the Indian people to be irrational (Anzaldúa, 1987).

A judgement is made against an entire people's belief system because it does not

subscribe to the tenants of scientific rationalism, the belief system the dominating class

values. In doing so, an ethnocentric judgement is made and an entire people whose

culture is rooted in opposing beliefs is disregarded and devalued.

The violence against culture transitions into exploitation of a vulnerable people

within the borderlands. Anzaldúa describes the irony of attempting to return to a

homeland that was taken away and in doing so earn the labels of "alien," and "invader."

Never is this truer than in a post-Trump world. Elected in part due to his staunch anti-

immigration policies, President Donald Trump presents as the embodiment of the enemy

for those that wish to move north into America. Trump has repeatedly spoken about the

issue of illegal immigration with tremendous amounts of disdain for the approximate 11

million undocumented people living within the United States (Haddon, 2015). Trump

uses words such as those listed above throughout his speeches and in conversation

regarding immigration policy, creating a language around immigration that is rooted in a

portrayal of the illegal immigrant as a criminal taking advantage of the United States and

all it has to offer. What is seldom mentioned, though, is the exploitation this group

experiences. About 52% of immigrants here illegally are from Mexico, and just getting

to the border itself is a challenge rife with danger (Gonzalez-Barrera & Krogstad, 2017).

Coyotes paid to coordinate crossings often attack and harm those they are charged with

assisting. Exposure to elements including heat exhaustion and dehydration cause many

deaths like in the Sonoran Desert. Called the Devil's Highway, one part of the desert is a deadly trail for those wishing to reach the U.S. near Douglas, Arizona. To date, 1,400 would be Americans died making their way along this path (ABC News, "One Night on a Deadly Border Crossing"). Elsewhere the Rio Grande and other bodies of water present their own challenges. One of my former students told through a paper the tale of their father and grandfather's deaths by drowning while crossing the river when she was just three months old and on the opposite bank with her mother. In fact, many students that are the children of immigrants are products of these experiences or direct descendants of those that made these crossings. It is an aspect of their lives that defines the Latino student, and the constant attack on their story, their people has an effect that must be dealt with both in and out of schools. It is a verbal violence directed at not just the immigrant group Trump is attempting to deport, but a group of American citizens, the children of these immigrants who have achieved the legal status their parents have not.

This duality of American and immigrant creates a space for misunderstanding and crisis for those within its ranks. The children of immigrants hear and see firsthand the violence that paved the path to their own citizenship, and they are forced to watch further cycles of exploitation play out on their undocumented family members. The immigrant child sees the economic struggle of the undocumented worker who is relegated to minimum wage jobs without protections of health insurance, equal wages, fair treatment in labor practices, etc. They are both set apart from the struggle of their families, yet unable to extract themselves from it. It is a space, a borderland between the American, white world in which they earned entry through citizenship and the immigrant experience

that afforded them entry into that world. Anzaldúa (1987) describes this space in one of

her poems:

> In the Borderlands
>
> you are the battleground
>
> where enemies are kin to each other;
>
> you are at home, a stranger,
>
> the border disputes have been settled
>
> the volley of shots have shattered the truce
>
> you are wounded, lost in action
>
> dead, fighting back;
>
> To live in the Borderlands means
>
> the mill with the razor white teeth waits to shred off
>
> your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart
>
> pound you pinch you roll you out
>
> smelling like white bread but dead;
>
> To survive the Borderlands
>
> you must live *sin fronteras*
>
> be a crossroads. (pgs. 216-217)

The crossroads is a place of assimilation into the dominant culture, as well as advocate

for the immigrant culture. It is a space where those that fill it are not truly part of either

group in it's entirety, but a mixture of sorts. The problems such duality causes, though, is

a sort of identity crisis where identity is difficult to conceive. Individuals that are either a

part of the immigrant experience or direct descendants of it define their identity in part by the thinking of others, specifically the dominant class. The lack of power over one's own identity is a potentially crippling thing, and the fact remains that this social cycle affects students in our urban education classrooms. The Latino student comes onto our campuses from homes experiencing the challenges of immigration and the immigrant experience, and unless given the space to explore these challenges, the student's agency is further limited, continuing a larger cycle of oppression.

Systems that Define Power

The lack of agency that exists within urban education described above may also be a result of the overarching makeup of American schools. For example, a structuralist reading of the current education system, like that of Louis Althusser (1970), would explain that the lack of agency that exists is due to the structure defining all of society's choices and opportunities. Individuals operating under that structure must be trained to accept the framework in which they work. This training comes from what Althusser defines as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's). Althusser (1970) defines ISA's as being supposedly non-political institutions that take on a deep political context as they help to define and shape us to accept the structure under which we live. Althusser (1970) points to schools, families as well as churches, as examples of ISA's. These groups discipline individuals within society according to the structure of that society and recruit them as subjects, who in turn assist in the reproduction of the structure.

> … I shall therefore say that, where only a single subject (such and such an individual) is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that

his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject... (pgs. 158-159)

Basically, through these apparatuses the individual is taught how to be a subject (how to act, what to do, what not to do, etc.). They are taught the norms of that society and disciplined to recreate only those norms. Their identity as a subject is created for them, as the terms of being a subject have already been defined by the structure in place prior to that individual's becoming a subject. Desires, choices, judgments, prejudices, etc. are all determined by the structure and enforced by the ISA's exerting their power and influence over the individual during the process of making them into subjects. Therefore, any concept of personal power does not exist because the structure prevents it from forming. Any belief that the subjects hold power, as perhaps a student may believe, is simply another way the apparatuses discipline its subjects. Thus, through Althusser's (1970) lens, the individuals that enter into the school system are immediately bound by the rules and stated norms of that system. From kindergarten on, student choice is controlled by the agents of the state, or educators, and the power exerted by these teachers limits the choices of citizens bound by the ideologies of such a system, or the student body. Students then are recruited as subjects within an educational framework and then subject to the authority and influence of that framework. This cycle is incredibly difficult to break, and it can be argued that the reason the achievement gap and the disparity between high poverty and high minority schools and their more affluent counterparts continue is due directly to the transfer of ideology from state to citizen or school to student.

Part of this transference of knowledge may apply to how the gap continues to widen because perhaps it is goes unnoticed by whites. Juliet Hooker (2009) describes the embodiment of race due to a visual component. Since race is not biological in nature, we view one another's race through a means of "visible identity," (p. 5). We begin to see visible difference in color between one group and another and start to ascribe traits to the colors associated with these groups. Stereotypes are then created and attached to this new idea of "race" that describes entire subsections of people that visually resemble one another (Hooker, 2009). A consequence of this visible differentiation is that groups begin to be qualified as less than due to the traits attached to the color they possess. The dominant group is the one that begins this classification and often due to their not existing within the same group, the pain and suffering of those that are or color are rendered "either invisible or, when visible, less deserving of empathy and redress" (Hooker, 2009). One example Hooker (2009) gives of what she calls colorblindness is the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Hooker points to a photograph taken of a white New Orleans police officer and an African American child he rescued following the storm. The little girl in the picture is laying her head on the police officer, and the white officer is comforting her. This photograph received a lot of national attention following Katrina because of the lack of fear expressed by the black little girl and the compassion coming from the white officer. One reason for the controversy surrounding the photograph is that prior to Katrina, the two races represented by the officer and little girl were often not in such close proximity. In fact, following the aftermath of the storm, there was a marked difference in what was perceived to the be the reason for the late and poor response by federal, state and local officials to those low-income, minority residents stranded after the

floodwaters began rolling in. By and large, white people surveyed did not find the late response to be related to race, but the African American population did. A majority of blacks surveyed stated they felt the delay in service was racially motivated (Hooker, 2009).

Hooker (2009) hypothesizes that this difference in opinion, as well as a delay in services is in part due to the colorblindness she discusses in her book *Race and the Politics of Solidarity.* The problem is that the white population in New Orleans and around the nation may have simply not been aware of the suffering already in existence of low-income African Americans prior to Hurricane Katrina. In truth, the hurricane did nothing but exacerbate issues already in place for generations prior to August 29, 2005. The problem is that these issues were not dealt with or even made priority by those in power. In fact, the entire of the identity of blacks within New Orleans is called into question because it is an identity not recognized or valued by some outside of the black community. Thus, the greater challenge of the achievement gap isn't just how to close it, but, rather, to understand how it is allowed to exist in the first place. For Hooker and others, the gap widens because of the lack of awareness that exists for those people on the other side of the gap, either subconsciously or consciously. The colorblindness allows for the gap to begin, to grow and continue to be unchanged due to the ingrained processes that allow it to exist in the first place.

To even begin to discuss changing such processes, though, we must first break down and examine the power structure inherent within these social cycles, beginning with the traditional classroom. To start, for the students, the agent of power they most directly deal with is the classroom teacher. A question can be asked, though, as to why

students are so willing to readily follow the lead of an individual they've never encountered before beginning with the first day of school. What socializes them to understand the authority of this individual as absolute? It is rare that students understand the scope of a teacher's qualifications. It is rarer still that they know their capability as an educator at the outset. Therefore, there must be markers that signify the authority of the teacher that allows one individual to control a room of 30 to 40 other individuals that willingly abandon their individual power once the school bell rings. While we've discussed the structuralist explanation of ideological socialization through state apparatuses, Michel Foucault (1990) presents another possible source of power. Foucault (1990) asserted that power is demonstrated through display. For example, the crown of the monarch, his throne, etc. are objects that collectively represent a seat of power. These displays exist to produce fear and respect amongst subjects but hold no power of their own. It is society that decides they are worthy of respect, and society's choice imbues the objects with power. For instance, a podium or desk are seats of power for the instructor. Placed at the front and sometimes center of the room, these items are used by the teacher alone and represent the center of authority in a classroom. The imparting of knowledge from the teacher to the student extends from these objects, and, as such, the objects are seats of power that separate the student and educator, defining the framework of authority within a classroom setting. The students are disciplined to submit to the authority of the teacher and abandon their own agency once they enter the building. They are taught that consequences arise from exercising free will, and they are conditioned to believe that their opinions should come second to the authority and thinking of the educator.

Foucault (1995) asserted a result of biopower is that no true individual agency existed. An example of this in education may be the fallacy of school choice. The issue of charter schools was discussed above. Charter schools are advertised as a solution to the urban education problem of school segregation and failing schools, but, in reality, it does not appear that the charter model presents any more integration opportunities than their public-school counterparts. The choice is limited by the segregation that still abounds on the charter campuses, the lack of transportation to the schools in better areas and even the lotteries that exist to determine the student body of these campuses. The documentary *Waiting for Superman* followed the application process for a number of families seeking out a choice for their students other than the public school they were zoned to according to state and local law. Families would wait with hundreds of other families hoping to be one of thirty or forty or fifty spots for the upcoming school year (Guggenheim, 2010). The majority of the time, the families followed in the documentary did not receive the golden ticket to the school of their choice. Instead, they left with only the public school option since the private school choice was unaffordable.

Further, charter schools have come under fire for not including students with disabilities. For example, NPR (2011) followed the story of 17 year old Tres Whitlock. Whitlock is an African American individual with cerebral palsy that renders him both unable to walk or speak. Still, Whitlock is a motivated student that dreams of becoming a video game designer. Thus, he and his family applied to the technology focused charter school, Pivot Charter in Florida. Unfortunately, Whitlock was met with multiple barriers to acceptance mostly due to his disability. Pivot Charter claimed they could not meet Whitlock's needs due to their lack of having someone trained in taking a student with his

type of disability to the restroom (NPR, 2011). Stories like Whitlock's are fairly common

when it comes to charter schools and students with a variety of exceptionalities. In fact,

the same NPR (2011) story stated that 86% of charter schools as of that year had zero

students with disabilities enrolled. Those outside of that 86% were often charter

campuses dedicated to whole school service of students with disabilities, and, most often,

that disability was autism (NPR, 2011). Thus, for the student with an intellectual or

extreme physical disability the choice between the public and charter model is not

necessarily a real one.

In fact, the idea of school choice, as a concept, is one that needs to be explored a

bit further. Begun in 2011, the national school choice movement became an official

organization tasked with spreading the idea of school choice and supposedly assisting

families in finding those choices. Each January, the groups that support school choice

come together for school choice week which the organization explains is a set of events

that "raise public awareness of the different K-12 education options available to children

and families, while spotlighting the benefits of school choice (School Choice

Week.com)." The choices they refer to are traditional public schools, magnet schools,

homeschooling, charter schools and online educational programs. While the guise of the

program is to assist in promoting a type of social justice for students by providing choice

in campus and type of learning, the result, as we have seen is not always as simple as

that. Further, what many people do not know is that the national school choice

organization is mostly backed by right wing groups and officials. For example, the

Heritage Foundation, Americans for Prosperity and the Koch brothers are all supporters

of the school choice organization (Rawls, 2012). Considering this connection and the

failure of the choice the groups are supposedly promoting, public school advocate Karey

Harwood asks:

> When they talk about choice, whose choices are they referring to? Are the
>
> children of people who are savvy enough to get out of the public schools the only
>
> children who are worth educating in our society? What happens to the children
>
> who don't get out? It seems the [people behind School Choice Week] knowingly
>
> embrace the idea of creating a second tier of schools for those American citizens
>
> who don't or can't 'choose' – and they are perfectly okay with a divided society of
>
> winners and losers. (Rawls, 2012)

While we can't prove that these groups are okay with the divided society, the question of

whether or not school choice truly exists is one that is interesting to propose. I would

argue that based on the evidence the idea of choice is marketed as a means to exercise

agency over education options, but the actual options are not only limited but difficult to

access.

Thus, an in-depth argument can be made to explain why the traditional power

relationship between student and teacher exists, but is this power dynamic the most useful

for that student. Does it benefit them, and is it the most effective way for students to

achieve knowledge? This paper will argue no. There is a distinct need that exists for the

student to obtain control over not just their thinking but their learning both in and out of

the classroom. It begins with the student developing a voice that extends throughout the

entirety of their educational experience. It is at this point that we return to the discussion

of language. By allowing student voice, we are encouraging the development of

language that stems from the student and by the student. In turn, through the exercising of this language, the student develops autonomy and a sense of freedom not attainable when the language of the classroom is controlled and created by the teacher. Allowing the student to begin to create this language is the start of a path toward agency or what Paulo Freire (2014) calls, "the route to civilization" (p. 31) where students become members of a society they have yet to operate within. It is the start of the undoing of the systematic cycle of oppression that cast these students outside the confines of society to begin with. Further, it can mark the start of the breaking down of the apparatuses of exclusion through the generation of a literal dialogue that engages the student by teaching them the most fundamental of skills, speaking about themselves to empower themselves to learn. To do this, though, the authority in the classroom that has been laid out above must be shifted from the traditional educator/student relationship to one of shared responsibility and shared power. The power structure must change from authoritarian to democratic. First, though, the concept of teaching must be altered. At the start of this chapter, a traditional definition for teaching was given- the remaking of the teacher's knowledge within the student body. Within a student directed framework, though, teaching becomes something greater. It moves from being mechanical to an active process that is grounded in shared authority and shared participation. The teacher teaches and the student learns, but then the student processes what they have been given and in return teaches, and the teacher learns from the secondary exchange. It is at its core a remaking of the knowledge the teacher imparts on the part of the students which is then reflexively returned to the teacher to reprocess and remake again. This continued

transference of content and interpretation of content within a student-directed classroom allows for democracy in learning and agency attained by all parties that participate.

Changing the Role of the Teacher

What of the traditional role of the teacher, though? Freire (2014) presents an anecdote that is useful in answering this question in *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving the Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* He describes an interaction between a parent and a classroom teacher. The teacher tore up a student's drawing of a cat a few days prior to a meeting with the parent named Claudius. Upon entering her classroom, Claudius is told by the teacher that she brought in a small statue of a cat for the children to draw. Claudius looks at all of the pictures the children drew. They are variations on the same cat, the same statue. They all look similar and present the same interpretation of the cat, the interpretation the teacher presented to the students upon assigning the drawing activity. Claudius asks the following:

> Why not bring a live cat into the classroom- one that would walk and run, and jump?" Claudius asked. "Then, the children would draw the cat as they understood it, as they perceived it. The children would actually *reinvent* the cat. They would be free to make any cat they felt like. They would be free to create, to invent and reinvent. (Freire, 133)

Claudius' assertions about the cat explain the basic theory behind a student-directed classroom. Here, the students are able to take material presented and translate it into a vision of their own making that is set apart but no less valuable than the one the teacher presents to them. It is their own design. The teacher is still necessary in this equation,

though, because the knowledge has to stem from some beginning point. In the Claudius example, the teacher's role in the classroom would be to inform the students about the notion of a cat prior to their drawing. The teacher would present the idea of "cat," provide an example of a cat (as the teacher did with their statue) and facilitate the discussion of the various manifestations of that cat that each student would complete on their own. By the end of the class, the students would have learned about "cat" and the teacher's perception of the concept of a cat would be forever enriched and potentially changed thanks to the various interpretations of "cat" offered by the students and shared through an open and equally weighted dialogue about "cat" (Freire, 2014).

Still, there are critiques of a student-directed learning environment. One potential criticism is the idea that students are not qualified to control their own learning. If the teacher is well educated and prepared academically to teach, why should the student's opinion hold as much weight? The answer is that life experience equates to knowledge, as pointed out by Freire (2014), and some life experiences are had by the students and not the teachers themselves. As already mentioned, urban education teachers are often quite different than the student body itself. Such disparities can present issues of understanding in the classroom that affect all aspects of the school day, including the effectiveness of instruction. One potential reason is the difference in economic class sometimes found between the educator and the student. Freire (2014) discusses what he calls a disparity between the "here and now" versus the "there and then." Frerie (2014) describes how students that are from lower socioeconomic classes than their instructor approach their learning through a lens of the teacher existing in a world they cannot access. The teacher's perspective or the teacher's "here and now" is vastly different than

the student's "here and now." Thus, the teacher's here is really the student's there, and the teacher's now is the student's desired "then," (Freire, 2014, p. 49). Therefore, in order to reach the student, the teacher must begin at the student's "here," rather than their own. To do this, though, the teacher must first discover what that "here" looks like. Without such discovery, the student is isolated due to instruction occurring through an authoritarian exchange between the teacher (the agent of absolute power) and the student (the subject of that power). In essence, the teacher is the sovereign within the classroom. Thus, including the student in developing the more inclusive "here" the classroom needs, the more democratic the learning in that classroom will become and potentially the more effective. Philosopher Ron Scapp describes this dynamic by saying, "If professors take seriously, respectfully, the student body, we are compelled to acknowledge that we are addressing folks who are a part of history. And some of them are coming from histories that might be threatening to the established ways of knowing if acknowledged, (hooks, 1994, p. 139)." The threat to this knowing is not necessarily a bad thing, though, because the knowing cannot occur without the student input, without their inclusion in the learning process and their voice being valued and heard.

Cultivating student voice is not just the idea of letting a student speak but guiding them about how to speak and how to use that voice as a tool for empowerment. Such empowerment comes from the creation of a new language of learning in the classroom. The beginning of this chapter included a definition of student-directed learning and the transference of knowledge within a student directed framework. As stated then, this transference is not controlled by one individual. Instead, the student and teacher should be equal partners that dialogue about a subject where each individual contributes and

takes away what they deem as necessary from the discussion. To determine what is necessary, though, the student must voice their belief not only about what is necessary but how they wish to convey this necessity, what language they will use to describe it. It is here that the Limited English Proficiency student must be considered. English Language Learners (ELL) are often some of the most unempowered students within a classroom because of the lack of a direct way in which to effectively communicate with the student. While current pedogeological practices require these students to be immersed into an English language environment, could this requirement of the use of English to communicate be a further extension of oppression within the classroom? In her poem entitled, "Discourse on the Logic of Language," M. NourbeSe Philip writes:

> English
>
> is my mother tongue
>
> a mother tongue is not
>
> a foreign lan lan lang
>
> language
>
> l/anguish
>
> anguish
>
> -a foreign anguish (Words Aloud, 2011)

With Philip's thoughts in mind, we must ask ourselves if we are teaching our ELL population that their mother tongue is less than the English language, and, if so, what are the long-term effects of such teaching? bell hooks and other feminist writers talk about what they identify as primary voices that are often marginalized. The celebration of these voices helps to "disrupt the primacy of standard English," it ensures the groups that use

such languages are not abandoned, nor their culture undervalued (hooks 173). As Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) writes, "I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself, (p. 81)." The question then becomes if we are taking away the ability to possess this pride from our ELL students who we require to learn the native tongue of America, rather than continue education in their own.

Now, such allowance of ELL students to only speak in their native tongue would hinder instructional practices in a traditional school setting. But there is an opportunity to encourage the preservation of that mother tongue, incorporate its use in the classroom, as well as respect and celebrate the culture attached to it. The student-directed classroom ensures a place for such multiculturalism. No longer will there be one norm taught as standard but multiple perspectives that coalesce to define a new norm within the classroom. The constructs of race, sex and class will be combined into one discussion, one community, where all voices are valued, and all voices have an opportunity to be heard. The power structure moves from authoritarian to democratic. The allowance of the student voice will carve out a space for multiculturalism and transform the discussion as the pedagogy is transformed to incorporate the student voice in decision making processes. As Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren explain, a new language will be developed "rupturing disciplinary boundaries, decentering authority, and rewriting the institutional and discursive borderlands in which politics becomes a condition for reasserting the relationship between agency, power and struggle, (hooks, 2007, p. 129)." Thus, some knowledge is only possible if the multi-cultural perspective is considered, embraced and cultivated in the classroom. Students must be allowed to provide their perspective through the exercising of their voice.

To be allowed to do so, though, the student must have a teacher that is able to create and maintain a culturally competent classroom. Described by Diller and Moule (2005), cultural competence is a framework to allow teachers to teach students from cultures other than their own successfully, where the teacher is both able to respect that student's culture, while being self-aware of their own. This self-awareness stems from the understanding that everything we experience growing up including our race, the makeup of our family, our religion, the socioeconomic and educational levels of our parents and more define our own understanding of the world and shape how we operate within it (Diller & Moule, 2005). The same is true of a teacher's students. If that teacher is different in any way from their students, though, the teacher must understand those differences and how to navigate them. The problem, though, is that such understanding is not being taught as often as it should be. The National Education Agency (2008) reports that only 1/3rd of states are currently requiring teachers to study any aspect of cultural diversity as a part of their formal teacher training. Further, only nine states currently have any type of stand-alone cultural awareness standards that their teachers must master prior to becoming certified (National Education Agency, 2008). Such failures certainly don't help create culturally competent educators, which, in turn, may further limit the student's ability to find their voice and use it in a safe and protected environment.

Research Supports Student Voice

Beyond student voice, there is much literature to support the idea that self-guidance is a useful instructional tool that benefits students on multiple levels. One example of such research comes from Jere Brophy. Brophy (1985) specifically studied the concept of self-guidance and how it differs from simple self-control. For Brophy

(1985), self-guidance is student driven and intrinsically motivated, while self-control is extrinsically motivated in order to avoid getting into trouble. Brophy (1985) claims that educators should be tasked with using classroom management as a means of instruction, rather than simply a system of behavior control. Brophy (1985) explains that "classroom management is seen as primarily a matter of telling and showing willing but ignorant students what to do, rather than enforcing compliance from students who know what to do but tend to not do it on their own." Brophy (1985) believes that all students typically possess the innate capability of following rules because they are aware of the rules prior to hearing them. As a result, educators should assist in the creation of self-guidance amongst students by changing the way classroom management is maintained or introduced. The teacher is meant to model the desirable behaviors at all times alongside parents at home. Brophy (1985) calls the process of this modeling the socialization of self-guidance. In order for that socialization to be successful, teachers must allow students the opportunity to experience moral and behavioral norms often and with an opportunity to reflect on those norms. Additionally, educators that come across students that pose a challenge in terms of classroom management and behaviors should not simply crack down on rules and enforce punishments. Rather, that educators should become an "active listener" that attempts to both understand the students concern, as well as work with the student to achieve an outcome that will benefit both that student and the class environment on the whole. Overall, Brophy (1985) presents interesting data that gives reason to believe that involving a student in the creation of rules, limiting the punitive nature of strict classroom rules, and individually tailoring procedures to individual students will positively affect the way that student behaves in the classroom. The more

opportunities for involvement the student is given, the more successful the student becomes.

Similarly to Brophy, DiGangi, Maag, and Rutherford Jr. (1991) have explored the effects of having students self-monitor aspects of their education and make changes according to what they see. DiGangi, Maag and Rutherford Jr. (1991) had a set of students with diagnosed learning disabilities monitor their own behavior while self-graphing their ability to remain on-task, as well as tracking their own academic performance on a series of arithmetic exams. The experiment, at first, only involved the students tracking their academic progress, but, once the self-monitoring process of behavior was put into place, the students had an increase in on-task behavior alongside test scores increasing tremendously. At the end of the study, on-task behavior increased from 55% of the time to 74% of the time for those students that self-monitored, compared to the smaller increase of behavior improvements of 47% of the time to 55% of the time for those students not self-monitoring, (Digangi, Maag & Rutherford, Jr., 1991). The numbers increased further when students were asked to self-graph and create means of self-reinforcement to support their new behaviors. These students saw positive behaviors increase to 88% of the time. The data collected by DiGangi, Maag and Rutherford, Jr. (1991), show support for the idea that if students are given the opportunity to monitor, reflect and control aspects of their behavior, they are more successful when success is defined as improvements in behavior and/or academic performance.

The work of Harris, Graham, Reid, McElroy and Hamby (1994) echo that of DiGangi, Maag and Rutherford, Jr. (1991). These researchers also looked at the effects of requiring students to self-monitor on behavior and academic performance, again using

a group with diagnosed learning disabilities across multiple subjects. Additionally, though, these students were identified as having the inability to stay on-task during class time. The study used spelling assignments and writing assignments as their means to assess the self-monitoring programs. The results showed that on-task behaviors increased from 56%, 66%, 59% and 28% for the groups studied to 74%, 97%, 85%, and 86%, respectively, once the students were asked to self-monitor (Harris, Graham, Reid, McElroy & Hamby, 1994). The results also showed the academic performance of all students increased with self-monitoring. Once the student was tasked with evaluating their own actions and adjusting them accordingly, their performance greatly increased.

A push to include young people in decision making is occurring within another industry, social work. A study completed in Canada by Carolyn Campbell (1999) advocates for experimenting with different types of educational processes for those within the social work field. The article explains the concept of empowerment where the student is part of the decision-making body. Power and decision making is shared between social worker and client and both parties learn from one another. Campbell (1999) advocates for what she calls equal partnership between instructor and student. When traditional instructor-directed models are used during instruction, inequalities are maintained between student and teacher. This is due to the fact that the teacher decides on final grades which determine future educational opportunities. When the student is empowered in a student-directed instructional environment, though, it allows the student to become a part of the process and gain autonomy. Such gains increase feeling of empowerment and assist in developing more successful students and more successful student/teacher relationships. Further, Campbell (1999) admonishes Western teaching

methods for not being open to such methods. She claims, in general, Western education

lacks the ability to embrace such teaching styles because of the more rationalist thinking

of Western educators. Still, if they would embrace student-directed programs, students

would possess a greater ability to adjust their own learning and understand how their

learning succeeds or fails.   Just like in the social work model, though, the classroom

extension would require a focus on the teacher being transparent about power and sharing

that power and authority with her students. Everything would be based on negotiation

with equal partnership across teacher/student lines. If done correctly, though, great

benefits will occur (Campbell, 1999).

Further, more recent studies have focused on student-directed learning, although

many are done at the post-secondary level. Still, the work of Breunig (2017) and Douglas

and Morris (2014) show that at this level, student-directed learning is successful and

popular amongst both teachers and students. The students are motivated and willing to

work, but, as Douglas and Morris (2014) point out, the students still make the point when

surveyed that their teacher has an impact on both their ability and motivation to learn. So,

the traditional professor is still important, but the students themselves, do like controlling

aspects of their own learning. A long ways from collegiate classrooms, though, at the

primary level, research shows that some aspects of student-directed learning are also

successful. Dignath, Buettner and Langfeldt (2008) researched what they label as self-

regulated learning. Primary school level students were shown to learn well when taught

how to learn and tasked with completing that learning by themselves after being shown

how to do it. Thus, this extension of student-directed learning shows that even at the

lowest levels of academic education, the students are still capable of running aspects of their learning with a teacher there to facilitate their understanding.

Current Examples of Student-Directed Learning

With all of the above in mind, the question becomes if there are any examples of student-directed learning that exist, and, if so, are they successful. The answer to both is yes. Perhaps the oldest exemplar of such learning is Summerhill. Located in England, Summerhill was founded in 1921 as a boarding school by A.S. Neill. The school is not an example of student-directed learning in the way that I have discussed in this paper, but, rather, is one of the foremost campuses that exist to promote democratic schooling (Chertoff, 2012). Drawing on Paulo Friere, Margaret Mead and John Dewey, democratic education is a type of learning that prioritizes student inclusion in the decision making process (Bennis). Students and teachers each have one vote when making all decisions in the classroom. At Summerhill, as with most democratic schools, there are no class schedules, no set classes, but, rather, there are timetables where activities are scheduled to take place and facilitated by the adults on campus (Summerhill). Students that attend Summerhill, often speak well of the school model and experiences had while attending. In 2011, when Summerhill celebrated its 90th anniversary, *The Guardian* published a compilation of comments and memories from Summerhill graduates over the years. One particular comment below sums up the democratic component of attending Summerhill.

> What we did get was a valuable education in democracy. At weekly school
> meetings, attended by anyone who wanted to come, issues were raised – a child
> destroying property, or a teacher talking in a way someone considered hurtful –
> and everyone had an equal vote on the appropriate punishment. These varied from

losing your puddings for a day to being banned from Neill's expeditions to the

sea. (Nuestatter, 2011)

This equal access to decision making power is certainly what sets Summerhill apart from

more traditional campuses and more traditional private boarding schools. Unfortunately,

Summerhill does not provide its democratic opportunities to many students, though, as

the campus is quite small, and the student population sits at or less than 100 students at a

time (Chertoff, 2012).

Still, despite its small size, Summerhill's influence beyond England has been

quite large. The Sudbury model of schools in the United States is based on Summerhill.

The Sudbury Valley School is the first Sudbury school to open its doors in the United

States, and it has since seen an extension of this campus to multiple other cities. The

Sudbury school model is democratic in nature, like Summerhill, where students make up

a large part of the decision making body. Further, with the Sudbury model, students of all

ages in one setting together. There are no delineations of grades based on age, but, rather,

students work alongside one another and the adults on campus referred to as "staff

members," (Houston Sudbury School). Additionally, much like in student-directed

learning, as I've described it, students create their own models of learning, as well as

decide how they best learn. Further, they extend this decision making to deciding what

they learn choosing classes and research interests at the start and middle of the school

years.

So what sets my discussion of student-directed learning apart? Well, there are two

points I would like to make here. First, there is the idea of access to such learning, as

described above. The argument of this paper is not that student-directed learning benefits

only those students from vulnerable populations. In fact, student-directed learning is something that would benefit all students, regardless of level of privilege. As the previous section shows, student voice and any program or instructional style that promotes such voice benefits students. Further, though, student-directed learning may potentially benefit those students from privileged populations because it will assist them in beginning to see their own privilege. While Giroux (1983) talks about the failure of the oppressed student to see the ways in which they are oppressed, the same is true of the oppressor student who does not always acknowledge their own ability to oppress. This is where critical pedagogy comes in where educators work to use such pedagogy to develop a collective consciousness where the lines of oppression are both visible and able to be changed. Student-directed learning attempts to do just this. By making the classroom democratic and equalizing the power of both decision-making and action, the students can begin to work outside of the bounds of ideological formations and oppressive discourses. By finding empowerment in the classroom, students from both privileged and oppressed backgrounds can begin to work to change the social structures discussed in this chapter and develop voice in different ways. The oppressed student can exercise their voice, potentially for the first time, while the privileged student can use it in new ways to recognize their own privilege and ability to act as oppressor.

The issue here, though, is that students from vulnerable populations don't have the kind of access to student-directed or democratic learning environments as their privileged counterparts. Take the examples I've laid out above. Summerhill, as mentioned, does not enroll many students per year. Those that it does admit pay between £8,568 and £14,889 in tuition, and there is currently no tuition assistance program

available to students from low-income backgrounds. The Sudbury model also is a tuition based private school. While each location varies in cost, let's look at the Sudbury model in Houston, TX to provide a comparison, as that is where my students live. In order to attend, students must pay a $50 interview fee and $150 visiting week fee that allows students to attend for 25 hours over five days. If chosen for admittance, students are responsible for 10% of their total annual tuition as a deposit to secure their spot. The total tuition is $7,000 a year as of the 2017-2018 school year (Houston Sudbury School). Unlike Summerhill, though, Sudbury Houston does provide an option for tuition assistance. Families are invited to apply for this assistance program, but the grant that waives tuition does not come without strings. Half of the tuition grant is required to be paid back to the school over the course of the year through what they label a work exchange program (Houston Sudbury School Tuition Assistance Program). This work exchange is paid back at $35.00 per hour for each hour the family volunteers and works at the school (Houston Sudbury School Tuition Assistance Program). That means that families must work a minimum of 100 hours at the school over the course of the year to pay back half of the tuition grant for the $7,000 tuition.

So, let us now talk about access. Students from low-income and vulnerable populations come from families where access to both money and time is short. While it makes sense that students from this group would not be able to pay for such high tuition, the idea of family members being able to devote 100 hours of time for tuition assistance is also difficult to realize. Take my students for example. Many of their parents worked two if not three jobs. They did not have time to come to parent teacher conferences, academic nights or school plays, much less to devote 100 hours of time to a campus like

Sudbury Houston. What is ironic, though, is that the Houston Sudbury School is located only a short way from the school my students attended. Located in Acres Homes, one of the most impoverished sections of Houston, the Houston Sudbury School should be able to pull in a population of students that are vulnerable and in need of the type of agency student-direction can provide. The cost, though, and the low enrollment numbers (only three staff members work with 100 or less students) prevent the type of access to democratic and student-directed learning experience that campuses like Sudbury can provide.

This brings me to my second point about the difference between current student-directed examples and the type of student-directed learning I am proposing. I am not just talking about creating new schools away from a traditional school campus. I am arguing that we should look at the impact of student-directed learning and use that information to potentially change our entire philosophy about education, including public education. It is my belief derived from personal experience in the classroom that the current structure of public education does not work. In this chapter I have described the failures of integration, the development of the achievement gap and the psychological impact that such deficiencies can have on vulnerable populations. If student-directed learning can be a catalyst for change when considering the shortcomings of public education, then perhaps we should explore it as an option for changing the way we teach and how our students learn, most specifically by allowing them to decide how to do the latter. That is where I began my student-directed experience, attempting to make that change. The exploration of how that journey unfolded in my classroom and the success or failure of it

can perhaps paint a picture of the potential for student-directed learning and what it can

bring to the students who participate in it.

Chapter III

Method

By conducting a narrative inquiry into my classroom and development of a student-directed instructional framework, an investigation into how to create such a framework and what is needed to support it is the focus of this chapter. My methodological approach is a qualitative study using a case study of my classroom during the 2016-2017 school year. I begin with my theoretical perspective on the concept of student-directed learning, and I use this theoretical framework combined with my practical experience in my classroom to develop themes I will explore in chapter four (Creswell, Plano, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003). To that end, I collected qualitative data as a part of my research project aimed at exploring a problem through an advocacy lens, in this case the way to help students from a vulnerable population find empowerment in the classroom (Hanson, 2005). As a result, I place myself and this study within a critical-ideological paradigm where such research is driven by a desire to "engage oppressed groups in collective democratic theorizing" about their own social status and related oppressions (Denzin, 1994, p. 509). As explored in chapter two, I believe that there are certain social systems and forces that have created a historical system of oppression amongst people of color that has resulted in a failing educational system. Such a belief is in line with a critical-ideological paradigm that embraces a historic view of processes that subjugate vulnerable groups both socially and economically (Ponterotto, Matthew & Raughley, 2013). Thus, this project is one rooted in critical theory and social justice research.

The qualitative piece of my study focuses on experiences gained in my own classroom while both constructing this instructional framework, as well as testing its success when used with students from a vulnerable population. This case study grounds my work in the realm of critical theory research because of the co-membership my study presents. I am both a member of my classroom and participant in the student-directed experiment taking place in my classroom throughout the 2016-2017 school year. Such co-membership is crucial when attempting to give voice to a vulnerable population, as the participation within a marginalized group helps provide a sense of equity, participation and protection from harm (Mohatt & Thomas, 2006). During the analysis phase, I will analyze my reflections and experiences in my classroom to determine answers to my research questions regarding student-directed learning amongst vulnerable populations. My classroom for the 2016-2017 school year will serve as the case study explored and analyzed. This project began as an attempt to ameliorate both behavioral and academic difficulties in an 8th grade English Language Arts and Reading class within a large urban school district located within Southeast Texas. The data, therefore, is archival, collected prior to beginning this project.

I am using a single case study that can be defined as a descriptive case study. I am describing student-directed learning as it took place within the real world context of my classroom (Yin, 2003). My case study is bound by time, definition and context. The time period is the 2016-2017 school year. The definition is my 8th grade ELAR classroom at a campus within an urban sector of Houston, Texas. The context is my transition from traditional classroom instruction to student-directed learning with all three of my classes. Case studies like this one are used to explore a topic of interest and potentially identify

previously unknown aspects about the phenomenon being explored through this study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this paper, my case study will specifically focus on what it is like to be a student in my classroom both before and after aspects of student-directed learning were introduced. Such inquiries are at home in the realm of education, as much of being a student and the learning process exist around the idea of stories and the telling and retelling of those stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, my own story told about the experience of the 2016-2017 school year serves as a record of research about the development of student-directed learning in my classroom and educational practice. It is a case study for how student-directed learning can be implemented in a real classroom with students from vulnerable populations. I have specifically chosen not to focus on the stories, though, of other teachers or the students themselves. This is an intentional decision meant to serve as a starting point of my research into student-directed learning.

Case studies such as this one are very common within qualitative studies (Stake, 2000). The use of research case studies arise when researchers are attempting to understand social phenomena, especially complex examples of it (Yin, 2003). For the purposes of this study, using my classroom as a case study will assist me in providing "an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied, (Hartley, 2004, p. 323)." Those issues in this case being student-directed learning and its connection to student empowerment within vulnerable populations. Further, my case study, like most case studies, is based on a constructivist paradigm where "truth is relative and … is dependent on one's perspective, (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545)." Thus, I am using my perspective as a classroom teacher to describe the reality of my room and better understand how student-directed learning affected my classroom and my students.

As Yin (2018) describes, my case study then is a critical case where I am beginning with a theory of student oppression in the classroom and using the introduction of student-directed learning in my classroom to connect to this theory, build upon it, challenge aspects of it and determine potential extensions and confirmation of that theory.

Since I am the researcher interacting with the program and subjects that I am observing, the question of my objectivity when it comes to my research may arise. While I will address that later in this chapter, I want to point out that it is impossible to separate myself from my subjects. Quite simply, education is a practice that involves people, and I am one of them, so I am attempting to capture the experiences both myself and my students had in my classroom (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2008). While not a traditional social science, education shares many things in common with fields such as psychology and sociology. Both of these, as well as all other social sciences, focus on the interactions between humans in society and how those interactions shape our society. Education is also a field of human interaction. It is a field where relationships are required, and the types of relationships that develop affect all aspects of the microcosms of society in which those relationships are formed, in this case the classroom or school building. Therefore, due to this connection, I believe that my research can be bound by many of the research beliefs held within the social sciences. One such belief is that social scientists cannot be value-free. Because the social scientist, like the educator, is human, they come into a research setting with preconceived notions. Thus, it is the responsibility of that researcher to challenge their own values by interacting with others (Olsen, 2004). Olsen (2004) states that, "Knowledge is embedded and developed within social practices. Researchers do not exist outside of the phenomena being researched. We are a part of

what we are studying, (pgs. 11-12)." I believe this also applies to myself in the classroom. As the teacher, I am a part of what I am studying. I cannot separate myself from it. Thus, before I can incorporate the beliefs of my colleagues or students, I must first challenge my own thinking about my research area. That is what I am attempting to do with this project. I wanted to challenge my own thinking about my students, student-directed learning, and my students' ability to participate within such a framework. I am using the case study of my classroom during the 2016-2017 school year to reflect on the roots of the student-directed framework as well as both reasons for its successes and failures and ways to potentially extend it beyond my classroom.

Researcher Role

I performed the role of the researcher throughout this research project. As with any action research project, I had the challenge of remaining unbiased and objective throughout (Bradbury & Reason, 2003). The students with whom I built this program around were all students in my own classroom. By the start of my case study, these students had been in my charge for almost seven weeks. Thus, a natural relationship and rapport was in place prior to beginning my data collection. Because of this, my students may have responded more willingly to the changes in instructional methodology than if they were wholly unaware of my procedures and expectations. Further, because we had a previous working relationship, some of the challenges of knowing my students had already been surpassed due to my having already gotten to know my classes from both an academic and behavioral perspective. Moreover, we had one diagnostic writing exam already completed, as well as running records for all students completed by the time this project began. Running records were able to assist me in determining students' reading

ability and issues of both comprehension and inference. As such, I began this project with those points of information that made my decision making about seating charts and where to begin with my classes easier than starting with a fresh group and no prior knowledge of students. Thus, the prior knowledge I did have may have had a shortening effect on the timeframe it took to help students adjust to student-directed learning that should be taken into account when both exploring my own experience, as well as any exploration of extending my instructional framework beyond my classroom and into others.

Further, as I was so closely related to the project, I became a major instrument of both data collection and analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Because my students felt comfortable with me, and I them, as outlined above, that sense of comfort was created due to my, the researcher's interaction with the students. While often, researcher-as-instrument is used to discuss the various differences between interviewing spaces and styles amongst qualitative researchers, it still can apply to my project, and I must ensure that I account for the bias this can create (Pezalla, Pettigrew & Miller-Day, 2012). To do so, I have ensured the quality of my observations by showing my experience in the area from which I am collecting data (Xu & Storr, 2012). By the time I began this study, I had five full years of classroom experience, with both a bachelor's and a master's degree, which earned me the status of Master Teacher by the district by which I was employed. Further, I determined that my archival observations were appropriate to be used to answer my research questions, as well as explore the challenges of those I observed, my students (Lofland et. Al, 2006). Finally, I accounted for the bias my role as researcher and participant could potentially cause. Those limitations will be explored at length in the last section of this chapter.

Site and Participant

The research conducted took place at a middle school within a large urban school district within Southeast Texas. The campus services 7th and 8th grade students within that district, but all data I collected was from students enrolled in my 8th grade English Language Arts and Reading classes. The campus my classroom was located on is classified as a Title One school. The Title One designation means that the campus received financial assistance from the federal government due to its high number of low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The funding is meant to provide resources to ensure that children from impoverished areas have the opportunity to achieve required academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). School wide, this campus services 663 total students. 63.6% are Hispanic, with the second largest majority being African American. Limited English Proficiency students make up 16% of the total population, while 84.4% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. To qualify for this service, families must be 130% or more below the poverty line, which equates to less than $15,171 total family annual income (Public Schools).

The following charts show a breakdown of demographics of the 87 students in my classroom.
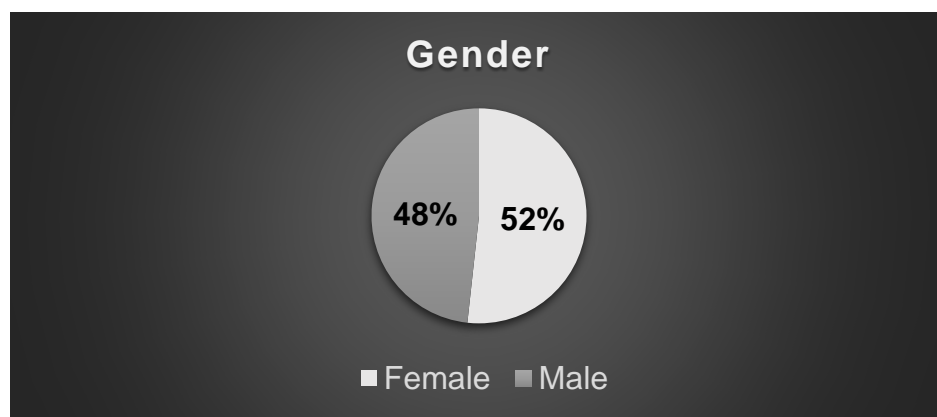
Figure 1. Breakdown of gender amongst my students.
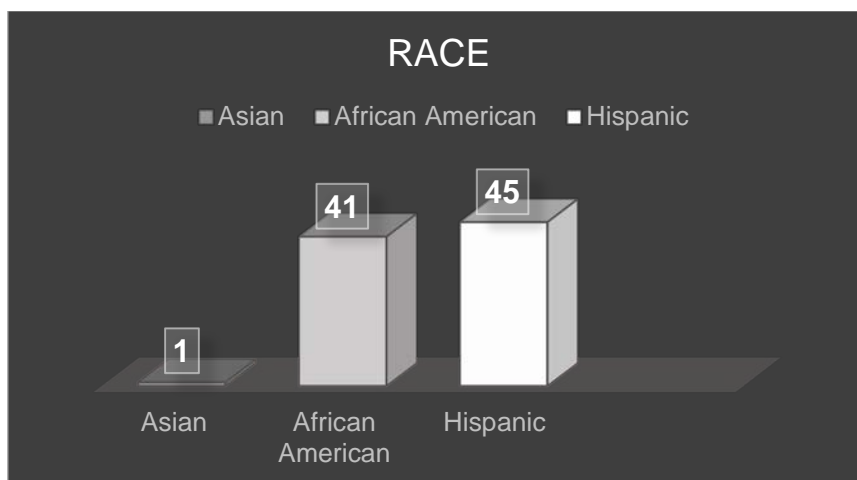
Figure 2. Breakdown of race amongst my students.

Additionally, there was a large population of students in my classroom with a Tier

designation. Those students with this designation are a part of a behavior management

system implemented on my campus that was composed of classroom teachers and a

district level behavior interventionist. Students were assigned numbers based on the

severity of their behavior issues with one being the least severe and three being the most

severe. My classes contained the highest percentage of Tier designated students out of all

of the 8th grade ELAR classes. I personally taught 52.4% of all 8th graders that were

included in the behavior oversight program during the 2016-2017 school year, while the

other students were spread out amongst the rest of the staff. In total, I had eleven students

with Tier designations split between my three periods that were 90-minute blocks. The

table below shows how these students were distributed amongst my three classes.

Table 4

Breakdown of tier behavior students

Class Period	Number of Students
1-2 Block	8
6-7 Block	1
8-9 Block	2

I am the sole participant of this project, as I am reflecting on my experiences in the classroom.

Data Collection and Procedures

The qualitative data analyzed throughout my study was collected through observation and interactions between myself and my students. I kept a daily journal throughout the school week for the duration of the project beginning with my student-directed experiment through the second to last week of school, once all instruction was completed. The journal began as a way to self-reflect about how the student-directed learning process was going. Because I was taking a chance by changing the type of instruction I was providing, I needed a way to collect my thoughts at the end of each day regarding the lesson plans I was writing and how the changes I was making to them was reflected in both the behavior and academic progress of my students. As such, the journal became a way to have a conversation with myself at the end of the day to understand how the changes I implemented were affecting each period, and I used what I wrote to determine if I should continue with the project or not. Once my dissertation project began to take form, though, I was able to use my journal and collected notes in order to shape my reflections on the build up to student directed learning, as well as track how my classroom changed over the roll out of the program in my classroom. The only days without entries in my journal were those that I was absent or that there were requirements for myself and my students that did not allow for instruction. On these days, I simply made a note about what caused the interruption. All qualitative data was collected within the confines of my classroom by only myself in the capacity of classroom teacher. I would take notes on my planning and conference periods for my 1-2 block and after

school for my 6-7 and 8-9 blocks, as I did not have a break in between them. The data collected always involved my students and the interactions I had alongside and with them. It was through these interactions that I began to craft the student-directed framework presented in chapter four. As such, most of the qualitative data presented and discussed comes directly from my own personal lesson plans that were organically created throughout the course of the 2016-2017 school year.

Additionally, a series of themes developed during my data analysis of my time in the classroom. The chart below shows the three themes that emerged and a brief description of each.

Table 5

Description of themes

Theme	Description
Agency	The ability of the student to act independently and exercise their own voice regarding their own learning. My definition of agency is rooted in the idea that individuals with agency are self-reflective, self-organizing and self-regulating despite the social systems that surround them (Bandura, 1986).
Engagement	The level of involvement, curiosity and excitement about the daily workings of the classroom, as well as the lessons being presented (Newmann, Wehlage & Lamborn, 1992).
Achievement	The student's retention of concepts presented in the classroom, ability to synthesize and use the information learned, as well as their reading level increasing over the course of the school year.

These three themes will be discussed in chapter four to determine the success or failure of the student-directed experiment in my classroom.

Finally, I took part in a debriefing interview in order to examine both my role as a researcher, as well my interactions with my students throughout the introduction of

student-directed learning. All questions posed during the interview were asked to help focus on how the researcher, myself, was an instrument of analysis. When the researcher is such an instrument, there is a great potential threat to the validity of data collected and analysis completed by that researcher due to bias (Poggenpoel & Myburge, 2003). Since I myself was the researcher, it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to question my own bias because I am so integrated to the study acting as an insider to my own research (Mehra, 2002). As a result, as Chenail (2009) explains, "Given this affinity these "insider" investigators may limit their own curiosities so they only discover what they think they don't know, rather than opening up their inquiries to encompass also what they don't know they don't know, (p. 16)." To ameliorate the problem created by this potential lack of objectivity, I decided to conduct a debrief with the researcher, myself (Chenail, 2009). One of my dissertation committee members conducted this interview with me during my analysis phase. intend to use what came out of this interview as part of my qualitative data that will be analyzed alongside my other data points to help maintain subjectivity and identify a priori assumptions I had about the student-directed learning process that took place in my room during the 2016-2017 school year (Chanail, 2009).

Analysis

For my analysis phase, I used a variety of data collection sources to answer my three research questions ranging from my literature review to self-reflections collected in my daily journal. A summary of my research questions posed and the data sources I used for collection can be in the Table 6.

Table 6

Summary of questions and collection sources

Research Questions	Data Collection Sources
What social factors regarding student voice exist to demonstrate the need for a pedagogical shift in the classroom, including my own?	• Literature review in chapter two • Debrief with the researcher
How was my student-directed classroom run and what tools were needed to change to such an instructional framework?	• Triangulation of themes • Debrief with the researcher • Self-Reflections collected daily in the classroom
What changes occurred in my classroom in terms of engagement and achievement following the implementation of student-directed learning?	• Triangulation of themes • Debrief with the researcher • Self-Reflections collected daily in the classroom

Since this is a case study, I had to ensure my data points were not analyzed separately but used together to "understand the overall case, not the various parts of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008)." Therefore, I used a bricolage method working from the perspective of combining multiple types of qualitative research outlined above (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Lincoln and Denzin (2003) explain bricolage as a type of research where the researcher pieces together stories and qualitative data collected in a type of patchwork connecting these disparate sources of data to determine information about a subject. By using such a methodological framework, I was able to interpret my data and explore multiple aspects of my research without being constrained by one type of formal data analysis (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991). As Lincoln and Denzin (2003) describe, bricolage rejects the positivist approach to research that begins with the belief that knowledge about a subject can only come from a scientific exploration of empirical facts.

This implies that this is one correct way to get information, which Lincoln and Denzin (2003) reject. Instead, bricolage research begins from a constructivist perspective and looks at how sociopolitical and historical contexts influence what is being examined (Kincheloe, 2005). In this vein, my data analysis came from my being a narrative bricoleur where I drew from multiple perspectives and used varied sources to interpret the effect student-directed learning had on my classroom (Rogers, 2012).

To do so, my conceptual framework involved a series of themes identified throughout my case study. I made connections between them to determine links between these themes and student-directed learning in my classroom. To find these connections, I used a holistic coding approach. Holistic coding is useful with data that has a standard set of time, which mine did. Since I was using my field notes in my research journal, there was only the 2016-2017 school year to explore. Further, thematic analysis is highly effective with holistic coding (Saldana, 2009). Thus, I read and re-read my journal throughout my analysis phase and coded appropriately. It was through this coding that my three themes developed and were explored throughout this analysis period. Further, I used my debriefing interview to identify associations with those themes, as well. In chapter four, I will provide three charts showing what I have found. The first will show the connections between my three themes and my self-reflections from my classroom, the second between the themes and my debriefing interview and the third showing how those associations identified in the first two charts overlap. By weaving these connections together, I can determine the success or failure of student-directed learning in my classroom.

Potential Limitations

As with any project, there are some challenges that need to be addressed. As Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) write, "Narratives sit at the intersection of history, biography and society," (pg. 132). Thus, all narratives are shaped by the context of the experiences of both the researcher and subject participating in the creation of that narrative. It is not necessarily fact what is presented in a case study and the narrative reflections that accompany it, but the facts of the microcosm in which the narrative being told was constructed (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Further, Johnson and Onquegbuzie (2004) describe this potential weakness of qualitative research where the knowledge gained by qualitative data analysis may not be able to be extended to further populations. Thus, it is fairly limiting that I present an argument for student-directed learning while only basing such an argument off of my own classroom and classroom experience with one set of students. I will address this issue at length both at the close of chapter four, as well as chapter five. Further, as mentioned previously, as with any project like this one, there is the potential for bias, as I the collector of information am also participating in the creation of the data I am collecting. That is where my debriefing the researcher interview will come in. Through this process, I will use the interview to talk about ethical issues and shortcomings within my case study. I will use these shortcomings and issues that arise alongside my theme exploration in the analysis section of my chapter four to paint a thorough picture of both the findings that stem from my case study, as well as the limitations of it.

Chapter IV

The Student Directed Classroom

In this chapter, I intend to present the findings that resulted from my data analysis using thematic analysis of my research journal outlining the process I undertook, as well as my debrief the researcher interview. To begin, this chapter will provide an outline for an instructional framework that I implemented in my own room to turn it from student-centered or teacher-directed to student-directed to answer my second research question: How was my student-directed classroom run and what tools were needed to change to such an instructional framework? It was a difficult process, though, because the student-directed room is so much different from any other. Thus, a breakdown of just how I initiated these changes needs to be presented in order to explain how to make the student-directed classroom a reality. The following topics will be addressed:

Table 7

Overview of chapter four

Section	Contents
Schedule of Activities	How the process of implementing the student-directed framework occurs
Phase One: The Roles of Teacher and Student	Defining not just the roles of teacher and student, but how to introduce these ideas to the students themselves.
Phase One: Getting Started	What is necessary over the first few weeks of the transition
Phases Two and Three: Lesson Planning	An overview of how the lesson planning process works
Phases Two and Three: Assessment Planning and Creation	The way assessments are crafted and given to students
Phase Four: The Collective Learning Environment	Now that the classroom is fully student-directed, what does it look like?
Evaluating the Success of Student-Directed Learning in My Classroom	Looking at the results of student-directed learning

As shown above, this chapter will serve as an overview of the student-directed classroom that I implemented in my own 8th grade English Language Arts and Reading room. It is important to note, though, that despite this program taking place in my middle school literacy classroom, the student-directed instructional framework shown in this chapter can be extended to address all students across all disciplines. The extension beyond the literacy room will be addressed in the next chapter.

My Instructional Story Continued

To start, I think it is important to explore my own instructional story further and how I came to the student-directed experience. It is here that I should mention that I am not a traditional classroom teacher. I am a product of an alternative certification program offered through the state of Texas, and my background both educationally and professionally is atypical for an educator. I spent my undergraduate degree program researching political theory, specifically contemporary theory influenced mostly by the work of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault and their commentary on power structures and the way in which those structures are both born and maintained. I left with my bachelor's degree from Tulane University to work in the nonprofit and political realms attempting to find a way to utilize my theoretical background to ameliorate the problems of my hometown of New Orleans, Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I found myself quickly frustrated by the innerworkings of both nonprofits and politics and jumped at the chance to try something new by teaching at the high school I personally attended. This school had experienced an immense shift in both population and structure post-storm. Prior to the hurricane that hit in August 2005, the campus existed as part of three high schools in a suburb of New Orleans that was

predominantly middle class and white. In fact, St. Bernard Parish, where the high school

is located, is a parish that was developed and flourished as a result of white flight

(Marcus, 1998). Located geographically southeast of the city, white blue-collar families

that previously lived in the ninth ward and eastern sectors of New Orleans, ventured

further outside the city bounds to get away from school integration beginning in the

1960s (Marcus, 1998). By the time my family moved there in the 1980's, the suburbs of

Arabi, Chalmette and Meraux were considered to be a safe place to live that was close

enough to downtown New Orleans to experience all the city had to offer but sheltered

from the problems that plagued it pre-Katrina, including a failing public school system,

immense income inequality, a high crime rate, and an overburdened public housing

system (Kates, Cloten, Laska & Leatherman, 2006).

When Katrina hit on August 29, 2005, the geography of New Orleans was forever

changed, including the suburbs that surrounded it. The problem became two-fold for the

residents of St. Bernard. First, the parish was arguably hit much harder than the heart of

New Orleans. Almost all 26,000 homes in the parish experienced extensive damage, if

they were not completely destroyed (Jervis, 2009). All campuses within the St. Bernard

Parish School District were also destroyed, including the high school I attended.

Secondarily, because of the levee breaks in the lower ninth ward hours after Katrina

passed through, the parish became a place of refuge for those residents that lost their

homes in this part of the city. Over the next few months, a large percentage of the

previous residents of St. Bernard Parish would rebuild elsewhere, while the empty spaces

were taken up by transplants from the ninth ward, one of the most impoverished areas of

the city where nearly all residents were African American. In fact, the population of St.

Bernard Parish as a result of these new additions went from approximately 4% African American in 1990 to 18% as of 2010, as the total population declined 47%, making this shift in racial makeup even more extensive (Alexander-Bloch, 2011). Thus, St. Bernard Parish found its demographics shifting rather suddenly, something the school system was attempting to address by the time I joined as a teacher in late 2007. By this point, the high school had gone from one of three to the only high school in the parish, and the previous graduating classes of approximately 100-120 (mine was 119) had ballooned to 400 plus students. Additionally, those students were a group with a much higher propensity of low-income, African American and Latino students that were tremendously behind in both reading and math abilities.

I entered the classroom excited to be a part of the discussions taking place on how to accommodate this new population, as well as how best to approach the issues arising as a result of the school not addressing their needs. Over the next few years, I began to hone my teaching skills and found myself becoming increasingly disturbed about the treatment of some of my students that were new to the area. The new students experienced a tremendous amount of targeted discrimination, and I began to become immensely frustrated with their treatment both in and outside of the school building. In 2010, my frustration came to a head, as I watched a large group of my African American students previously from the lower ninth ward fight for their right to have access to low-income housing. Since St. Bernard Parish was mostly middle class prior to Hurricane Katrina, there were zero public housing and a very limited number of low-income housing options that existed pre-2005. Now that the population had shifted so dramatically, though, a need had developed for these types of facilities. Almost four years

earlier, in 2006, Provident Realty, a housing development company, came to the parish to propose a solution, a series of mixed-income rental facilities.

Residents of St. Bernard Parish prior to the storm, the majority of whom were white and home owners, began to fight against this development almost immediately. After three years of fighting, a federal judge ruled in 2009 that the Parish had to allow the construction of the buildings, as their opposition was racially discriminatory, a sentiment echoed by United States Office of Housing and Urban Development officials (Alexander-Bloch, 2011). As a result, the parish altered its zoning laws to prevent the construction of these multi-family developments within parish bounds to totally prevent construction from occurring. By 2011, the federal government began to restrict federal funding to the parish as a way to put pressure on them to allow the facilities, as protests and Parish Council meetings saw immense outcry from both sides of the issue. Both then and previously over the years of controversy, the future population of these facilities were talked about in a very targeted way. While race was never explicitly mentioned, it was heavily implied. Take for instance the editorial that could be considered to be the escalating point for the entire issue. U.S. District Judge Ginger Berrigan stated in an editorial published in 2008 in *The St. Bernard Voice:*

> Should St. Bernard residents be concerned? Ours was a crime-free community of homeowners with a deep appreciation for shared values. ... Is that now threatened? The fact that each development mentions that it will provide 'supportive services in a community facility including ... after school programs on a voluntary basis, adult basic education, and personal finance' may provide some insights into the background of the intended occupant. (Alexander-Bloch, 2011)

Additionally, the judge would state that these units were certain to divulge into "a ghetto with drugs, crime, vandalism, and violence, (Alexander-Bloch, 2011)." While the words African-American were never mentioned, the fact that the new population that was both low-income and would be renting these units were predominantly black was well-known. Thus, the argument against the properties was an argument against the influx of people of color coming into St. Bernard Parish. Further, it was an argument based on the assumption that these people would be violent criminals. It was a labeling and judgment of an entire race, and everyone knew it, including my students.

Eventually the apartments would be built and rented to capacity almost immediately, but the damage was done. I saw my African American and Latino students talk about their new home in a way that was outside, as if they did not belong. They would refer to the areas they lived in prior to Katrina as home and this new part of town as simply where they were at that moment, for how could home be a place where you are so clearly not wanted, where you are told what you are and worse, what you will be. I realized then that this population of students was facing an immense challenge of identity. They were forced to live amongst people who rejected their being there based on a faulty evaluation of their morality, potential and ability due to the color of their skin. These students were stuck, unable to leave and unable to redefine themselves because the definitions were already written for them. In frustration, I made the decision to return to school to continue to research these issues.

I left teaching and spent two years pursuing my master's degree where I returned to my theoretical roots, choosing to research and write about critical race theory. It was research done in an effort to figure out solutions to what I had seen, how to incorporate

these students into a society that did everything it could to keep them outside of its

bounds. I continued my exploration of Althusser, Gramsci and Foucault, and I extended

my critical theory background to include writers such as Girogio Agamben who

specifically writes about the idea of being held apart and how that holding separate both

occurs and the effects it has on the people placed on the outside. While I was inspired by

Agamben and my master's thesis work, I was disappointed to find that at the end of that

two years, despite having a higher degree, I had no better idea about how to empower my

former students or their families to change the cycles they were being absorbed into. So, I

left school and returned to the world of non-profits hoping to find some solace in working

alongside families of color seeking financial literacy and first-time homeownership with

Habitat for Humanity. In the two years spent working there, though, my time in the

classroom was always in the back of my mind. I realized I needed to return to a

traditional education setting and try again. I began to reframe the way I thought about the

act of teaching. I decided to re-enter the classroom in Houston where I was now living as

a teacher that would choose to use teaching as a conscious form of resistance against the

cycles of oppression I'd witnessed at my last school. I decided to let this inform all

aspects of both my teaching style and approach to content. I began by being purposeful in

my choice of school. I decided upon a campus that, at the time, was the worst performing

middle school in the school district in which I would teach. I made the decision to let my

theory background inform both my teacher knowledge and practice. I would use it to not

just resist those power structures in place that I had studied but to attempt to rewire the

thinking of my students so heavily influenced by the cycles of authority and the

socialization of information that accompanies them.

I started teaching again in January 2016, and, from day one, I questioned everything I was given and analyzed each task I was told to do with a critical eye. That is where I was when I started with the class of eighth graders mentioned previously. I found myself failing to reach this group of students, and for assistance, as stated above, I turned to those in authority over me- skills specialists, campus administration and district wide curriculum supervisors. The tools I was given, though, frustrated me more than my inability to find a way to connect with my students. Almost every district professional development seminar and almost every faculty meeting talked about the students in a way that assumed a deficiency in terms of both behavior and capability of achievement. We always began by talking about crafting a stricter and more consistent classroom management program, where we were taught to start by expecting the worst from our students. In fact, many of these seminars actually included activities where we would list out "bad" behaviors we knew would happen and how we would react in terms of rules and consequences. These activities combined with crisis management seminars on how to appropriately break up fights created the overarching view of the student body as that of uncontrollable, violent young adults. When we actually began to discuss instructional approaches, deficits were always discussed as an assumed burden for the teacher, something that would hurt their individual test scores and need to be ameliorated first and foremost. Thus, everything became about the state standardized test, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness test. All roads led to the STAAR, certainly all instructional preparation.

What about the students, though? Were they really going to be as challenging as the information presented by the district claimed they would be? It depends on who you

asked. For some, the preparation for what was to come, the violent, "deviant" student, turned some teachers into overlords in their classroom where they constantly talked about having to "handle" and "control" the students that entered their rooms. To this end, I would observe over the next year and half of teaching, teachers yelling, cursing, insulting, even physically threatening students. I would personally see teachers within my own department walk their students through the entire campus over a 90-minute block in a line with their fingers on their lips. This teacher would stop at every classroom her students passed to tell the adult in the room how terrible the students being punished were. The described march of humiliation certainly didn't affect the students' behavior in a positive way. If anything, it made it worse. So much so, that this teacher would randomly leave campus in frustration because of the way their students were acting throughout the year. Upon walking out, a substitute would sometimes be found for their students. Other times, they were left alone or forced to sit on the floor of other overcrowded classrooms. The administration's response was to forgive the teacher and blame the student. Statements like, "Well, that is a challenging class," and "I understand needing to walk away" were made more than once in departmental meetings where the issue of this teacher's absence/behavior was discussed. Thus, the teacher was allowed back time and time again, and when they inevitably would walk out again, the school wrote more students up, sent them to the in-school suspension room, sometimes for 20 days at a time, or sent the students to the alternative campus for half a year.

As you can imagine, none of these approaches was effective. What was labeled as student behavior "problems" across the campus continued. Fights occurred almost daily. The attendance rate continued to be well under what was required by state mandates for

both students ***and*** the faculty, and the test scores remained low and below standard. Therefore, when I found myself dealing with large behavioral issues in my own room, I found the resources for dealing with these issues lacking entirely. All that existed were structures that assumed things about my students. I was told there would be extreme deficits that would be insurmountable and behavior problems would only compound the instructional ones. So, when the students finally entered the classroom in late August, it was obvious what the teacher's opinion was supposed to be about them. They were treated as deviant. They were told *what* to do, as in most educational settings, but, worse, they were told what they *were* both subliminally and directly. Thus, they acted in kind and became what they were told to be. As a result, I decided to go out on a limb and try the opposite of what everyone else was doing. Instead of placing further restriction, I made up my mind to do the most revolutionary thing I had ever heard of in the classroom thanks to the Ted Talk I came across with Hutton and his accompanying research. I relinquished all control of my room over the last few months of the first semester of the 2016-2017 school year to my class.

I began the transfer of power by teaching students about how to make lesson plans, the starting point for all formal educational interactions. Together, we planned a Texas Education Knowledge Standard study on the topics we were covering and created a lesson using a lesson planning template I modified. The students volunteered to be group leaders, and each group worked together throughout the week and taught an aspect of our topic through a mini-lesson while I assisted only in the facilitating of that lesson and overseeing the group work we decided upon as a class. The only formal teaching I did was a short five-minute explanation of our concept where I provided examples and

anecdotes I found helpful. The students did the rest, including finding all other resources and sources to explain their own concept of the topic at hand. By the end of the week, I had only one discipline referral, the entire topic we began was covered entirely, and my informal assessment through observation and a student-driven class discussion showed tremendous retention. I was not sure I could or even how to replicate the success I had seen that week, but I knew I had witnessed something both uncommon and loaded with potential to change my class from there on out.

To that end, I will include one last anecdote about the power of this student-directed experience. My first and second block of the day was by far the most challenging on paper. Not only did this class score the lowest on their previous state standardized test, a measure of content knowledge respected by administration and the district, the average reading level in the room was two to three grades below where it should have been. Additionally, I had my largest population of Gaining Appropriate Performance (GAP) students who had multiple aides with them during my class, as well as their other classrooms, in an effort to not just protect the student, but, as I would come to observe, protect the other students from them. GAP students were classified by the district in which I taught to be those students who were in definitive need of highly structured behavior management plans. Many of the GAP students were also classified as behaviorally challenging or officially diagnosed as having moderate to severe emotional disturbance ("Aldine Independent School District: Special Education Services"). Thus, they were the students that posed the most "trouble" to teachers and their peers according to the team that classified them as GAP. As such, considering my population, from the perspective of my administrative team, this class was going to be a huge challenge. I

attended multiple meetings at the start of the year with the campus behavior specialist,

assistant principals and GAP program managers discussing what my approach would be

and more pointedly "should" be from their perspective, particularly with one student who

I will call *Kyle*. *Kyle* was an overaged African American male that entered my room with

a diagnosed learning disability in reading. Additionally, he had a history of being

extremely violent with both students and teachers. In particular, *Kyle* liked to be verbally

abusive to those around him, including his instructors. I spent the first few weeks of

school dealing with a lot of profanity thrown my way and consistent scenes of *Kyle*

throwing his bag, books, pencils, etc. before storming out of the room. To make matters

worse, if *Kyle* would, on the rare occasion, refuse to leave, the GAP teacher and their

aide(s) would physically turn *Kyle's* desk over and pour him out of it before physically

dragging him out of the room screaming. These incredibly disturbing encounters would

occur in the middle of my class while the rest of the students observed. It was a toxic

cycle that was just one of many I wanted to assist in changing when I began my student-

directed experiment. *Kyle* spent four weeks working alongside other students in my

classroom under my new instructional model. Over this month, he would work in a group

(or with any other person for that matter) for the first time in my room or any other for

that school year. He agreed to serve as a mentor to a new student that was added to my

class, and *Kyle* began to change the way he dealt with his frustration. He would ask to go

outside to calm himself down, and, because he was directing his experience in my

classroom, *Kyle* was able set his own time to cool down. When he made the choice to

leave, he was allowed to stand outside for however long he needed, rather than a time set

by his behavior plan. Sometimes he would spend two minutes, sometimes he would never

return, but, over those four weeks, *Kyle* received zero discipline referrals in my room. It is not an exaggeration to say he was a totally different student, something noticed by his aides and GAP teacher. Now, *Kyle* still had issues with profanity. He still got angry, but he was an active participant of a learning community when he crossed the door into what had become *our* classroom.

Unfortunately, *Kyle* would not get the opportunity to continue such growth. He was expelled and sent to the GAP unit for an incident in another room mid-semester. I did not know he was gone until four days after he was sent away, and I asked about his return. I was never told what happened in that other room, and I was not told if and when he would be returning. I was only instructed to pack up his things and hold them in case he was able to come back before the end of the year, which he would. I would only see *Kyle* one other time before the school year and my teaching tenure at his middle school would end. It was the first day he returned from the GAP center, and I walked past him in the hallway. *Kyle* had grown tremendously over the four months he had been gone, and I will admit I did not recognize him at first, but when I did, I spoke. I said hello and welcomed him back. *Kyle's* response was short, "Fuck you, white lady. Don't you ever fucking talk to me like you know me again. I'll fuck you up." At this point, he was pushed up against a wall by his escort, yelled at to calm down and eventually escorted down the hallway to the front office to be written up for our encounter. While I requested he not receive a referral from our exchange, he did. By week's end, he was officially expelled again. The student that left my room four months prior was not the same student I encountered that morning of his return. He was remarkably different, and he had not only regressed in his behaviors, they had intensified. The afternoon of that encounter, I spoke

with his GAP teacher who told me that they were not surprised by *Kyle's* reaction. According to them, every kid that goes to the GAP center came back worse and changed because that's what a place like that did to you. After all, the GAP center is meant to serve as an alternative campus. Restrictions are extreme on all that cross through the doors of the school. Students can rarely make any decisions for themselves, and, often, they are prevented from even speaking for part, if not all day. As a result, the students that come out of the center often exhibit extreme behaviors, and are the product of their environment. This was certainly true for *Kyle*.

To contrast *Kyle's* journey, another GAP student in my room, who I will call *Ben* shows another possible outcome. *Ben* was an overaged Latino male with the same diagnoses as *Kyle*, as well as anger issues, albeit not as violent as *Kyle's* outbursts tended to be. *Ben*, though, like *Kyle*, had been poured out of his desk multiple times, dragged out of my room kicking and screaming, and was considered to be a huge problem by administration, like *Kyle*. *Ben* did not get expelled, though, and by the end of the year, *Ben* was continuing to work in groups, successfully passed his STAAR test, and his progress was so great, he received an award for a story he wrote as a part of a large class project. *Ben* started the year labeled a problem and ended the year a member of a learning community, an active learner and successfully matriculating to the next level of learning. So what was the difference? From my perspective, *Ben's* lack of expulsion made a huge change in what he was capable of doing, capable of becoming. *Ben* learned to express himself. *Ben* learned how to work with others. *Ben l*earned what he needed and how to express those needs. *Ben* changed his course because of an opportunity to do so. That was the difference because it was an opportunity *Kyle* did not have.

This is the last point that I want to make about the student-directed classroom. It wasn't just a way to create a better learning environment where there were less disruptive students. Instead, it is was about creating a way of helping to redress the harm of the assumption that these students will be disruptive in the first place. To start then, based on my experiences, with students like *Ben* and *Kyle*, I have to ask if these students and others like them will ever be as behaviorally challenged if we don't assume the behavior disorder to begin with? Perhaps we, as educators, need to address the challenges the students face, rather than the challenge we perceive their behavior presents to us as teachers. Maybe if we don't assume they are the problem, we can approach the very real problems they face as people, not just as students, and help these students begin to understand what they need, how to get it and help them create the change to find a solution a reality. It is with these questions that my journey into active resistance through the development of student-directed learning begins.

Schedule of Activities

To begin, I had to face the issue that student-directed learning was going to be something that was not just foreign to me but also my students. Thus, due to its uniqueness, a specific schedule was needed in order to successfully implement a student-directed framework. I decided it was important to recognize two truths from the outset. First, I had to realize this would be a process. I knew that my end goal was student control, but there was no way I could expect to just turn over the control of my classroom to the students on day one, or even at the end of month one. Not only would that be chaos for me, the teacher, it would be chaos for the students as well. Students are accustomed to their teachers occupying particular roles in the classroom. Thus, they

cannot have those roles change suddenly and responsibility fall on them with no safety net, no warning. Therefore, the student-directed classroom was one that would take time to implement. Additionally, I had to recognize that this would be a fluid process. I knew that I would make some strides with students only to see setbacks the next day or following weeks. That is why my main goal became a consistent move toward student-direction at all times. As long as students were beginning to work with me and grow/use their voice, the program implementation would be successful, and I believed it would eventually reach its full potential.

To start, I set out a proposed timeframe. I believed if I could stick at least closely to these stages, then I would find myself moving toward at least some aspects of daily student-directed learning by the start of the second semester of the year.

Table 8

Projected timelines

Stage	Description of Stage	Timeline Goal
Phase One: **Part One: The Roles of the Teacher and Student** **Part Two: Getting Started**	Introduction of student-directed learning as a concept	4-5 weeks
Phase Two: Guided Lesson Planning	Students will be placed in groups and begin planning lessons alongside the teacher.	4-5 weeks
Phase Three: Solo Lesson Planning	Students will plan lessons in groups by themselves and present alongside the traditional educator.	6-8 weeks
Phase Four: Collective Learning	Students will plan lessons by themselves and deliver lessons by themselves	The remainder of the year

Because my three class periods differed in both size and abilities, I was aware that the suggested timeframes I gave myself may be more plausible in some classes than others. Thus, I was prepared to attempt these timelines, but not married to the idea that meeting

them would mean success or failure of my student-directed experiment. Instead, I decided to work each step in each class in a consistent fashion, only moving forward when my students had achieved that phase's requirements, the threshold of which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Phase One, Part One: The Roles of the Teacher and Student

As previously discussed in chapter two, the roles of teacher and student as they have been traditionally defined in an American classroom change drastically in a student-directed environment. Because of that, it was here that I decided to begin in order to outline how the student-directed room would look and how to get from classic power dynamic between student and teacher to collective learning environment where power is both transparent and shared equally by all. Thus, it is worth repeating at the outset that in the student-directed classroom, the teacher does not inhabit the traditional role of classroom instructor. Instead, I began to think about my role as the teacher as more of a facilitator, rather than the sole seat of power. I wanted to change what I would be doing on a daily basis to where I would be tasked with assisting the students in maintaining a consistent, enriched learning environment, but I would also be instructing them on how to not only decide what they wanted to learn, but also how to learn it. The first few weeks in the classroom, then, would need to be all about defining these new roles of teacher and the students, or more appropriately the co-learners.

First, expectations would need to be laid out at length for students from the start. They needed to understand that this new type of learning was not a ruse or a temporary change but a permanent shift in the way things would operate in the classroom. I knew that one thing that may complicate this is that the majority, if not all, of their other

teachers were operating within a more traditional classroom setting. Therefore, students had to understand that the expectations within the student-directed room were going to be much different than the other classes they were attending. As a result, I decided to begin this process by having a conversation with my students. I did a random sampling of my students by placing their names on sticks and pulling three students from each class to interview informally. With each student, I had a casual conversation about their learning style and what they liked and did not like about each class they were currently enrolled within that year. Mostly, the students reported that they liked the classes with no homework or that involved computer use on a daily basis. Additionally, more than one student said their favorite classes were those where they could be on their phones the whole time or talk to their friends. As such, gym class and career studies (a class in one of the computer labs on campus) came up as a favorite with almost all those I spoke with that week.

Once these initial thoughts were expressed by the students to me, I began to introduce the idea of student-directed learning, without explicitly calling it that. I asked the students what they would think about teaching their classes, rather than the teachers doing all the work. Would they enjoy that? Would it be a type of class they would want to attend if they got to decide what to do and when to do it? The responses I received were pretty interesting. From the outset, the students all expressed interest in teaching the class themselves, especially if they could decide assignments. Then, they began to ask questions and expressed their own thoughts about how they would want such an arrangement to look. That is when I began to understand that the students would make assumptions about student-directed learning from the beginning. They expressed

preconceived ideas about what student-directed learning would look like, and it was up to me to help them understand from the beginning exactly what student-directed learning would be in our classroom, and perhaps even more importantly what it would not be. I used my conversations to compile a set of misconceptions that I wanted to address with my classes from the beginning of our journey into student-directed learning to both help me dialogue with them about my expectations, as well as give them a jumping off point to set their own. Below, I have compiled these misconceptions I identified based off of my initial conversations with the nine students I unofficially surveyed.

Table 9

Student misconceptions

Student Misconceptions to Address
1. We can choose to do nothing.
2. We can give ourselves all A's.
3. The teacher has no control over us.
4. This class will be easier than others.
5. The teacher is lying to us because we have no power.
6. Only the smart students' opinions will matter.

Let's start by looking at the first misconception: the students can choose to do nothing. From the very first day, I realized that this idea must be addressed. For the student-directed classroom to work, students must understand that they are partners in every process that will take place in the student-directed room. They will have input in everything that is done, but their input can never be for the class to do nothing, just as the instructor cannot choose to do nothing. Their grade, the success of the class and the success of their fellow students depended on their commitment to offering ideas and ensuring that doing nothing is never an option. The same went with grading. Just as there is never a do nothing option, there is never an option for all A's for everyone.

Students would be involved in both the creation of assessments and the evaluation of those assessments, but there would always be rubrics involved, and there would always be grades that reflect more success for some than others. Students needed to understand that grading would still be a part of the student-directed classroom and that they would be held accountable for what is learned, as well as their participation in the process of creating the outline for that learning.

Then, there is the idea of control. I recognized that some students would assume that once I included them in the process of creating the class that they could take advantage of me, the teacher, in some way. In my initial conversations with my classes, I had multiple students assume that because I would be including their classmates in decision making that I was asking for trouble. They were concerned I wouldn't be able to control their peers. I knew that such a problem was directly linked to the first assumption in this section regarding work required. In the same way that the issue of commitment would need to be addressed, as would the idea of control. I decided to explain the concept of student-directed learning in our first phase through an analogy of a corporate boardroom. Every member of the class has power and ownership of what occurs and what is learned, just as shareholders at a company possess ownership of pieces of that corporation. Still, the traditional classroom teacher, like the original creator of a major business, maintains majority stake at the beginning. So, when it came down to it, the students own pieces of the room, but the director of that room, the traditional classroom teacher, has the deciding vote until full student-directed learning took place. To that end, both a strong classroom organizational program and the practice of procedures for the student-directed room would be needed for this instructional

methodology to work. This idea lead to the next assumption, which was that a student-directed room would potentially be easier than others. In fact, I realized, the opposite would most likely prove to be true. Unlike other classrooms, the students would not just be responsible for learning but for creating lessons and helping others learn. That idea and the expectations that will accompany it needed to be made clear from the start. That brings us back to the idea behind the student-directed room that there needs to be a transparency of power. Therefore, I decided I would have to be up front about all expectations in order to make sure the students felt included and begin to trust the transfer of power dynamic that would occur once power was totally shared with the other learners in the classroom.

Trust would also potentially pose a problem for some students. From my initial conversations, there were students that questioned the motives I had for trying to give them power over their learning. In fact, some of my students did not believe I meant what I said when I proposed that we try student-directed learning. They spoke out and made claims that I would say anything to just get them to listen. There was a real belief that power was never actually going to be shared. Such disbelief makes sense considering the information gathered and discussed in chapter two. The teacher running the student-directed room must understand the students in their classroom. As a result of the social cycles outlined in my literature review, some of the students in a classroom stemming from a vulnerable population are not going to have any experience with agency of any kind both in and out of the school room. Thus, I knew there may be some distrust of the concept once introduced, and, once past the distrust, the students would not have any idea how to speak up for what they wanted or needed because some of them genuinely may

not know how to do so. Therefore, it was tantamount for me to put the students at ease and follow the program with fidelity. Anything that could be perceived as deception or manipulation by myself would set the possibilities of the student-directed room back tremendously. This was especially true of the final of the misconceptions on this list where the students believed that only the "smart" individuals in the classroom would have their opinions count. Both distrust and lack of confidence were expected from my students due to their being from vulnerable populations. Having been held apart and left in the gap between low-income schools that are made up of predominantly students of color and their more privileged counterparts, my students, at times, felt ostracized and less than. These feelings were often acted out in the classroom in a variety of ways including expressing or believing that their opinion didn't matter as much as other students. Again, it would then be my responsibility to ensure students understood from the start exactly how the classroom would work, including the equitable piece of classroom planning and execution. The fact that all students would have an equal say alongside the instructor needed to be made clear and repeated ad nauseum to assuage any fear the students may have of their needs or ideas being held less than any other student in the room or even the teacher. That would be the first step of ensuring the students felt comfortable enough to share their ideas and participate in the groupings that would be needed to make the student-directed classroom work.

All of the above misconceptions would prove to be true over the course of the next year with my students. Thus, I had to find a variety of ways to change my student's perspectives on student-directed learning and put to rest the many misconceptions they would have about what such learning would mean. I began by implementing three types

of activities involving student-directed learning over the first few weeks of its use in

order to both encourage dialogue, as well as an understanding of what we were about to

embark on together. All three activities were used in conjunction with the Discussion

Topics handout found in *Figure 4.1* and completed in the ways explained below that

handout.

Discussion Topics

1. Think about your favorite class. Why is it your favorite? What about it could be repeated in other classes to make those classes better?
2. Define power. Using your definition, explain who has the power in a classroom? Do you think this person(s) should have power? Why or why not?
3. Do you ever feel powerless? When do you feel this way? Why?
4. What would happen if students were allowed to make some of the decisions in a classroom? Do you think they would make good choices? Why or why not?
5. What do you think would happen if your teacher did not show up tomorrow? Would the class still run like it is supposed to be run? Why or why not?
6. Define control. Using your definition, explain a time you felt like you were in control. Did you like it? Why or why not?

Figure 3. Discussion Topics Handout

1. **Gallery Walk**: With this scenario, I set aside one to two days for this assignment. Students were placed in groups of four to six, depending on both classroom size and behavior. Once in groups, students were given one of the questions listed on the Discussion Topics handout. They also were given anchor chart paper and markers. The students were then instructed to write their question prompt at the top and work as a team to answer the question posed. Once finished, the six anchor charts were placed on the walls around the classroom.

For the next step, students were given a pack of post-it notes per group that were all different in color. The students completed a gallery walk where they used their post-it notes to make comments to add to the discussion on each of the five anchor charts that they were not assigned. By the end of the class, a discussion took place as a whole group to not only discuss the examples given but included the comments provided by classmates to add to the topics discussed by each group individually.

2. **Quick Write Assignments**: In this scenario, each discussion topic was taken separately over six days' worth of quick writes, or writing assignments that serve as start of class activities. The students were provided the topic of the day and given 15-20 minutes of time to write their response. Following this, the students worked together in small groups to select what they felt was the strongest response out of those produced at their table. These were shared out with the entire class and used as the jumping off point for the whole class discussion.

3. **Home Learning Assignments/Writing Round Table**: Additionally, I found it important for students to dialogue outside of the classroom, so each question was assigned over six days of home learning assignments. At the start of the class, students, as their starter activity, were placed in groups where they shared their writing from the night before. The round table piece came in because each student in the group was be asked to write on their own work one to two things from each of their fellow student's writing that they wanted to now include in theirs. These were different opinions, anecdotes they found convincing, a better definition of a term, etc. Then, I began the whole class discussion of the topic of the day.

The benefit of using all three of these options is that they all included a component that required students to work with their fellow learners to evaluate other's opinions, as well as their own. By the end, they were working in such a way that their perspective on a topic was changed because of different opinions or perspectives on that topic that their fellow students expressed. The students made comments and added to the discussion in the gallery walk. They evaluated and discussed the best answer in the quick write option, and the students actually wrote things they had changed of their own pieces based on reading others. Each of these tasks proved to be a great introduction to collective learning, which, as we've discussed, is at the very core of the student-directed classroom.

The three options made a way for the discussion to occur at the outset of the introduction of the student-directed framework in such a way that spawned deep discussion about the concept of student-directed learning, while ensuring students began practicing working together to build an idea, introducing that idea and learning from others as they go.

Phase One: Getting Started

Once the discussion aspect was complete, an introduction into the way lessons would work had to occur. I predicted that this portion of the student-directed framework would take a few weeks to introduce in order to create an understanding of what a student-directed classroom looked like, as well as helping students learn how to help guide themselves throughout the year. Practice would be key, and, just like with classroom management, consistent policies, planning and activities needed to take place to give the students and myself a sense of comfort before moving totally into a student-directed room. Thus, the first few weeks (three to four weeks I predicted depending on behavior and buy-in) would be a transition period where student voice would be cultivated while I modeled the way lessons are planned and why I made the decisions I did from lesson planning and objective writing all the way through assessment. The idea behind such modeling was to create a sense of a transparency of power in the classroom. The creation of lessons and the reasoning behind the choices made prior to their reaching the students could be demystified through this process. No longer would there be any question about the source of what they were being taught, as I, the teacher, would be giving a behind the scenes look into the anatomy of my lesson planning style, as well as lesson planning templates. Additionally, this process would help the students begin thinking about how they would change such choices if they were in charge. One thing

should be mentioned, though, and that is the fact that just because the instructional framework was being introduced did not mean that I would "lose" these weeks of instruction. The required topics and objectives that must be covered during this timeframe by both campus and district administration were still going to be addressed, still be taught. It is just the way they were being taught that would change. The instructional framework that I was introducing would assist in the delivery of curriculum that was already in place. All the student-directed teaching style would do was hopefully create a new and better way to transfer the knowledge I as the teacher was tasked with transferring to the students, not eliminate any time that could be spent imparting that required knowledge.

With that in mind, to start, I had to prepare a lesson planning template for each student and for each lesson. I decided I needed one template for the start of the week to provide an overview of the week's activities, as well as a daily lesson plan that would be distributed at the start of each class period. The templates would be used by the students once they joined in the lesson planning process, so I made the decision that I needed to utilize them from the start of the semester to generate a sense of familiarity once they became part of student creations. Let's take a look at the templates for lesson plans below. First, in *Figure 4*, I've included an example of the Weekly Lesson Planning Template that would be presented at the start of every class on Monday morning.

Figure 4. Weekly Lesson Planning Template

You can see that the Weekly Lesson Planning Template I've created is not as complicated as the traditional lesson planning form that is used by most school districts. That is because, at the end of the day, students are not traditional educators. Becoming an expert in the paperwork aspect of the educational field was not the intention of our student-directed room, nor do I believe is it necessary to ensure student voice is adequately valued and heard. Thus, making the lesson planning process digestible for the students was necessary to ensure their cooperation and ease of transition into the student-directed room. Still, I wanted to ensure I introduced the language teachers use to the students. For example, getting students used to talking about objectives and areas of focus would assist them in having formal, high-level, academic conversations about

educational concepts, while ensuring they were not ostracized by a lack of vocabulary and jargon with which to discuss the planning process.

Following the Weekly Lesson Planning Template, I used the Daily Lesson Planning Template as a jumping off point for the class period. These daily lesson plans were intended to be more in depth, as it covered an overview of what the class would be completing that day. Additionally, these lesson plans allowed the instructor for that day the opportunity to discuss their reasoning behind why they made choices for that lesson, as well as walk the learners through how a lesson was paced (and the thinking behind such pacing). The purpose of these conversations was to model for the students how decisions are made about teaching, as well as guide them to a working timeline/timeframe for lessons they eventually would be creating. Further, the Daily Lesson Planning Template provided an outline of the pieces needed for a successful lesson, so the student/student groups would not be working from scratch once they began to compile lessons of their own. In a way, this daily lesson plan was meant to act as a checklist that all portions of the lesson have been considered by the person crafting that lesson, as well as give them an opportunity to discuss their reasoning behind the choices they have made. Such discussions would assist both student and instructor with understanding how they intended to teach and provide the students a chance later in the week with a feedback form to comment on how it would have been better crafted to help them learn. An example of the Daily Lesson Plan Template is included below in *Figure 5*.

Daily Lesson Plan Template

Area of Focus

Objective Statement

Resources Needed

Starter

Activities

Exit Activity/Informal Assessment

Home Learning

Figure 5. Daily Lesson Plan Template

You can see that yet again the daily lesson plan is geared toward student use. It doesn't

require knowledge standard numbers, nor does it include all of the pieces required of a

traditional lesson plan, but it is still an adequate outline tool intended to be a way to help

students and teachers plan lessons together as well as independently, while ensuring all

aspects of a lesson are considered, planned for and those choices able to be justified once

the lesson is presented. Still, there is a connection between the Weekly Lesson Planning

Template and the Daily Lesson

Plan Template. The titles of the sections are almost all the same. The purpose was for the creator of the lesson to be able to expound upon their planning in the weekly template in the daily template.

Let's look at each piece and the way they I introduced them to the students in the first few weeks of the transition to student direction. First, there is area of focus. This section is a direct reflection of the Weekly Lesson Planning Template. The purpose of the area of focus is to allow the instructor to define at the outset what the lesson for that day will be focusing on for the class period. For example, for my class, theme, writing conventions, figurative language, inference, etc. It is a short phrase or even just one word that provides an overview of the day. I began by helping the students understand not just what area of focus means, but the purpose of having this to guide them in their lesson planning. Much like the thesis statement for an essay, the area of focus drives the lesson, like the thesis drives the content of your writing piece. And like the thesis statement, everything must link back to the area of focus. The students were instructed that anything that did not, should be cut from the lesson.

Next, there is the objective. These short sentences are meant to encapsulate not just what the instructor wants the learners to take away from that day, but, also, how the leaners will show that they have attained what was meant to be learned. I provided my students with a format that all objectives should be written in, in order to make objective writing easier, as well as ensure all parts of the objective are included. That structure looked like this:

We will learn _____ and show our
understanding by _____.

By providing the same format each week, students became accustomed to both the structure and what was needed in order to make the structure work. Further, by color coding the structure, students understood that red would be the area of focus, while the blue was how that area of focus would be assessed, or how the instructor would determine the students had mastered the lesson for that day. An example of a completed objective I provided using this format is below:

We will learn how to identify a theme and show our understanding by **orally presenting a theme they identified from a short story with their group**.

In this example, the area of focus is clearly theme, and the way the instructor would assess the understanding of that area is by evaluating student presentations on the theme they identified with a short story in class. Both sections of the objective are clear, and, by using the structure provided, the objective is short, to the point and covered all the bases required. While the above was for a literature lesson, the structure works just as well as for a lesson that is more writing centric. For example, the following objective was provided as an example for a lesson on writing paragraphs:

We will learn how to write complex paragraphs and show our understanding by **creating an anchor chart containing a paragraph with their small group**.

The area of focus is clearly discernable as the composition of complex paragraph writing, and the assessment would come in the form of students writing a paragraph on an anchor chart that their group will either present or turn in for grading. Again, by using the structure, the objective is clear and conveys the necessary information. Further, by writing words like "we" and "our" in the objectives, it was my hope that students would begin to use language that included themselves as part of a collective learning group, rather than simply students receiving knowledge provided by the teacher with no

feedback. Further, I believed that by writing these objectives in the first person, the student would take ownership of what was written and would participate in the transference of the targeted knowledge for that day's lesson.

Once the objective section was complete, the person writing the daily lesson plan would turn to the resources section. I explained to students that this section was where they would list mentor texts to be read, materials needed for small grouping activities (anchor charts, worksheets, markers, etc.), and whatever else they deemed necessary for the lesson. The purpose of this section is to ensure everything is gathered and ready for class that day, including what is needed for the next section, the starter activity. The starter activity provides not only an activity to kick off the class, but it can serve as a way to both review what was done the day prior or introduce a new topic. Additionally, it ensures consistent classroom procedures where the class starts the same way each day with an activity that immediately starts students working and sets the tone for hard work throughout the class. I knew that such a rationality behind the starter activity needed to be shared with the students, so they could keep the purpose of the starter activity in mind when planning the lessons throughout the year. In fact, the students from the beginning needed to understand that each aspect of the lesson planning process served a purpose, and, if the lessons they create did not meet these purposes, then those lessons would be ineffective both for themselves and their co-learners. Later in this chapter, we will explore how I evaluated the effectiveness of the lessons planned in my classroom, but, for now, the starter activity section of the lesson plan was meant as the start of that evaluation because the way the lesson starts set the tone for how the lesson progressed throughout that class period.

Next, the activities section that follows is meant to include a list or agenda for what will take place in the classroom. Providing this to students at the start of each class allowed them to know what would be taking place, so they knew what to expect throughout the day. It also provided a sense of accountability for the person running the lesson. Because of this section, students knew not just the order of how things would take place that day, but they knew what to expect. If the instructor, myself or one of their peers, skips sections or does not get to sections, that speaks to the pacing of the lesson, as well as the effectiveness of that lesson. Just as the traditional teacher would use the agenda as a way to stay on track, students needed to understand that the agenda section of the daily lesson plan would help them to do the same thing when they were in charge of the teaching for that day or that piece of the class period. Further, they needed to understand the importance of this information as learners. The more information the co-learners had about what would occur during class that day would ensure that the learners were as engaged and prepared as possible to learn, setting them up for more success as learners in the classroom.

The second to last section of the daily lesson planning template is the exit ticket/informal assessment piece. It was crucial that students understood the importance of both an exit ticket and informal assessment. This began with me discussing both with the students, as well as explaining how what I chose as the daily exit ticket/informal assessment provided me with enough information to determine if the students had grasped the concepts presented that day. Such a discussion began with a conversation about assessments. Most students up to that point only understood assessments as tests or papers they've been assigned and given grades on after the due date passed. Such

thinking needed to be expanded, though, where assessments became a much more complex term covering both formal and informal assessments and the purposes for each. Once students were able to talk about assessments separate from something that earned a grade, they could begin to think about assisting in the planning of how to informally assess whether knowledge standards targeted for that day had been attained by the learners in the room, as well as determine if they themselves were fully understanding lessons presented throughout the year. Once students understood the purpose of assessments and how traditional teachers crafted them, the mystery behind the assessment process is solved, and students can begin to craft ways to self-assess their learning to judge effectiveness of lessons, as well as their ability to understand concepts in the classroom. Further, hopefully, such self-assessment would lead to increased agency or a feeling of control over their progress and abilities throughout the year.

The final section of the daily lesson planning template is the home learning (or homework) section. Home learning is something that is optional in a student-directed classroom, and, from my point of view, it would be up to those planning the lesson that day as to whether it will be included every day. In my room, we decided that home learning would only take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Prior to making this decision, though, I provided some reading on homework as a concept, and we had multiple discussions about the pros and cons of work at home. It was not a decision that was made off the cuff, but, instead, in conjunction with our persuasive writing unit, we researched options and decided as a group when homework would be due, if at all.

Where would this conversation begin for both instructor and student, though? I started with the research of Cooper, Civey Robinson, and Patall (2006). In 2006, the

three authors released a review of research on homework from 1987-2003. What they found is that specifically in grades 7-12, there was a positive correlation between homework completed and academic achievement (Cooper, Civey Robinson & Patall, 2006). The researchers also found that over the sixteen years' worth of research they reviewed, students were not being assigned a tremendous amount to do each night, with most students in those grade levels spending an hour or less on homework each day, with no particular subject providing more homework than others (Cooper, Civey Robinson & Patall, 2006). Therefore, if homework is helpful in the grade levels this student-directed learning is targeting, perhaps it is something included throughout the lessons being planned as a collective group. If it is going to be assigned, though, as with anything else in the classroom, it must have a purpose. Cooper, Civey Robinson and Patall (2006) specifically recommend ten minutes of homework per grade level the student currently falls within. Therefore, a seventh-grade student would be assigned 70 minutes total across all classes, while a sophomore in high school would be given 100 minutes per day. It is important to remember, though, that this amount of time is combined for all classes that student attends. Thus, the seventh grader that has four teachers on a block schedule, under this guideline, would only be assigned 17.5 minutes of work per teacher. The sophomore student, though, that attends a non-block campus and has seven instructors would be expected to complete about 14 minutes of work per teacher. The students really responded to this study, so once we decided upon the days, we also set parameters for the length of assignments. Based on the research above, the home learning, or homework assignments, developed and assigned through this lesson planning template would not be

arduous, but, rather, short assignments meant to supplement what was completed in class that day.

Further, we had to examine what those assignments would look like. Again, we turned to research. The National Education Agency states that all homework fall into one of three categories: practice, preparation and extension. Thus, when planning the home learning section of the lesson plan, students and myself would first need to determine which category the assignment falls within, why and how it will serve the purpose they've assigned to it. For example, if the assignment was to write a thesis statement following a lesson on thesis statements, then the home learning fell in the practice category. But, if the students were asked to evaluate the persuasiveness of a thesis statement they've been given and revise it to make it more persuasive, they would be completing an assignment that fell within the extension category. The main thing is that like all other aspects of the lesson planning process, students and myself alike would be asked to justify for their co-learners why they've chosen what they have for that lesson and how it all connected both to the area of focus and objective for that day's learning. If that connection was there, the home learning supported the lesson and benefited the students from its completion.

Later in this chapter, we will look at these two lesson plans in action with a series of lessons planned for my classroom. For now, though, there is one additional template that I created to be introduced from the start of the student directed classroom- the Lesson Reflection Form. This form provided an opportunity for the learners in my student-directed room to give feedback on the lessons presented. It was necessary to include this feedback because part of the philosophy of the student-directed classroom is that

everyone learns differently. That is at the core of the student-directed room, and I had to give all learners the opportunity to provide feedback on how they would learn better or how they would have run that lesson. In *Figure 6*, the lesson reflection form is included.

Lesson Reflection Form

Lesson You are Assessing

Do you think the objective statement made sense and reflected the area of focus well? Why or why not?

Did you learn what was intended? Why or why not?

Do you think the activities made the best use of time and assisted you in the learning process?

What could have been done differently to help you learn better?

Rate this lesson between a 1-10, (ten is most effective) Explain your rating in one sentence.

Name of student providing reflection.

Figure 6. Lesson Reflection Form

The Lesson Reflection Form I decided would be given weekly, if not more often throughout the week, depending on what we were doing. Below are the two ways I decided to implement these reflection forms.

1. **Weekly**: The Lesson Reflection Form was given to students each Friday to complete either as the starter activity or extended exit activity for that week. Students in this case picked one lesson from the week or used the week in its

entirety. The students were expected to write at least one sentence for each section, with two to three sentences required for the section that asks what could have been done differently.

2. **Daily**: For particularly difficult units or when new concepts were introduced, the Lesson Reflection Form became a standing exit activity for the class. I made the decision about when we switched to daily reflections based on assessment data from the lessons throughout the week. If not much retention was being shown, the students reflected daily until we could adjust the instruction based on feedback to produce assessments that showed more retention. At this point, we switched back to the first option of weekly reflections. It was also always a standing thing that students could request to move to daily reflections, if they also felt the lessons were not going as well as they could.

The purpose of the form regardless of when given is twofold. First, it is meant to serve as a means to create a dialogue between instructor and learner. I was amazed at the information I was given by students once I gave them a chance to assess my teaching methods. I discovered quickly that things I assumed students would genuinely enjoy, such as playing online quiz games like Kahoot, some students found distracting and anxiety inducing. One student even went so far as to tell me on a reflection that when they found out I was using Kahoot, they asked to stay home the next day because they couldn't think quickly enough to participate, so they never had the opportunity to guess before the answers were already given by another classmate. Thus, they felt Kahoot days were a waste of time. It was invaluable to hear feedback such as this, and the reflections began to help me change the way I talked to my students and certainly the way I planned for them.

Beyond the planning process, though, the Lesson Reflection Form also served as a means for the student to begin learning how they personally thought about the learning process, including how they would learn best in the classroom. Such self-discovery began when students were taught how each component of the lesson works, so they could

figure out where the break down occurred, if they didn't learn, and what worked well, in case they found a lesson to be really successful. That is why the Lesson Reflection Form had to accompany the Weekly and Daily Lesson Plan forms. Together, these three documents would assist the students to learn how I taught classes, as well as gauge whether those methods were beneficial to them or not. Moreover, since this instructional framework was meant to assist students in cultivating their own voice, expressing their opinions about issues with the lessons, as well as identifying positive aspects of a teacher's methods, they would begin to understand what they needed, speak out about what needed to change and participate in the process to facilitate that change. I knew that once all three forms were used often and well by the students with me doing the teaching, the move into the second part of student-directed learning could occur where lessons were not just presented to the students. Instead, the students themselves could begin to take on some of the planning responsibilities alongside their traditional classroom instructor, me.

At this point, we come to a close of phase one of the implementation of the student-directed classroom, or the "getting started" phase. I should say that I initially set out for this process to take three to four weeks to implement. That proved to be realistic in two of my blocks, but very unrealistic in one block. That particular block (my 8-9) took almost eight weeks to become comfortable with these processes, but I did not consider that a failure. Instead, I decided that any movement toward student directed learning was a success, and I knew I would work with this class until they were ready to move on to phase two. In order to assist me in deciding on when this move to phase two was realistic, I created a formal checklist to determine if each of my classes was ready to

progress to phase two of this instructional methodology. The formal checklist included

the following five questions:

1. Have we completed all topics listed on the Discussion Topics worksheet in this class, including whole class discussions about each topic on the list?

2. Have we spent at least three weeks using the Weekly Lesson Planning Template, Daily Lesson Planning Template and Lesson Reflection Form in the way and as often as they are meant to be utilized?
3. Are all students able to tell me what those three above forms are and why they are used?

4. Do I feel like my classroom management procedures are well in place and I don't have major behavior issues in my room during this block?

5. Do I feel like I know my students well enough to place them in groups based on both academic prowess and behavior?

The idea became that if I could answer yes to *all* of the five questions listed above, my

classes were ready to progress to phase two. If any answer was no, though, then I knew I

had to continue to practice the routines provided here and use the forms that accompany

them until my students were ready to move forward.

Phases Two and Three: Lesson Planning

Once my checklist was complete, I began to transition into phase two of the

student-directed instructional framework. Since the lesson planning process has already

been discussed at length in terms of the templates used, we will move on to the way

lessons were generated once the power was starting to be shared with students. After the

completion of the check list referred to in the last section, I felt the initial roll out of a

student-directed room was complete. Now, the students themselves could begin assisting

in the creation and delivery of lessons every day. Just like me, the teacher, they would be

responsible for creating lesson plans using the weekly and daily lesson planning

templates, and they would be held accountable for all pieces of these templates being

completed, as well as ensuring the area of focus was both addressed and that their fellow

learners attain the information presented. I determined that this process would take place

over phases two and three of this program. Phase two would include the students

planning lessons in conjunction with me, but I would still be the one actually delivering

the lessons. Phase three, though, would allow students the opportunity to instruct their co-

learners, with supervision.

To start, the classroom had to be split up into a series of groups.   I based these

groups on a combination of both behavior and academic ability. By this point, the roll

out of the student-directed room had been taking place for at least a few weeks, if not

more, so I had ample time to get to know my students well and identify behavior issues,

academic deficits, as well as academic strengths. I weighed each of those three areas

heavily before assigning groups. When I discuss this process with fellow educators, I

always refer to the task of creating groups that will work cooperatively and successfully

like a chess game. I look at my roster for each block and begin moving students around

like pieces on a chess board to strategically curb issues, while encouraging growth. As

the teacher, I had to always ensure I was thinking five, six even ten moves ahead of the

issues that could arise in my classroom. I would run all the scenarios I could think of:

clashes of personalities, the way students would interact with one another's strengths and

weaknesses and how these groupings would be laid out across my room. It was only at

this point, that I would make my initial seating chart. Of course, none of these choices, or

moves if you will, are ever set in stone. Instead, it is possible to change groups once they

are assigned. In fact, I decided early on that I would incorporate scheduled changes at

designated points in the classroom in order to foster continued growth and continued

community building in the classroom. I first tried to shuffle groups every three weeks, but this proved to be too much work to redo groupings that quickly. So, instead, I created new groups at the end of each nine weeks grading period following the benchmark exams for that nine weeks. I would use those and the data I'd collected on student work and interactions to restructure my groups in all of my blocks. While this seemed to work well beginning with the second nine weeks benchmark, I did have a few moments where changes were made prior to the nine weeks closure. A perfect example of this happened immediately following a terrible fight on campus. I wound up with three of the students involved in that fight in one grouping. When they returned after 10 days of suspension, the three students walked into new groups, and the conflict that surely would have occurred if they had still been grouped together was avoided. That is the power of the grouping process, though. It can be a great benefit to teacher and class if utilized as a tool to organize the room and learning process, but, if organized incorrectly, it can be a mechanism for trouble.

To that end, I understood that when assigning groups, I had to keep in mind that each group would have members that served particular functions. Each group member was initially assigned a role upon their assignment to the group. I believed that eventually these roles could rotate as student-direction became more familiar, but I needed to ensure that prior to this taking place that each group had members that could fulfill all required roles from the start. Since each class size was different across my day, I decided it would be easiest to assign the roles in sets of four, so that I could assign four students to each group initially and then include left over students to co-own roles. Those students that co-owned roles were typically lower level or were showing little or no buy-

in to the student-directed process. Further, any student that entered my room late in the

year was automatically a co-owner of a role, so they would have a mentor of sorts to

complete their role with and learn the student-directed process as they went. Finally, co-

ownership was also assigned to those students that were absent often. Their partner for

that role was always a student that had better attendance, so their group was never left in

a bind because of one member's attendance issues.

Once in groups, the following four roles were performed by one or more of the

group members. Both a definition of the role and an outline of their duties is included

below:

Researcher: The Researcher is meant to serve as the group member that will identify
what is being learned, why and how best to ensure that learning is occurring. The
Researcher will be expected to complete the following:

1. Define the area of focus for their group, as well as provide an overview of what
   that area of focus is and how it relates to previous work completed.
2. Write the area of focus section of the daily lesson plan assigned to the group.
3. Compose an objective statement for the daily lesson plan assigned to the group
4. Present this objective and define both the area of focus and informal assessment
   to their group for approval.
5. Participate as needed in any other capacity that the group needs.

Organizer: The Organizer serves as the individual within the group that gathers all
materials necessary for that group's proposed lesson, including the selection of mentor
texts. Additionally, the Organizer is expected to complete the following:
1. Determine what the group will need for the materials section of the daily lesson
   plan and gather those materials.
2.
3. Write the materials needed section of the lesson plan.
4. Select potential mentor texts for the lesson.
5. Present the potential mentor texts to the group for approval.
6. Participate as needed in any other capacity that the group needs.

Instructor: The Instructor will act as the person who delivers the information collected
by their group to the whole class, as well as plans how that delivery will occur.
Additionally, the Instructor is expected to complete the following:

1. Plan the activities section of the lesson plan, as well as present these activities to their group for approval.
2. Complete the activities section, home learning, starter and exit ticket sections of the lesson plan.
3. Present the material as decided upon by the group to the whole class in the format decided upon by their group.
4. Turn in the lesson plans to the traditional classroom teacher and facilitator.
5. Participate as needed in any other capacity that the group needs.

Defender: The Defender will be tasked with justifying the choices made by the group to the whole collective of learners. Additionally, the Defender is expected to complete the following:

1. Complete the Lesson self-evaluation form for the group by close of class each Friday prior to the week of the lesson's delivery.
2. Defend orally to the traditional classroom teacher and facilitator what the group will do and why.
3. Defend orally to the whole class, if the lesson is called into question.
4. Read and respond, if necessary, to evaluation forms provided by the whole class.
5. Participate as needed in any other capacity that the group needs.

You may notice a few things from the descriptions given. First, the outline is meant to look and sound a bit like a job description. In essence, that is what they are. These roles were jobs that the students would occupy in their groups from assignment through the completion of their tenure with the group. In order for the group to be successful, then, the students had to ensure they met all expectations outlined for them in these descriptions, and the students also needed to understand that their success and failure would be driven by their collective work with the other group members. The benefit of this reliance on one another not only involves the comradery and teamwork that was generated by the groups working together. It also presented a real-world life lesson about interpersonal relationships students encounter outside of the classroom. The students and I would discuss how adults must work with others in workplace environments, family interactions and more, and so by working in groups where they performed specific functions, they were practicing and harnessing these skills in the student-directed room,

while learning how to make their opinions and work not only be heard but stand out from the crowd. Secondly, though, the job descriptions were written in a way that make assessing student work a bit easier. Much like how teachers are evaluated based off a list of expectations, this set of guidelines for the position students held served as a rubric to evaluate their work and progress at the end of their role's completion. I will address this in more detail in the assessment piece of this chapter.

For now, though, I want to move on to how these groups functioned. After being placed in initial groupings based on behavior and academic abilities, students were first assigned roles by myself. I was met with some pushback, but the students were informed that they would be given the opportunity to choose roles in the future. For now, they were trained on what roles they would play and how these roles interacted with one another. Then, they began working toward using the lesson planning forms discussed above. At first, each group planned alongside me in order to understand how the lesson planning worked. Next, we began to break down the components of lessons by group. For instance, one group would plan the starter activity with me, while another would plan the group activity that day or my mini-lesson. Finally, another group would plan the exit ticket/reflection activity. Due to this being only the second phase, though, all lesson planning was done in conjunction with myself and based on previous lessons I had already written. The purpose of this was to provide a structure for the lessons, so the students would not be starting from scratch. Over the course of phase two, we rotated portions of the lessons being worked on by each group so all students were able to plan each portion. By doing so, students understood all aspects of the lesson, and I was able to gain invaluable feedback into how both my lessons were understood by students, as well

as what my students wanted when it came to different aspects of what I was teaching them. For instance, I learned that starter activities were not effective in the morning, if they were writing activities. Students almost unanimously expressed their hatred for starting the day off with a writing assignment. They all preferred to read quietly and discuss orally in order to give them time to wake up. As such, I changed my starter activities in first period to reflect these preferences. I found that instead of fighting students to complete their starter work, the students began to self-manage and enter the classroom not just willing to work but ready to do so because they were doing what they requested, rather than what was dictated to them.

On the other hand, my last class hated reading independently at the end of the day as a starter activity, so we had to discuss where to put the reading portion of our class in our ninety-minute timeline. What we found was that the independent reading worked best at the end of the class period as a way to wind down the day. Once we reached this decision together, again, the buy in was incredible from the students and the constant battle to engage them in the activities at hand became less and less until they were almost nonexistent. In fact, in the last months of school, the only recorded incidents I have between students in terms of them not wanting to complete their work on starter or exit activities came from interactions with students that either were returning to my classroom after being absent a long period or students that spent weeks in the in-school suspicion room only to return to my class after ten to twenty days of instructional time lost. By this point, the effects of the student-directed classroom experience either had diminished to the point of contention or that student was not present to be involved in the decision-

making process that produced particular routines and procedures, so they did not share

the same amount of buy in for our processes.

Overall, though, the lessons we began to plan together blossomed, and eventually,

we were able to move on to phase three of lesson planning where students began to

construct original lessons rather than build on ones I had previously created. Again, this

happened at different times in my three classes. I constructed another checklist to help

determine when each group was ready to move on and take more control. The five

questions I asked were:

1. Are students able to use the lesson planning templates without much assistance from me?
2. Are students generating ideas that are in line with the area of focus that are both original and connected to the teaching point at hand?
3. Do the groups work well together across the class where each aspect of the lesson could be planned successfully?
4. Is there a high level of trust not just between myself and the students but between the students as well?
5. Do behavior issues remain at a minimum within the class?

For one of my classes, it would take nine weeks longer than my other two to move on

from phase two and into phase three, but eventually all three blocks would produce

affirmative answers to the five-question check list. Once this occurred, a transition into

phase three could begin for lesson planning. At this point, students would plan lessons

from scratch.

Phases Two and Three: Assessment Planning and Rubric Creation

Alongside the lesson planning process outlined above, phases two and three also

featured another aspect, the creation and administration of assessments. When students

are allowed to be an equal partner in the classroom that means they are responsible for all

aspects including contribution to the assessment process. In my classroom, through both

phases two and three, students assisted in in the planning of assessments, as well as the rubrics evaluating those assessments. From the outset, I want to address one thing. Unfortunately, I was not able to extend student-directed learning to 100% of my classroom, specifically when it came to assessments. There were some assessments that I could not avoid. For example, district level benchmarks, testing and state standardized testing were all requirements that my students had to take, regardless of their or my opinion of those assessments' value. I gave students grades using traditional rubrics on district benchmarks, and I was required to count those benchmarks as a major grade for the student's nine weeks grades in my classroom. Further, I was also required to prepare my students to take the STAAR test. At the end of this chapter, I will specifically discuss the STAAR and how my students faired after being instructed from a student-directed framework. For now, though, the assessments discussed in this section are the class assessments that served as formal assessments of the course beyond those required by the District, school and state. Let's begin, though. with a discussion about how assessments were created. As everything else, the assessments were written by consensus, like the lessons themselves. First, I want to define assessments as they were used in my classroom. We did not take traditional tests or quizzes. Instead, all the assessments crafted were related to writing assignments or group assignments. We met the minimums required by the District for these assessments. They included one major grade per nine weeks (which was the aforementioned district benchmark test or writing diagnostic), six homework grades and nine daily grades. Some nine weeks, we were able to generate more daily grades, but this mostly occurred in the final two nine weeks in conjunction

with a large writing project all three of my classes took part in that culminated in April. First, though, let's start with the first and second nine weeks.

As previously mentioned, I did not begin student-directed learning until the first nine weeks was almost at its close. Therefore, the assessments given during the first nine weeks were all teacher driven and more traditional in nature. I had quick write assignments that occupied daily grades, as well as class participation grades, a few quizzes and a persuasive letter writing assignment required by the district as part of the writing folder each student was tasked with keeping. Starting in the second nine weeks, my classes had begun the getting started phase of student-directed learning, as I had developed it. Thus, by the mid-point of the second nine weeks, I began to discuss assessments with my classes. We began by having a conversation about what assessments were and what they meant to a class. By and large, my classes expressed a distaste for assessments. We did a word association board, where we brainstormed words we could relate to assessment. The words that were brainstormed included: nervous, mean, unfair, hard, grounded, and angry. I knew that most of the words would be negative, but I was surprised by just how negative the words would prove to be. After much discussion, my classes and I came to the agreement that we would not be doing any traditional tests or quizzes, as I felt from a research based perspective that they were not useful, while my classes felt immense anxiety or apathy about these types of testing tools. Instead, we came up with a series of assessments that were based on writing responses, exit tickets and group projects. Participation also remained an assessment piece, but it was guided by a rubric which shows both the score and components to meet that score, as well as the corresponding grade students could earn:

Table 10

Sample rubric I created

0- Student Absent and/or refused to participate	1- Student present but little participation offered	2- Student participated, but to minimal standards	3- Student offered good insight and assistance to group (if applicable)	4- Student offered unique insight/performed tasks and roles appropriately
F	D	C	B	A

Now, the zero listed that says absent was only if that absence was unexcused. Obviously,

students who were sick, in SAC or had another valid reason for missing class that day

were not penalized with a zero or an F. Still, this rubric allowed for quick grading, as well

as transparency with the students about why they were achieving those grades. Further,

they were wonderful discussion tools both with the student or with parents, if the need

arose to meet with parents of students who were struggling.

The rubric above was a simple one decided upon by my class and myself, but

when creating assessments in my room separate from participation, we always created a

rubric to capture what the assignment entailed and what was expected in order to

successfully complete each assignment. With these rubrics, of course, comes talk of

grading of those rubrics. That is another concept that can be complicated within a

student-directed classroom. Traditionally, my students were accustomed to grading being

done by the traditional classroom teacher. If my class was to be student-directed, though,

I had to ensure the students were directing the entire process, including the grading of

those assessments they both created and took. From the outset, I believed that the most

effective method for assessing progress in a student-directed classroom would be to have

the students self-assess. After all, when attempting to build agency, assisting students in

creating a voice to determine what they deserve for work completed would be an important part of the process. Full student independent grading would not take place until phase four, but we were able to move into a co-grading relationship where students dialogued with me about their own assessments and grades they deserved, as well as students beginning to assess one another formally. I will explain the co-grading process in the analysis phase of this chapter.

Phase Four: The Collective Learning Environment

At this point in my classroom, I had made the full transition to student-directed learning for phases one, two and three. Students understood the concept of student direction. They were able to work cooperatively in groups, understand rubrics, understand how assessments and lessons were written and planned those lessons and assessments alongside me. Further, they were able to self-assess and assess the works of others. So, that brought me to the final phase of student-directed learning as I saw it, what I call the collective learning environment. Just like with the check lists prior to phases two and three, there was a set of questions I had to ask myself about each class to determine if they were ready to move on to phase four. Those questions were:

1. Can students plan lessons independently that include an area of focus and activities related to that area of focus with little to no assistance from the teacher beyond brainstorming ideas?
2. Are students comfortable with the nature of assessments and the writing of assessments that truly assess the area of focus covered by a particular lesson?
3. Are students able to grade one another and themselves fairly and objectively using rubrics created collectively by the group?
4. Are students able to deliver lessons in front of their peers without teacher support?
5. Are students more a collective group of learners, rather than a traditional class of individual students?

If the answer to all five questions was yes, then that class was ready to move on to phase four. I imagined this phase to be where student direction fully takes over. I would totally take a back seat and become the facilitator at all times, rather than a traditional educator. The students would plan all lessons, not just a few, and they would deliver their own lessons without my support. The same would be true of rubric building and assessments. We would create those together, and the students would drive the conversation each and every time. It was the phase that I knew would be the most difficult to get to, but I believed would reap the most rewards.

Unfortunately, I was not able to reach this stage with any of my three blocks. While my classes earned yes answers to some of the five questions on my checklist (Block 1-2 earned three, Block 6-7 earned four and Block 8-9 earned two), none of them achieved five affirmatives. I believe the reason for that is quite simply that I ran out of time with my students. While my classes had almost an entire academic year to transition to student-directed learning on paper, the actual class time we had to devote to the creation of a collective learning environment was limited by three specific factors. First, district and state mandates took away class time from what my students and I wanted to plan. We were required by the district to take part in two multiple choice benchmark exams over two days a piece, with one additional day of review/retest for each. Then, we were also required to devote three days to a writing benchmark/diagnostic, as well as a retest day. In total, these were 10 instructional days that I was required to devote to tests that did not allow for any student input or deviation from lesson plans given by district personnel. The entire ninety block periods were devoted to the assessments. Further, we lost ten instructional days to the STAAR test's first and second administrations, as well

as retest days. I was not in my classroom or with my students for these ten days, as we

were assigned testing rooms that were required to be run by a script from the state of

Texas. Any deviation, would have resulted in monetary penalties for my campus, as well

as consequences for me including potentially losing my teaching certificate. Then, there

were running record requirements. As an English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR)

teacher, I had to complete running records at the beginning of the year, middle of the year

and end of the year for all of my students. Typically, these took three full days for me to

complete. While I found time to do a mini-lesson and assign independent work, I lost the

ability to reinforce or guide my students through student-directed learning on these days.

Finally, we were also required to devote three instructional days to TELPAS testing, as

well as two days to universal screening in the fall and again in the spring for math and

reading, both of which were administered in my classroom. The chart below shows a

breakdown of the total loss of instructional time due to these district and state mandates:

Table 11

First accounting of days lost

Reason for Lost Instructional Time	Total Days of Instruction Lost Over the Year
Multiple Choice District Benchmark Exams	6
Written District Benchmark Exams	4
STAAR Test first and second administrations	10
TELPAS testing	3
Universal Screening	2
Running Records	9
Total Days Lost	**34**

As you can see, that is a loss of 34 total days throughout the year that were lost to our

student-directed building due to those requirements discussed that were non-negotiable

for both myself and my students. Secondly, I lost a large amount of class time due to my being placed in charge of accelerated instruction. This is a position that is assigned by school administration, and sometimes district personnel. The individual placed in charge of the accelerated instruction program is tasked with taking those students who are not successful on the first 8th grade Reading STAAR test into their classroom. I was required to serve in this role, and I was taken out of my classroom for ten instructional days prior to the second administration of STAAR. My students from my normal classes were split up between other ELAR teachers on my campus, forcing their numbers sometimes as high as 62 students per room because they encompassed both their regular class, as well as mine. My room, though, was reserved for the approximately 5 to 12 students on my accelerated instruction schedule over six class periods of 45-minute lengths. The students were made up of my own students that failed the STAAR first administration, as well as the other three eighth grade ELAR teachers' students that were unsuccessful. Again, this was something my students nor I were asked to consent to, but despite that lack of consent, it was a requirement that I fulfill that position and my normal students work on a research paper in a new teacher's room for two full weeks of school. This brings the total days of student-directed instruction lost to **44 days** for the school year.

Finally, I lost instructional time because of an administrative issue on campus. A fellow ELAR teacher who I mentioned in chapter one stopped coming to school every day. This educator would usually at least come through lunch, but after lunch they would have either walked out or taken the rest of the day off. Thus, I was asked by administration on many occasions to take their classes for my afternoon blocks (from 1:10 p.m. at the start of sixth period through 4:10 p.m. when 9th period ended). The

absent teacher's classes were as large as mine, so I was not able to teach in my own classroom. On the days I had to take this teacher's classes, I had to teach in the cafeteria in order to accommodate the entire group. Further, I had to instruct both classes at once, which posed a problem because one group was taught under a traditional instructional model and was a 7th grade ELAR class, while my class was taught under a student-directed model and was an 8th grade ELAR class. If my classroom was at phase four, perhaps student-directed learning could have continued despite these circumstances, but we were not at this level yet when the problem of taking these additional students began to occur in February 2017. In total, I lost five instructional days to this issue. When that is combined with the eight days I was absent throughout the academic year due to my toddler son having pneumonia twice and RSV once, the numbers quickly add up. The chart below shows an updated accounting for lost instructional time I could devote to student-directed learning, as well as the total days lost considering all of the above instances.

Table 12

Final accounting of days lost

Reason for Lost Instructional Time	Total Days of Lost
Multiple Choice District Benchmark Exams	6
Written District Benchmark Exams	4
STAAR Test first and second administrations	10
TELPAS testing	3
Universal Screening	2
Running Records and Accelerated Instruction	19
Combination of Classes due to teacher absence	5
Days I was absent due to familial illnesses	8
Total Days Lost	**57**

As the chart shows, in total, I lost 57 days' worth of instruction due to the combination of issues explained above. That is more than the 45 days it takes to complete one nine weeks grading period. In the end, out of the 180 days of instruction required by the state of Texas, I was only able to devote 68% of my time to teaching. What is interesting, though, is that this was the case for most teachers on my campus that were teaching from a traditional instructional model. That is a huge deficit to overcome, and it certainly made teaching tremendously challenging regardless of the pedagogy being employed for that school year. Further, some of the lost time could have been ameliorated with collaboration and conversation demonstrated by student-direction. For example, the district benchmark days lost could have been limited to two days each if the students that were absent had been sent to one collective place to take their benchmark on campus once returning to school. Instead, the two or three students from each class that missed the first administration were required to complete their test in their teacher of record's room. That meant that my classes of 30+ were required to sit silently for 90 minutes with only a book to read due to testing security while two or three classmates took the benchmark they had taken the day before. Even the accelerated instructional model could have been altered where I could have spent 45 minutes with my classes and instructed those students that were unsuccessful with STAAR for the last 45 minutes, rather than being gone for the full 90-minute class period. At least my students would have had access to my room for part of the day, which would have been much better than simply sitting on the floor of a new teacher's room doing an assignment I did not assign, nor that they had any input on in our classroom.

Still, despite these issues, my classes did work diligently toward student-direction, and we made the most of the time we did have together. I hypothesize, though, that with more time, we would have made even more progress and potentially could have reached phase four: a full collective learning environment. If we had reached this level, my classroom would have been 100% student run. It would have been a well-oiled machine where I simply acted as a facilitator of the process and source of knowledge as needed. The students, though, would have been content specialists, teachers and co-learners were learning was collective, power was shared and learning enriched by those changes. It is my hope that with another group of students or formal research group, I can see students work through the first three phases to reach phase four and observe what that would look like in practice and how it informs the concepts of teacher and student, as well as learner and a school, as a whole.

Evaluating the Success of the Student-Directed Teaching in My Room

Despite not reaching the full potential of a student-directed classroom, my students and I made immense progress toward student-directed learning by the end of the 2016-2017 school year. Thus, to end this chapter, I want to explore my third research question: What changes occurred in my classroom in terms of *Agency*, *Engagement* and *Achievement* following the implementation of student-directed learning? While reflecting on my time in the classroom, I created a conceptual framework with which to gauge the success of my class using these three themes: *Agency*, *Engagement* and *Achievement*. The below chart was first introduced in chapter three, but I have included it again here to show the definition of each of these themes as they pertain to my classroom.

Table 13

Theme descriptions

Theme	Description
Agency	The ability of the student to act independently and exercise their own voice regarding their own learning. My definition of agency is rooted in the idea that individuals with agency are self-reflective, self-organizing and self-regulating despite the social systems that surround them (Bandura, 1986).
Engagement	The level of involvement, curiosity and excitement about the daily workings of the classroom, as well as the lessons being presented (Newmann, Wehlage & Lamborn, 1992).
Achievement	The student's retention of concepts presented in the classroom, ability to synthesize and use the information learned, as well as their reading level increasing over the course of the school year.

From the outset, one of my biggest goals with this project was to increase the amount of agency experienced by my students within my classroom, as well as help those students empower themselves to use such agency. As I went through the journal I had collected throughout the school year, certain examples presented themselves to show that my students had gained *Agency* over the course of the year. The first comes from the end of phase two of student-directed learning where students were assisting in planning lessons. Over the course of a few weeks, what began to occur was that the lessons being created were not revisions of ones I had written, as they were in the beginning, but original ideas produced through conversations between each other and with me. Over time, my ideas began to be dismissed, and the students' ideas took precedence more often than not, showing agency over their learning in a way they had not done so before. It was a fantastic transition, and, along the way, I began to make a few observations. First, I learned, that as we progressed, I often planned with lower expectations than the students began to have of themselves. More and more I was told, "That's too easy," or, "That

doesn't challenge us." The students began to like pushing one another to grow both their abilities, as well as the abilities of their fellow classmates. That was my second observation. The more the students became involved, the more ownership they began taking not just over their own work, but the work of their class. They started encouraging their fellow classmates because they wanted their lessons to work, and the students knew the success and failure of the lessons would be determined by the level of retention gained in that area of focus after the lesson was complete.

Further, I saw a positive shift in behavior across all of my classes. Students began to get along better, work together more seamlessly and begin to act in a communal way, rather than as individual learners in a classroom. A perfect example of this involves a student in my first period class that I will call *Brian*. *Brian* was a student that was often bullied in his classes due to some eccentricities he possessed as a result of an intellectual disability. Further, it was difficult to get students to be willing to work with Brian because they identified him as strange and outside the bounds of what eighth graders consider to be normal and socially acceptable. Still, *Brian* was put into a group along with everyone else in the class. At first, I spent a lot of extra time with them to ensure the other members of the group were not being cruel to him, but, over about six weeks, the attitudes of his other group members changed. *Brian* would walk into class with two gentlemen that also were in his group because they wanted to make sure he reached class safely. They would assist him in finishing assignments, bring him extra supplies in case he forgot his own and explain concepts to him throughout the class period to ensure he was keeping up with the pace of the class. These students completely changed their interactions with *Brian* prior to working alongside him, and their support of *Brian*

eventually extended beyond my classroom into other classes and the hallways. *Brian's* group members had taken ownership not just of their work, but the collective wellbeing of their group and fellow learners. It was fantastic to see and an exciting extension of the student-directed experience. It was also an extension that I believe wouldn't have developed without the space carved out for positive interactions within a student-directed classroom. The ownership over ideas crafted through lesson planning for the class was transposed to ownership over everything that occurred in that classroom, and because of the buy-in and ownership shown, the lessons got better and the classes themselves improved alongside them while the individual learners grew tremendously in a multitude of ways.

A further example of this came when we were completing research papers. Typically one of the most difficult parts of my curriculum, the research papers were meant to be completed over the course of six weeks independently. My students did not wish to do this, though. They wanted to complete the projects in groups because they felt they needed the support. I wrote in an entry in my journal on April 26, 2017,

> Students argued that they couldn't do the work alone because if they did they would fail. This admission and explanation shows they understand their deficits, one of which being writing. They also said they want conferences with me weekly to have extra scaffolding and for me to lecture/give examples. Big improvement from last year when I had to fight them on these conferences.

What I found so interesting about this is that the students were recognizing that they did not know how to do a research paper well, despite having done one the year prior. Typically, I would lose many days to the research paper process because the students

would work on computers aimlessly. Instead, when they partnered up, they began to split the work and complete tasks on time and with more attention to detail. Further, the students expressed the need for my assistance. We went back for a few days to traditional lectures about thesis statements and evaluation of sources because they thought they needed it. It was not a fight. It was not a loss of agency to have me take control of the class again. Instead, it was an example of them using their agency to self-advocate for themselves as learners by identifying an area of need and using me to fill that need. This is something that would not have taken place prior to beginning this assessment, in part, because the students didn't know what they needed.

The final example I will use regarding *Agency* is the assessment process. As mentioned earlier, students in the first phase of assessments would co-grade their assignments alongside myself and their peers. The way this co-grading took place in my classroom was through meetings with groups, as well as meetings with me. Basically, an assessment would be worked in the following way. First, the assignment would be given with an agreed upon due date. Then, the students would complete the assignment. Once finished, the product would be shared with their group and every group member would provide feedback on the assignment and whether it met the requirements of the original directions. This feedback would be given on sticky notes that would be stuck on the assignment by each group member. Therefore, the student would have multiple perspectives on their work by the end of the roundtable discussion/editing of their assignment. Following this, students would be given one day to incorporate the changes suggested by their classmates at their own discretion. The next class, the student would turn in their assignment along with a completed rubric reflecting what they felt their

grade should be on the task given. I, as the teacher, would fill out my own rubric, and the student and I would meet to talk about how our rubrics compared. Then, as the final step in this process, the student would be given a chance to incorporate my suggested changes, again at their discretion, before a final grade was decided upon by the student and myself in a final meeting.

What came out of these meetings was not just great conversation about work being completed, but the students helped me to understand how they approached assignments, as well as where deficits may lie in the lessons prior to assessments or within retention of concepts for specific students. It also seemed to break down the walls that surround grading where students began to not be afraid to fight for higher grades, if they felt they were deserved. This self-advocacy began with simple arguments like "I worked hard" or "I wrote three paragraphs," and, overtime, the arguments grew into more well-rounded statements about how their writing had improved or how their answers and writing connected to the topic at hand. Further, my grading process became easier because I was sharing the responsibility for grading with the students themselves, and the students were exercising agency by advocating both for their grade, while understanding their own performance within my classroom.

The second theme looked at the level of *Engagement* within my classroom. Engagement entails not only level of involvement with the inner workings of the class, but an increase in both curiosity and excitement for learning. I was able to view this in many different ways in my classroom. The first example I will use from my self-reflections collected in my classroom journal comes from the end of phase two of student-directed learning where students were working alongside me to plan lessons. By

the end of this phase, the lessons coming out of my classroom were really different than the ones I originally would have planned to present to my classes. As a way to illustrate the differences, I've included two lessons below that introduced the idea of irony. One was written by me the year prior to my student-directed learning experiment. The second was written in conjunction with my students. For comparison sake, I have retyped the original lesson I authored by myself into the framework used in my classroom in the 2016-2017 school year. *Figure 7* is my original lesson. *Figure 8* is the lesson written alongside my students.

Daily Lesson Plan Template

Area of Focus

Irony and Defining Situational Irony

Objective Statement

We will learn **how to identify and define irony** and show our understanding by **identifying ironic situations in our own lives and pop culture.**

Resources Needed

Irony PowerPoint   Alanis Morisette "Ironic Video"
Anchor chart paper
Markers

Starter

Quick Write: Write about a time you saw or experienced something ironic.

Activities

1. Starter Activity (5 minutes, individual practice)
2. Share out of starter quick writes (5 minute, whole group)
3. Mini-Lesson review of irony (8 minutes, whole group)
4. View Alanis Morisette video, "Ironic" (5 minutes)
5. In groups, analyze what is ironic and what is coincidence in the video. Use the anchor chart papers to track your ideas (20 minutes, small groups)
6. Gallery walk to view class ideas (10 minutes, small groups)
7. Exit Activity (5 minutes)

Exit Activity/Informal Assessment

Write a definition of irony on a post it note and park it in our lot!

Home Learning

Be aware of irony all around you! Take note, if someone says, "That's so ironic!" Was it really?

Figure 7. My original lesson

Daily Lesson Plan Template

Area of Focus

Irony and Defining Situational Irony

Objective Statement

We will learn how to identify and define irony and show our understanding by identifying ironic situations in our own lives and the world around us.

Resources Needed

Irony PowerPoint   Ironic photographs
Anchor chart paper
Markers

Starter

Quick Write: In response to the picture displayed, write a few sentences about what is funny about the photograph shown.

Activities

1. Starter Activity (5 minutes, individual practice)
2. Share out of starter quick writes (5 minute, whole group)
3. Mini-Lesson review of irony (10 minutes, whole group)
4. Return to first photograph and analyze what is ironic about it (5 minutes, whole group)
5. In groups, analyze what is ironic about the photograph assigned to your group (15 minutes, small groups)
6. Group presentations about ironic findings (20 minutes, whole class)
7. Exit Activity (5 minutes)

Exit Activity/Informal Assessment

Write a definition of irony on a post it note and park it in our lot!

Home Learning

Be aware of irony all around you! Take note, if someone says, "That's so ironic!" Was it really?

Figure 8. Revised lesson plan written with students

Let's analyze the differences. First, there is a change in objective. When I discussed the original objective, the students did not like the aspect that focused on pop culture. They were put off by the term, and they said it was not going to be easy to link irony to examples around them before they remembered exactly what irony was supposed to be. In fact, out of those in my groups that assisted in writing the objective, very few students felt comfortable with irony as a concept, despite, irony having been a huge focus of their ELAR classes the year prior. So, we changed the wording to talk about irony around us, rather than irony specifically in pop culture or music, which was my original intent.

Then, we began to look at the starter activity. The lesson I created on my own features a five-minute starter activity that asked students to write about a time they saw something or experienced something ironic. Students did not like this idea from the get go. To start, some found it intimidating since they again couldn't remember what irony meant. Others, could define irony, but they didn't quite know how to extend this definition to recall what an ironic situation they experienced felt like. The general idea was that it wasn't a great way to start because if they did begin this way, the students would start by feeling like they were at a deficit, and many expressed that just beginning with such a frame of mind would make them shut down the rest of the class. So, we started brainstorming new ways to start off a lesson on irony. The students suggested my displaying an ironic video for them to comment on at the start of the class. Since the starter was supposed to be completed without my oversight because of my required door duty each period, that wouldn't work. We eventually compromised on an ironic picture that could already be displayed as students entered. The students in my starter activity group worked with their organizer to pull a photograph that showed a road sign in a cemetery that said, "Dead End." This example was definitely ironic, so we moved forward to what they would be doing with the picture. I suggested that students say what was ironic about the photograph, but, again, they didn't like the idea of being forced to remember irony's meaning. So, one of my students suggested that we simply write on the slide, "What's funny about this picture?" I questioned the use of the word "funny," and that student said that kids could tell you what made something funny but not understand why it was funny. It was up to me, the teacher, to connect the why, the irony of it all throughout the rest of the lesson. I agreed with their assertion, so, on the day this particular class was held, the

slide was put up with the question decided upon, and I was shocked at how many students not only were able to tell why it was funny, but so many were able to connect and use their knowledge of irony to identify the picture as ironic once I reminded them of irony's meaning. In the end, because of that, I was able to use the starter activity as an effective informal assessment of student's pre-knowledge about irony thanks to the way the students asked the question. Further, by having the participation of everyone because of the lack of intimidation by using a formal and unfamiliar term in my questioning, the students participated more readily and had a good time discussing and laughing about both the picture, as well as the stories and anecdotes we were able to share about irony in our mini-lesson review.

The rest of the lesson reflected what occurred with the starter activity. Students began to breakdown what I felt was great from my teacher perspective and explain to me how it would feel from their student perspective. What is interesting about the realizations they helped me come to, though, is that I truly thought the first lesson was one of my most successful. In fact, it was one of my model lessons I used to obtain the current job I had teaching 8th grade ELAR. The lesson, as I constructed it, met the standards of student-centered instruction. I planned with the students in mind ensuring they would move throughout the classroom, be able to be active, work in groups, and I created opportunities for engagement and authentic learning, or so I thought. What I found out after revising the lesson alongside my students was that much of what I had decided to incorporate and thought to be clever, the students found pretty boring and not useful. For example, I had used the Alanis Morrissette video, "Ironic" over four years of teaching irony in ELAR classes. My goal with this video was to show students that the

thing that was ironic about the song was that in fact it was not very ironic at all. Most of the examples referenced throughout the lyrics are examples of coincidence, not irony, so I always believed it to be a clever tool to involve students in a discussion using music as a means to make connection between ideas. Overwhelmingly, though, my students hated the song. They hated the video even more. If you are not familiar, it features four different Alanis Morrissettes singing the song "Ironic" all demonstrating a different aspect of her personality. It's a little strange, and the early 1990's feel the video has and the quality that is reflected due to its age really turned students off from the get go. They were so turned off in fact that many students said they stopped listening and couldn't analyze the lyrics properly because they just hated the song so much. I was definitely surprised, and I asked them if it was the song or that they didn't want to learn alongside music. Many said they liked music, but others deemed it distracting, especially if it was a song like the one I had chosen. I will be honest that I was very skeptical of their critique, but I was committed to the revision process, so we went back to the drawing board, and I scrapped my ironic lesson for theirs.

The students wanted to return to the ironic photographs. They thought they were fun, and they believed their fellow classmates would like to look at more of them. When I asked if they would be useful, many expressed the belief that students would be engaged when dealing with these photographs because they are funny, so they wouldn't be bored, like they predicted they would be during the song I had planned to show. I suggested we have a set of eight pictures for the groups in our classes. I thought they would be great to use with the gallery walk I had planned. Again, though, the students disagreed. While gallery walks were great ways to get them moving, the students said that often gallery

walks aren't as useful because some of their classmates did not take them seriously. They thought it would be more meaningful to give students the opportunity to share out their ideas and present the photos to the class. The students believed this way everyone could enjoy the pictures and have whole class discussions about the ironic aspects. Further, they wanted my input on all the pictures, and some expressed that they would feel safer knowing I could assist them in making connections, if they were unable to do so on their own. That would not be the case with the gallery walk. Thus, we changed the timeframe allotted for activities, and the lesson was conducted as the students suggested. It turned out to be fantastic for both them and me. I was able to see my students work together to begin to dissect the ideas surrounding irony and what makes something ironic and because we chose interesting photographs for groups to use, almost all students were engaged and great discussion was had.

Another marker for *Engagement* I think is behavior. In the introduction, I discussed the issues with behavior I experienced in my classes at the start of the school year. These issues were due to a myriad of reasons including extremely large class sizes, a large number of students with behavioral diagnoses and typically students who were far below level academically which led to extreme frustration with both reading and writing. As stated earlier, because of these challenges, I began to research new ways to deliver information and run my classroom. That is how I came across student-directed learning as a concept, and it certainly was my hope that this new type of delivery method of instruction would assist in helping my students and myself build a better relationship and work together more smoothly. While I think teachers often use discipline referrals in the most negative way possible, it was always my intention to only write a student up if

absolutely necessary. Further, when students were acting out in my classroom, it was usually because they were bored. I have multiple journal entries chronicling this for certain students. For example, one student, who we will call *Deja*, would have very bad days if she was not involved in what was going on in my classroom. I have a journal entry from October 25, 2017 speaking to this. I wrote:

> *Deja* had to be sent out today because she hated the lesson we were doing. I asked her before she left to go to another classroom why she was causing such a stir that day. She told me it was because she didn't like what we were reading. I need to find a new book that she may enjoy. Remember to look at her reading inventory sheet to see which genres she likes. There is a sale at Half-Price Books this weekend.

That entry is but one of many for *Deja*. You see, *Deja* was a highly intelligent student who was in my first and second block, where the reading levels were the lowest across the board. The fact that she read on level meant she was often bored with our readings selected for that week. Thus, if she was not engaged, she would not work and she would cause a disruption that would escalate quickly. When we began student-directed learning, *Deja* began to be more successful in my classroom, particularly when the students began to help plan lessons. She became a group leader, and she loved getting to choose what she did. The change in *Deja* was fantastic, and I began to have entries like the one below from December 5, 2017:

> *Deja* had a great day today. She loved the activity we decided upon where students were creating plays from books. While *A Christmas Carol* was pretty

high level for her group, as the group's self-appointed director, *Deja* loved being

in charge and interpreted the reading for her group in a respectful way. Their play

was so cute. I loved the British accents. Remember to highlight her tomorrow and

call home.

Basically, the more engaged *Deja* was, the better her behavior, and the more respectful

she was of both me and her fellow classmates. Because of such an example, I feel like my

overall discipline records can be a testament to such engagement, as *Deja* was not my

only student who grew in terms of behavior, as their engagement level increased. Thus, it

was not surprise that as my engagement across all three classes increased, my behavior

issues went down. The chart below shows the number of referrals sent for each of my

three blocks for every month of the 2016-2017 school year.
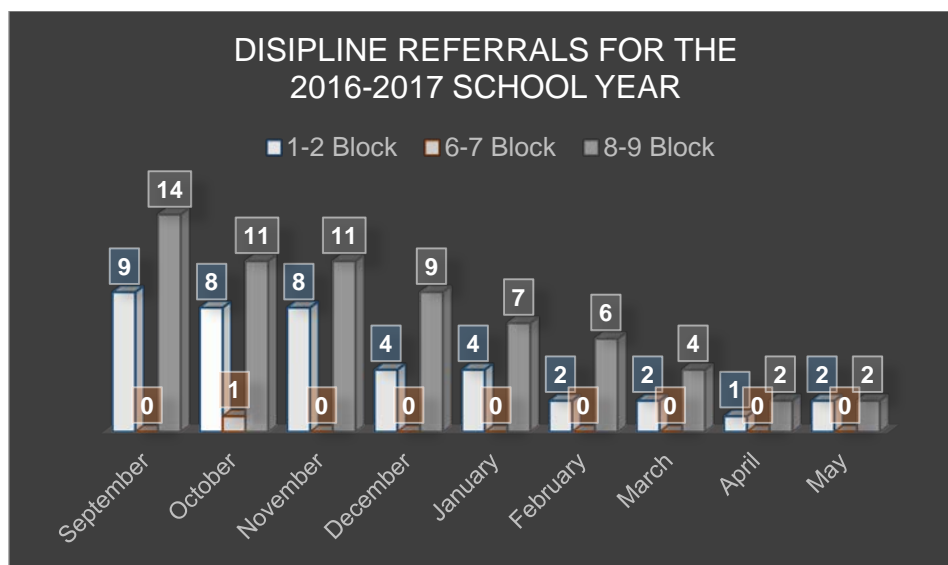

Figure 9. Discipline referrals for the 2016-2017 school year

As you can see from the data, my discipline referrals consistently decreased and

remained low throughout the school year. I saw decreases in my 1-2 and 8-9 block almost

every month after beginning student-directed learning in late September. By the end of the year, the incidents I was writing referrals for were not even incidents related to goings on in my own classroom. For instance, the referrals shown for April and May for both my 1-2 and 8-9 block were the result of either poor behavior in the library or in the cafeteria when classes were being taught in those locations. I had received word from the librarian or from a substitute that a student had done something wrong, violated some procedure. As such, I was required to write them up because those individuals did not. For my actual classroom, though, it began to run much smoother, and I did not have what traditional teachers would identify as behavior problems. I believe that this success in terms of behavior improvements was due directly to the changes in instruction occurring in my classroom. It was not that I had crafted a stronger classroom management system, as suggested by campus and district administration. Instead, I had turned over control of the majority of the inner workings of my room to my students, and, once the students were engaged by this control, the behavior conflicts just seemed to work themselves out. The stronger the community that was created, and the more excited the students were with what we were doing, the less oversight of that community I had to provide.

The third theme I explored was student *Achievement* in my classroom. As mentioned previously, two out of three of my classes featured a host of lower level students. The average reading level in my first block was a fourth grade reading level when I began, and the average reading level in my last block was a fifth grade reading level. My 6-7 block was my gifted and talented class, but this designation did not necessarily equate to high levels of reading. While I had a few students who read at or above the eighth grade reading level, I had four students in that classroom who read

below the sixth grade. Part of this is the misnomer that the term gifted bestowed upon these classes. While the class was listed as gifted and talented, only seven of the students in the classroom held this formal diagnosis. Instead, the other students were classified as Accelerated Placement (AP). The AP designation just meant they performed well in their previous ELAR class and potentially on the last year's STAAR test. It did not mean, however, that these students could handle gifted and talented on level or above grade level work, nor did it mean these students read at or above their reading level. As such, the levels of achievement in my classroom across all blocks were fairly low when I began working with my classes.

That low level was something I set out to change. I have a few examples of how it did throughout the school year. First, I explained earlier about the changes to my lesson regarding irony. While the planning process was eye-opening, what was most exciting for me was the retention that came from this lesson. Typically, when I used my lesson planned for the start of irony, I wound up using at least three to four additional days to drive home the idea of irony and link ideas for students about what exactly irony meant and how to identify it. Even then, many students still struggled throughout the year whenever we returned to irony. This time, though, I only had to dedicate one additional class day for re-teaching, and, overall, the students maintained the knowledge gained during this lesson and the one that followed it. The retention across all three of my classes was so much higher than when I used my own lessons, and this would not be the last time that was the case. I had the same experience described above with multiple other lessons from my teacher vault of lesson plans that I considered my steadfast and go to ways to teach core ideas. At first, I worried that the way the new lessons were being

constructed that the students would not be working enough or in the ways they were "supposed to" as I had been taught as an educator. What occurred, though, was that the students proved through their ideas and participation in the lessons we planned that they were not just willing to work, but they created even more student driven types of activities, so they wound up working more than I had intended them to do so. I figured out fairly quickly that the "supposed to" I had been taught held no bearing on what actually was needed in my classroom.

Further, I saw an increase in student reading levels over the course of the year. I assessed reading levels in a traditional way for three reasons. First, I was required to do so by the District, so I had no choice in the matter and explained this in depth to my students. Second, I had already started the year using running records as a marker of student achievement. Thus, in order to provide a fair comparison, I had to use running records again at the end of the year. Finally, the students liked the running records process. I had a long conversation with my classes regarding running records, and I found that students liked them for two reasons. First, they were used to the running records process. Within the district I taught, my students were assessed using running records beginning in elementary school. It is a process they were both familiar with and found to be unintimidating. Secondly, the students understood the progress gained or lost through running records. They looked forward to hearing if they moved up a grade level, and they took immense pride in such an increase. As a result of all of the above, I used running records to assess reading levels and achievement in comprehension in my classroom. What was wonderful was that by the end of the year all but six students increased their reading level, with some growing two grade levels.

Further, I found it interesting to see my students begin to understand achievement in a new way. Typically, students would be worried about their progress report and report card grades, as well as how they were performing on district benchmark exams. Those benchmarks would give a fairly good idea to both the student and administration as to whether they would be successful on the STAAR exam. The deeper we got into the school year, though, the less my students discussed these traditional markers of success. While I was required to still administer these tests, we did not focus on them. In fact, by the start of the third nine weeks, I removed all reference to those tests from my room. Previously, I had tracking pages up for students and whole classes to track their data, and I had a countdown to STAAR, as well as the next benchmark exam. By the time we returned from the Christmas break, though, these were no longer necessary. Instead, we focused on what we were learning, not how that learning would be tested.

To end the *Achievement* conversation, though, I do want to spend a few moments on STAAR test data. As a proponent of student-directed learning, I reject the notion that a student's achievement can be reliably determined based off a standardized test score. Still, because I was teaching in a traditional public school, these scores mattered not just for the administration of my campus, but they would determine whether or not my students would matriculate to the ninth grade. Thus, I think it is worth analyzing these scores to determine if the type of achievement my students were obtaining would also translate to the current accepted standards of achievement in public education, such as the STAAR. The chart below shows the comparison of STAAR test scores for the 8th grade ELAR test over a two year period. In the 2015-2016 school year, I did not teach from a

student-directed instructional framework. Thus, I have compared those scores with the

scores for the classes who did receive this type of instruction. .
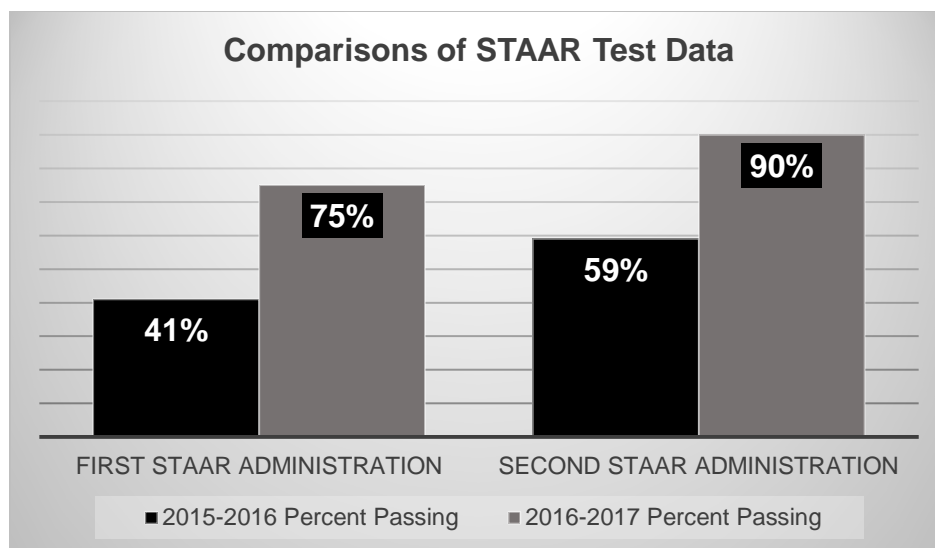
Figure 10. Comparisons of STAAR test data

There is a significant difference between the two years. The STAAR test is given over

two administrations, one at the end of March and one at the start of May. To evaluate my

test scores, I've included both administrations here. The first administration is something

that obviously falls under my class data. Preparations for this administration begins on

day one of my class. The second administration is also part of my data due to two

reasons. First, all of my students that were not successful on the first round of STAAR

testing entered into a reteaching phase with me from mid-April when scores come back

until the second administration. We worked together daily to reinforce skills not achieved

on the first test. Further, I was the teacher in charge of accelerated instruction, so not only

did I have all my students in intervention instructional practices in my room, I also taught

them in accelerated instruction over a ten-day intensive intervention period. Considering

that, on the first administration of STAAR, only 41% of my students passed for the 2015-

2016 school year. That is compared to 75% in year two in my student-directed classroom. Further, after the second administration of STAAR in 2015-2016, my total number of students passing climbed to only 63%, while 90% total passed for 2016-2017 as of the second test. In fact, only nine students did not pass the STAAR test out of all three of my blocks for the 2016-2017 school year while I was using student-directed learning.

Let's take a closer look at those nine students. Two of them were students with special education diagnoses. These students were between three and four grades below level in reading when they entered my room, and both were unsuccessful on the seventh grade STAAR the year prior. Since the STAAR test for eighth grade is a reading test, those students and I had prepared ourselves for a non-passing status, but we turned our attention to growth. I am happy to say that one out of the two grew from less than 20% on the 7th grade STAAR to 46% on the 8th grade STAAR during the first administration and another percentage point to 47% after the second administration. The other student didn't have the same success of growth on either, but their performance was consistent with their abilities shown in the classroom. Moving on, two of the nine failures were students that had been suspended or removed from the campus for extended periods of time due to issues with other classroom teachers. One of the two spent twenty days in the in-school suspension room in the month of February, and another ten days combined the semester prior. The other student was removed from my campus and sent to the GAP center within the district for ten weeks beginning in December. Thus, this student did not return until the start of March. Finally, two of the nine students were designated as English Language Learners that had tremendous difficulty with reading and writing exams due to their English still being fairly low level. Both students were identified officially as Limited

English Proficiency (LEP) students, so their expectation of passing, again, was not high, but the focus became growth between administrations, which did occur. With those considerations explained, we are left with only three of the nine failures that were both not expected or prepared for by myself and my students, and it should be mentioned that all nine students did eventually pass the third administration offered over the summer. I did not include those number here, though, as I was not a summer school teacher, so I don't believe it would be valid to take credit for increases in scores with the instruction provided over the summer months.

Overall, though, I was incredibly happy with these numbers, and my scores placed me at the top of the school in terms of passing rates for the STAAR exam. The closest teacher to me was at 68% for the first administration and a growth to 72% after the second for the same teacher. Still, their increase in scores was not as high between test administrations as mine were, nor were the other teachers in my department. Overall, as a department, we reported a school wide score of 64% passing on the 8th grade ELAR test following the second administration of STAAR. It should be noted that this number includes the charter school that shares the campus. Their scores and my school's scores were combined as a result of a partnership between the school district within which I was employed and the charter. As the charter school performed slightly higher on these tests, it raises the school score when it comes to official reporting. Still, even with this inflated score, my students were at 90% while the rest of the campus was at 64%, which is a large difference I was very proud to see.

Further, when comparing the 2015-2016 school year to the 2016-2017 year, you can see the amount of percentage growth achieved. From 2015-2016 to the 2016-2017

school year, my first administration STAAR test scores saw a percent increase of **82.93%**. For the second administration, there was a percent increase of **52.5%** between the 2015-2016 school year to the 2016-2017 year. I believe the most significant of the two is the first number which shows the increase for the first administration. I was incredibly happy to see such a larger number of students find themselves successful on the first go around. It paints a picture, I think, of a stronger curriculum and delivery of that curriculum that resonated with students enough to provide success on the STAAR test given in March, which allowed me to focus on a smaller group and utilize our learning community support those students. Moreover, since I never made STAAR test prep a large portion of my class (for example, there was no drill and kill), the STAAR exam held a little less anxiety for the students because it was not the end all be all, but just another assessment we would be taking and that we felt we were prepared for because of the work we did together throughout the year. As a result, the STAAR became a required test, but it was not our only goal. Learning together and learning differently was the main focus.

The final piece of STAAR test data I wanted to discuss is the breakdown of scores across my classes. As stated previously, my 6-7 block was my gifted and talented class. Often, GT scores inflate teacher's individual scores, but I want to show that it is not just due to GT that my scores were so much higher than my students' peers. When I break down my scores per class, they look like this after the second administration of STAAR:

Table 14

Breakdown of passing after second administration

Block/Student Population	Total Percentage Passing After 2nd Administration
1-2/Regular Education and SPED	87%
6-7/Gifted and Talented	100%
8-9/Regular Education and LEP	89%

The 100% passing for my gifted and talented classes was not surprising, but my regular education classes that included a mix of special education students and limited English proficiency students still scored within the high eighties. Further, their scores are higher than the overall scores for the school, which I think makes an argument against believing my GT classes weighted my scores overall. Only twenty of my students were designated GT. That made up only **22.99%** of my total students, so I feel the success on the STAAR is a significant way to show the success of my students. Despite not teaching from a test prep perspective, my students still obtained the knowledge required in the form of Texas Education Knowledge Standards (TEKS) tested on the STAAR exam. They demonstrated that with their test scores.

The above anecdotes combine paint a picture of how student-directed learning transpired in my room and the changes that occurred as a result of them. The below chart is a summary of those points, the holistic coding I used, and how they connect to the themes I identified to answer my third research question.

Table 15

Summary of themes and connections

Theme	Codes	Connection
Agency	• Advocacy • Knowledge • Expressiveness • Trust • Self-Knowledge	• Students expressed opinions about strength and difficulty of lessons • Students advocated for others in the classroom • Students asked for help when it was needed from the teacher/requested a return to traditional instruction when they felt it best benefited them • There was an increase in metacognition of students and how often they employed it to their benefit • Students advocated for their grades and what they deemed their work was worth
Engagement	• Involvement • Advocacy • Attentive	• Students involvement with lesson writing • Students advocating for lesson choices • Students critiquing traditional teacher's choices in a respectful way • Behavior improved alongside involvement in the classroom
Achievement	• Knowledge • Increased Ability • Understanding	• Higher retention of concepts evidenced by less reteaching • Reading level increases • The definition of how success and achievement are defined changed • STAAR test data shows traditional achievement standards were also met

The reason I include this chart is because I analyzed the experience of student-directed

learning in my classroom in one other way, through a debrief with the researcher

interview. The purpose of this interview, as stated in chapter three, was to assist me in

identifying additional points I had not considered previously, any apriori assumptions I

held, as well as highlighting difficulties and potential issues of bias. The questions used

were revisions of the debriefing interview questions composed by Onwuegbuzie, Leech

& Collins (2008). I worked with a member of my committee to revise these questions to

meet the requirements of my study. The final questions posed in my interview are below:

1. **Researcher's Perception of the Participants**: How comfortable were you
   serving in the role   of participant and reflecting on your experiences as a
   classroom teacher?
2. **Perceptions of Non-Verbal Communication**: To what degree do you think the
   setting impacted the dynamics of data collection?
3. **Interpretations of Interview Findings**: What findings surprised you?
4. **Impacts on Participant**: In what ways, if any, did your (professional
   relationship) influence your data collection (i.e., capturing observation notes,
   analyzing lesson plans, other data collected)?
5. **Ethical or Political Issues**: What types of ethical issues did you encounter as a
   participant-researcher, if any?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to add or share?

Over the course of the forty-seven minute discussion, much came to light in terms of my

reflections on my class and the student-directed experience itself. In the end, the same

three themes of *Agency, Engagement and Achievement* can be explored to add to the

previous reflections presented above.

I will begin again with *Agency*. Through my interview, I was able to identify

some complications when it came to bother creating agency in my room, as well as how

students used that agency. First, there is the complication that the setting of this study

caused. Classrooms are already set up in a way for a distinct power structure to exist. The

simple placement of a teacher's desk or arrangement of desks can portray varying

degrees of teacher authority in the classroom. Thus, I had to find ways from the outset to

ensure my classroom's physical set up did not inhibit the fostering of agency amongst my

students. To do so, I changed the seating often, changed the colors and sought input from

students as to what would make them feel most comfortable, which included putting up

Christmas lights and using lamps, so the lighting was more like a home, rather than a classroom. Further, when it came to class enviornment I experienced an advantage because my classroom was outside. This meant that my room was in one of the temporary buildings. Thus, my classroom was larger than those inside, and it had windows, which the interior rooms did not.

Being outside in a temporary building also assisted in setting my room apart from the type of environment that existed inside. In my debrief the researcher interview, I was able to discuss the setup of the school building. With very few windows even in hallways, and strict procedures and rules, the school was not set up to encourage student agency, but, rather, student compliance. By being outside, students could feel like they were entering a new realm of learning that was different than the one from which they came. That leads me to a second point about agency, students were building agency and use of that agency within my classroom, but they were not allowed to use their new-found voice in their other classrooms. I was the only teacher on campus that was working from a student-directed framework. Thus, my students could feel empowered during the ninety minutes they were in my classroom but lose that empowerment when they left for their other classes or for school that day, as many did not have any agency at home either. One complication of this was that my students were performing great in my classroom in terms of behavior, but they were still having behavior issues with other teachers. So, when a student left my room, they would often be written up in another classroom and sent to SAC for five, ten and sometimes twenty days at a time. When that student returned, the agency building process had to be started again, so we lost a lot of time and a lot of traction with our program because of behavior issues in other classrooms.

Further, the school procedures at lunch did not help either. My afternoon classes came from the cafeteria and lunch. While I did not experience many issues with my 6-7 students, my 8-9 students that came from "D" lunch (the last lunch of the day) entered my room after sitting in what was often a silent lunch block. During these silent lunches, students were given thirty minutes to get food, eat and throw away their plate, but they were not allowed to speak the entire time. Once they left this block, their behavior in the hallways and in their next class was always a challenge, as they had just gone from zero privilege. For my classroom, it meant going form zero agency to a place where they were expected to not only cultivate agency, but use it responsibly. That was not always possible for some of my students, and it was a challenge created by school administrators who were trying to curb poor behavior, but, often, wound up creating more of it. And when this bad behavior would occur, it presented a unique issue for me, as their teacher. By beginning the student-directed experiment, I had entered into almost a contract of sorts with my students. I promised to relinquish power, if they promised to become engaged in the process and act responsibly. When issues would occur, though, such as fights or extreme examples of acting out, I was responsible for taking care of these situations as the teacher. Thus, if I had to write a student up, I was in a way removing the agency I had tried to cultivate with the write up. It was a very complicated place for me to be, as their teacher, but more importantly as their co-learner within a student-directed classroom. One extreme example of this involves a student that returned from the alternative school after being gone for three months. This student reentered my classroom finding it a much different place than when they left. Unfortunately, they made the choice to act out in extreme ways every day, including bullying other students and starting

physical altercations in class. I had to make the decision as the responsible adult for that room and take back the power from my students for a two-week period. We still worked in groups and completed lessons in a similar way, but I became the seat of power again to regain control over this returning student. I received a lot of pushback from my students, and some of the trust that had been built between my students and myself was broken for this time period, but the removal of that one student's agency was necessary to benefit the class as a whole. Fortunately, after two weeks back, the student was moved to a different classroom, so we were able to regain normal interactions, but this is an example of how the development, sustaining and exercising of agency in my room was immensely complicated.

My interview also presented some interesting reflections on the theme of *Engagement*, specifically with the initiating of that engagement. One particular anecdote that came to light involved a student I will call *Jenae*. *Jenae* was a student that was in and out of the SAC room and suspended from school often. Thus, when we began the student-directed experiment, I anticipated *Jenae* being one of the more difficult students to get to buy in. I was not incorrect in this assumption, but I was surprised to find out why she did not want to engage in the process. I explained earlier that my students had many assumptions about student-directed learning, one of which being an apprehension that they were being targeted, or that I was trying to trick them. *Jenae* was one of these students. When I randomly selected students to interview about the possibility of student-directed learning, *Jenae* was one of them. When I explained what it meant her response was, "You ain't gonna send me back to SAC." I was so surprised by her response, but basically, she thought that if she got to make decisions for herself, it was my way of

finding a way to get her sent out of my classroom again. As I got to know *Jenae* better throughout the course of the school year, I learned that other teachers found her so challenging, that it became a relief for her to be gone, and they often told her just that. Thus, she began to believe that she was a burden and acted as such. I can say that while some days were easier than others with *Jenae*, a burden she was certainly not, and I was able to watch her grow as a student and engage in the process of taking control over her learning. Unfortunately, in her other classes, *Jenae* still got in trouble, so she missed more of my class than I would have liked due to SAC and suspensions off site for other teachers. Still, she is a perfect example of one of the barriers to engagement that I experienced in my classroom because she was not alone in feeling like student-directed learning may be a trick.

Interestingly, I also had an issue with my gifted and talented class that I discussed in my interview. My GT class was full of students who were rule followers, and the idea of doing class differently made them very nervous. Moreover, by and large my GT students were not good at working in groups. They preferred to work alone and not share the academic spotlight. As such, engaging them in the group work portion of student-directed learning was very difficult. Fortunately, due to their rule following nature, the entire class quickly acquiesced to everything I was asking them to do, but it was very surprising to me to find them to be lacking in engagement because I had made the assumption that my highest level learners would enjoy being in charge of their learning most of all.

When it comes to *Achievement*, my debrief interview also highlighted two points. First, it became very clear very quickly that a universalized approach to my curriculum

was not successful. I am defining universalized here as being one lesson taught on one subject. I began to see how students learned in such disparate ways, that they needed individual lessons and individual approaches to those lessons. By allowing the students to help create them, it not only took the pressure off of me, their teacher, but it allowed me to begin to understand how they learned, and them to understand the same thing. When I looked at the same lesson across three different classes, they rarely looked the same, and I think that was a big takeaway from this process, that simple differentiation with one lesson does not work. Sometimes, the student needs an entirely new lesson altogether than their classmate.

Secondly, I admitted in my interview that while I did not believe in the validity of the STAAR test, I was absolutely terrified of how my students would do on it. This admission does not mean that I felt the STAAR test should matter, but, the fact was, it did. I feared that my idea of student achievement (success in retention of concepts and engagement in learning) would not be enough for my students to succeed in the traditional ways the school and district administration expected them to succeed. Thus, when it came time for STAAR, I did second guess whether or not our student-directed experiment had been successful. Luckily, my students performed wonderfully on the STAAR showing full retention of the TEKS tested, but the fear is something I think should be acknowledged because it is something many teachers who embark on this process will encounter due to the constraints placed on educators in terms of what is used to determine their quality as a teacher.

With the above in mind, my debrief the researcher interview allowed for a deeper exploration into the themes of *Agency, Engagement and Achievement*:

Table 16

Additional thematic connections post-debrief the researcher

Theme	Connection	Additional Connections from Debrief the Researcher Interview
Agency	• Students expressed opinions about strength and difficulty of lessons • Students advocated for others in the classroom • Students asked for help when it was needed from the teacher/requested a return to traditional instruction when they felt it best benefited them • There was an increase in metacognition of students and how often they employed it to their benefit • Students advocated for their grades and what they deemed their work was worth	• There is an innate power structure that exists simply in the way a classroom looks and is set up that inhibits agency. • Students' other classes were not taught in the same way, so they had agency in my classroom, but not others. • Procedures in other parts of the school complicated agency in my classroom, such as silent lunches • When students returned to the classroom and presented behavioral challenges, the agency was removed from the whole class in order to gain control. •
Engagement	• Students involvement with lesson writing and advocating for lesson choices • Students critiquing traditional teacher's choices in a respectful way • Behavior improved alongside involvement in the classroom	• Because students saw teacher as enemy and agent of power, there were initial barriers to engagement. • The GT class was difficult to engage because of their rule following nature, as well as their difficulty due to their being abstract thinkers.
Achievement	• Higher retention of concepts evidenced by less re-teaching • Reading level increases • STAAR test data shows traditional achievement standards were also met	• Assessing students based off a universal curriculum did not work because all students wanted to learn differently and each classes' lessons were different. •

Before ending this chapter, though, I want to explore the final question asked in my interview regarding ethical or political issues. This section of my interview allowed me to not only identify some of these issues, but it also helped me recall some items that paint a clearer picture of the challenges my classroom faced. First, in terms of ethics, I feared often through this process that I wasn't doing my job. I had been hired by my District to complete a set of responsibilities in a certain way. That meant that I was supposed to teach from a pre-set Year-At-a Glance schedule. I was supposed to prepare my students using certain strategies and certain tools and specific readings. While I still completed district assessments, as required, I did not do any of the other requirements. I taught from my own mentor texts, in my own way and assessed my students in my own way. This lead to my feeling like I was violating the trust placed in me by the school board, administration and parents of my students. Moreover, I sometimes questioned if I was also violating the trust of my students who would pay the price for this not working. I think that is where most of my fear regarding the STAAR test stemmed, my fear that I was failing all of those stake holders.

My job also was unique because of the setting in which I taught. I was able in essence to get away with teaching radically because my administration was incredibly absent in the day to day of my classroom. I was only observed three times over the course of the school year, twice for fifteen minutes and once for forty-five. During these observations, I was able to craft that day's work to look more traditional than my classroom was, and it benefitted me because I was able to keep administration at bay. It was not that the administrative team was not capable, but, more, they were overworked and dealing with huge issues with other classrooms and a population that was immensely

challenging in terms of behavior. I admit in my interview and here that I was able to use that to my advantage. Additionally, I had little involvement with my skills specialist or colleagues. While we had to have planning meetings daily, most days, we signed a paper and went about our planning blocks alone. There was no communal planning with my colleagues, and my skills specialist was so overwhelmed with other duties and responsibilities, that because my room did not turn out many write ups and my students performed well on district assessments I was left alone. Again, I used this to my advantage.

These reflections I believe are necessary as I move into chapter five and looking ahead to extensions of the student-directed experience. My setting was unique to other teachers who have more involved administration or more constraints placed on them. So with that in mind, it is important to consider all of the above and ask where can this experiment go from here and what extensions exist to perpetuate the success of my classroom? Further, what obstacles exist to prevent this from happening? It is here that we turn to the future and a potential conclusion in chapter five.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Now that my journey into student-directed learning has been explored, it is time to turn to a conclusion of all that has been discussed. Mine is but one example of what student-directed learning can look like and the experience it can be for both teachers and students. Therefore, when considering where to go from here, it is important to consider the following topics before we close:

Table 17

Overview of chapter five

Topic	Description
Anticipating Future Barriers to Student-Directed Learning	Looking at how the barriers I experienced could act as a deterrent for other educators and students (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015); (Ayala, 2017).
Considering the Current Educational Landscape	How does the current landscape of education benefit or prevent student-directed learning from taking place (*60 Minutes,* 2017); (Samee Ali, 2017); (Department of Education, 2016).
Expanding My Project	What research projects could expand upon my own personal experience to explore the efficacy of student-directed learning further

Anticipating Future Barriers to Student-Directed Learning

First, I want to explore barriers to wide-spread implementation of student-directed learning. I discussed some potential limitations in my previous chapter, but I want to discuss in greater detail other barriers that either I experienced or I can predict other educators may encounter. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I lost many days of instruction due to administrative requirements, including state standardized testing. Unfortunately, the test-preparation culture that currently permeates our public-school system is one that is not going away. In 2015, the Council of the Great City Schools

(2015) conducted a study of standardized testing from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade nationwide. They found that over the course of these fourteen years of school, the average student takes 112 standardized tests. According to the report which examined sixty-six urban school districts, in Kindergarten, students spent 8.5 hours testing, increasing to 23.2 hours by the fifth grade (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015). Eighth graders tested the most out of any grade, spending 25.3 hours on 10.3 standardized tests during that academic year (Council of the Great City Schools, 2015). The irony, though, is that compared to other countries, we not only over test, we underperform. The Council of the Great City Schools (2015) also found that compared to those nations that outperform American students, students there took three standardized tests throughout the same fourteen years of school.

In the state of Texas where I taught, the amount of standardized tests was overwhelming for my eighth graders at times, specifically the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness Test. As educators, we were tasked with teaching for and to the STAAR from day one of the school year. All eyes pointed to April and the testing that would come along with it. Despite this amount of preparation, though, the question of whether it benefited the student in terms of knowledge gained comes in. In 2017, STAAR test scores actually went down across the state and across most grade levels, especially in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) (Ayala, 2017). The following charts summarize these changes in STAAR ELAR Reading and Writing scores:

Table 18

Summary of students passing on STAAR reading

STAAR Reading Percentage of Students Passing			
	2015	**2016**	**2017**
Grade 3	77	74	72
Grade 4	74	77	70
Grade 5	78	75	71
Grade 6	76	71	67
Grade 7	75	72	72
Grade 8	78	82	76

Table 19

Summary of students passing on STAAR writing

STAAR Writing Percentage of Students Passing			
	2015	**2016**	**2017**
Grade 4	70	69	63
Grade 7	72	70	68

As you can see, every grade level decreased in achievement from 2016 to 2017 except the 7th grade reading scores which remained at 72% passing, despite the passing standard holding steady over both years (Ayala, 2017). What can this tell us? Well, I think it is a testament to the little success our Texas students are seeing when it comes to standardized testing. There is much literature that exists to hypothesize exactly the cause of why achievement on the STAAR is not increasing, but I can only speak anecdotally to what I experienced in my room. The majority of my students entered my classroom far behind standard in both reading and writing. As such, the idea of having these students achieve a certain percentage on a test that grades them on an eighth grade reading level is a pretty large request, especially the way the curriculum is meant to be taught. I was instructed to spend the majority of my year re-teaching, not exploring new concepts. In fact, when looking at our units, they were exactly the same as the year prior for the

seventh grade curriculum. We focused on non-fiction, fiction, completed a research paper and a poetry unit, just like our seventh-grade counterparts. The only change was the mentor texts. The standards, though, and the content was exactly the same. Thus, there was not much opportunity for expansion or growth. It is here that student-directed learning actually benefited, rather than harmed me. The TEKS I was tasked with teaching were still taught, and the students still achieved, but they were not taught in a traditional way. Instead, since the students were both driving their own learning and identifying their own weaknesses, there was an individualization that happened in my classroom that could not happen in traditional instruction. Each student began to receive what they needed to advance their reading and overall ELAR abilities. While I do not believe in the validity or use of standardized testing, my students' scores on them would make or break my future in the school system. So the fact that my students still were able to achieve on them after I taught through a student-directed framework was a win/win for me, as their teacher. In fact, in the end, 100% of my students passed STAAR proving that while the standardized testing schedule complicated my classroom, it was not an insurmountable barrier to student-directed learning. In fact, I would argue that it made my students perform better. If standardized tests are meant to test what a student "should" know at the close of a year, by teaching the way I did, I was able to guarantee that this "should" was met by individualizing the curriculum to address each need of each student. That is why it was successful. Once they knew how to identify that need within themselves, my job and our lessons were more directed, more useful and translated into success on the STAAR, as well as the many other measures explored in the previous chapter.

The issue of standardized testing brings up another potential issue, though, lack of administrative support. I have been very honest, that my administration was absent in terms of classroom involvement throughout the 2016-2017 school year. As a result of this, I did not find myself fighting for my type of instructional methodology in the same way other teachers would have to do. In fact, this was true within even my own district. I had colleagues at other campuses whose skills specialist made daily visits to their classroom. Another campus took control of the classroom so far that teachers were not able to make their own copies. Instead, skills and paraprofessionals were tasked with doing this so that all copies could be approved. If that had been the case, I would have had a much bigger fight ahead of me, as I did not teach in the traditional way the administration and district expected me to teach. Instead, by simply meeting deadline requirements I was left mostly alone. I turned in lesson plans to the school assistant principals, attended all required meetings and was allowed to operate my classroom autonomously. Without such autonomy, I am not sure this experiment would have worked or been able to last as long as it did. It is certainly something other teachers will need to address on their own campuses in order to successfully embark on a student-directed journey.

Further, as mentioned above, the combination of standardized testing and administrative oversight is a huge challenge for teachers to overcome. I mentioned earlier that my future within the district was directly related to my students' test scores. That is because a major part of my yearly evaluation was the growth my students achieved on the STAAR test versus the year prior. In my district, we were evaluated by as system that is called INVEST. This system is made up of two parts. First, you are observed a series of

times by your appraiser (either the assistant principal or principal on your campus) in 15

minute and 45 minute increments. The amount of observations you receive is dependent

on the number of years you have taught. So, a new teacher is observed more often than a

veteran one. These observations are to determine the quality of four domains: planning

and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities.

Then, in October of the next school year, teachers are evaluated again based on their test

scores and what percentage their students grew from the year prior to that year's test.

From these two scores, the teacher is given a formal rating of Unsatisfactory, Needs

Improvement, Satisfactory or Highly Effective. Renewals of contracts, pay raises and

bonuses are all directly related to this score and rating. Thus, teachers must follow

instructional guidelines given by their appraisers (which often include test preparation

centric teaching), and the scores truly matter. That makes the test scores critical to teacher

success, and the implications of this is that student-directed learning may be too much of

a risk for some teachers to feel like they can reasonably take.

Finally, there is the issue of embarking on this journey alone on your campus. I

discussed in the previous chapter about how my students struggled due to experiencing

agency within my classroom, but that same agency was being denied to them outside my

room. This was particularly true when dealing with other teachers. Since I was the only

teacher instructing from a student-directed framework, the other classes my students

entered were very different than mine. Many of them struggled with this fact. I have one

particular encounter recorded in my journal that speaks to this issue. A student received

their six week progress report and was very distraught that they were failing two of their

classes. We had a conversation where I explained that they should celebrate the A they

had in my class because they had worked so hard to earn it. The student responded with, "So what? What's the point?" They then walked away. I was very upset after this encounter because I did not know what to say. I understood this student and others' frustration. They were experiencing success in my classroom but failing others that were still taught in a controlled way by other teachers in the school. That is something I was still navigating at the end of the school year, and I think any teacher embarking on this journey would need to do. The frustration of experiencing agency in one room only to be denied it elsewhere was difficult for my students and for me, as their teacher, co-learner. The fact of the matter was that I kept my agency when they left and had theirs stripped away.

Considering the Current Educational Landscape

The next topic I want to explore is the way our current educational landscape influences the need for student-directed learning. While a lot about the current public-school system was explored in chapter two, I want to talk about a few more statistics in this final chapter. The U.S. Department of Education released a report in 2016 analyzing the quality of fair and satisfactory education students of color have access to in the United States. According to this study, students of color were far more likely to be referred to special education, be suspended from school or be educated in segregated settings than their white counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Further, students of color had less access to high-level math and science courses. Of those schools with high African-American and Latino student populations, only 33% offer calculus, 48% offer physics, 65% offer chemistry and only 71% offer Algebra II. Further, students of color were more likely to be chronically absent than white students. According to the

study, 16% of black students were chronically absent during the school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). What compounds this, though, is that 21% of these students attend schools where the teachers are chronically absent. In total, 21% of chronically absent students of color attend schools where greater than 50% of the teachers were absent for ten or more days throughout the school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). That presents a loss of not just class time when that student is absent, but also when the teacher is, as well.

The picture these numbers paint of the current public-school landscape for students of color is one of lack of access, as well as lack of quality instruction. Without equality of educational offerings, fair and equal treatment in the classroom and for classroom infractions, students will never have the opportunity to succeed in the same way as their privileged counterparts. It is what leads to failing schools, poor performance, and a plethora of other issues we see within many urban school settings and within campuses that host a majority vulnerable population. Still, complicating these statistics further is the current political actors that arguably have the most effect on public education. When President Trump was elected in November 2016, discussion began about who would receive the cabinet positions within his new administration. In late 2016, it was announced that Betsy Devos would take the position of Secretary of Education. Since the announcement, and certainly since her confirmation hearing, there has been much public debate as to whether Ms. Devos is qualified for this position, as well as the effects her serving in the role will have on the future of public education. First, critics turn to Ms. Devos' own educational history. Devos did not go to public school and has never worked in a public school, but she is now in charge of the 90

percent of American children that currently attend public institutions (Samee Ali, 2017).

Further, Devos does not have a track record of even supporting public education as the

best choice for American students. Devos is a staunch advocate for school choice,

heralding both charter and private schools as alternatives for what she has often labeled

as the failing public school system (Wong, 2017). Finally, Devos is a proponent of the

limiting of the government's role in education, and her boss, President Trump, agrees

offering his support for cutting the public education budget by 9.2 million (Wong, 2017).

To this end, Lily Eskelsen Garcia, president of the National Education

Association, said the following about Devos after she was confirmed, "She is missing the

biggest piece of the puzzle, which is to wholeheartedly support public school as well as

the needs and dilemmas of all kinds of students (Samee Ali, 2017)." The latter part of

this statement alludes to another critique of Devos, a white woman, which is her potential

lack of support for all students, of all backgrounds and color. Recently, this topic came to

head in March 2017 during a *60 Minutes* interview with Devos. Look at the below

excerpt from the transcript of that interview that addresses some of the concerns

presented above:

> **DEVOS**: We are studying that [Obama-era rule <u>seeking to prevent discriminatory</u>
>
> <u>discipline in schools</u>]. We need to ensure that all students have an opportunity to
>
> learn in a safe and nurturing environment. And all students means all students.
>
> **STAHL**: Yeah but let's say there's a disruption in the classroom and a bunch of
>
> white kids are disruptive and they get punished, you know, go see the principal.
>
> But the black kids are, you know — they call in the cops. I mean, that's the issue:
>
> Who and how the kids who disrupt are being punished.

DEVOS: Arguably, all of these issues or all of this issue comes down to individual kids. And —

STAHL: Well, no. That — it's not.

DEVOS: — it does come down to individual kids. And — often comes down to — I am committed to making sure that students have the opportunity to learn in an environment that is conducive to their learning.

STAHL: Do you see this disproportion in discipline for the same infraction as institutional racism?

DEVOS: We're studying it carefully. And are committed to making sure students have opportunity to learn in safe and nurturing environments. (Blake, 2017)

As you can see, no actual answer was given by Devos. While making general promises for students to have the opportunity to learn, explaining how those "safe and nurturing environments" come about is something altogether different. These environments have certainly not been created for the schools in Michigan where Devos spearheaded and funded a large charter school movement. Devos claimed in the above interview this transition to charter models would have a positive impact on public schools in the state (*60 Minutes*, 2017). Despite two decades worth of charter school growth, though, the Michigan school system has yet to see a solution to bring its public-school performance out of the bottom third of state school performance scores (Emma, Wermund and Hefling, 2016). Further, when we look at specific numbers, according to the Michigan Department of Education, as of the 2016-2017 school year, only 31.5% of students grades 3-8 were proficient in Math and ELA, and only 23.4% of students in the 11th grade were proficient on the state test, the M-STEP (MI School Data). Further, when you begin to

break down the demographics of those schools that performed so low, a clearer picture is painted of who exactly is in these failing schools. As of the 2015-2016 school year, less than 22% of households in Michigan had school-age children. By and large, whites in urban communities were more likely to be an example of the 78% of childless households counted. This low number of white students in Michigan public schools is specifically evidenced by the fact that the majority of residents in the largest urban school districts of Lansing, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Muskegon are white, but the majority of students enrolled in the public schools are people of color (MLive, 2017). In Muskegon alone, in 2016-2017, 58% of students actually enrolled in the public schools lived below the poverty line. These statistics used together show that public-school populations in Michigan are not only largely made of students of color, but those students are majority impoverished and are failing to achieve.

The issue here is that her own home state of Michigan speaks directly against what Devos believes will happen when school choice is offered to American families. While Devos claims public schools will improve alongside charters and other examples of school choice, this is not proving to be the case in the first location she has brought such a model (Blake, 2017). What does this mean for the rest of the nation then, if her plans for the Department of Education take hold? What implications can we foresee for current public school teachers? In chapter two, I discussed what I call the fallacy of school choice, and Devos' plans for an increase in such "choice" nationwide could prove to be disastrous for our public-school system, specifically those students of color enrolled on these campuses. While we cannot do anything immediately to change Devos' agenda or the plans of the Trump administration, we can work to give our students as much

opportunity to succeed in the classroom and bring that success outside of it to their communities. Those within public schools should take the current state of our educational landscape and be inspired to make changes to begin to protect both public-schools and the students within them. Student-directed learning is one option to do just that. By incorporating a system that not only encourages agency but cultivates it, it can ensure that those groups within the public-school system are protected from the bureaucracy that surrounds them. It can help to battle against what is happening on a federal level by ensuring that we are preparing students to achieve in a way that ensures self-empowerment through the use of voice and newfound agency. Perhaps that will be a start to curb the consequences of what is to come their way if Devos and her department move forward with their plans.

Future Research

So with all of the above in mind, where can this project go from here? Moving forward, it would be useful to begin a larger study of student-directed learning beyond my classroom. This study should include teachers of all content areas and grade levels. In doing so, it could be shown whether student-directed learning is able to be expanded to all subjects. English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) is a subject that naturally lends itself to discussion, exploration. Would a mathematics class, though, be able to have the same success as I did in terms of student buy-in or cultivation of student agency? Would a Physical Education class that already has a group-based learning structure be easier to turn to student-directed learning than a Computer Technology Education (CTE) class that is based in individual work? These questions are just a few of the many that could and should be asked about how student-directed learning extends beyond the ELAR room.

Further, the effect of the age of the students on student-directed learning should be explored. Would younger students be easier to transition to student-directed learning? Would older students be more reticent because they had experienced more years of traditional school? The answers to these questions would provide more evidence in favor or against student-directed learning.

A study that did not have me both as researcher and participant is necessary, as well. I explored the potential limitations to this study in my previous chapters. It would be interesting to see more teachers' experiences, as well as have an objective observer evaluate the types of themes I identified in my last chapter. The more teachers and the diversity of both those teachers' content areas and student populations would make for a richer collection of case studies to explore beyond my own. At the end of such a collection, a better overview of student-directed learning would be had to make the argument either for or against this becoming a more pervasive style of teaching within our public school system, specifically amongst vulnerable populations. And considering the current landscape of public education, we are in vast need of exploring new programming and new types of teaching that can engage our students and find a way to show that public schools can still be a place of learning, success and prosperous achievement for all students, even the vulnerable ones. Student-directed learning could be one of those new ideas, but it will take more research and time to truly tell.

Summary

Before I close this paper, I want to address one final issue. Student-directed learning is something that can benefit all students, not just those from vulnerable populations. Teaching all students about how they learn and scaffolding how to use this

knowledge to their benefit is wonderful for students of all backgrounds. The problem, though, is that not all students have access to such knowledge. I addressed this lack of access to student-directed learning in the previous chapter outlining how students of color and those from vulnerable populations may not be able to afford the few programs that exist that offer this kind of instructional style. In this conclusion, though, I want to address one additional barrier. It goes back to the way vulnerable populations experience the world, not just education. Chapter two outlined an argument for how students stemming from vulnerable areas represent an oppressed class. Due to social institutions and systems of power that are in place, these vulnerable students operate within an oppressed system. Privileged students do not. Thus, even if all students were exposed to student-directed learning, the impact of it on a privileged group of learners versus a vulnerable one would be vastly different. The privileged student would enter into this classroom already having some aspect of innate agency since the privileged student stems from an oppressor class, as a result of that privilege. Therefore, they do not begin with the total lack of agency that vulnerable students do.

Now, that is not an argument to deny a privileged student access to student-directed learning. Instead, it is a call to use such learning to help change the systems in place from another angle. I have made an argument throughout this paper about how student-directed learning can enhance the agency of vulnerable students and in turn those students can use such agency to begin to operate in a different way with the world around them. There is a potential for them to begin to break down the barriers that have surrounded them as a result of such empowerment. This is why teaching from a student-directed framework is what I call teaching as resistance. It is a resistance of the status quo

and the power structures that operate around the vulnerable student. It is the resistance of

the idea that students will leave the social institution of education as lacking in

empowerment as when they entered it and that oppression become magnified once again.

Through student-directed learning students can gain the agency that the oppression they

have experienced has denied them, and, if successful, the use of such agency can extend

into all aspects of their life. The privileged student has a part to play in that, as well,

though. Student-directed learning within these populations can be used as a way to assist

those privileged students with identifying themselves as oppressors and understanding

how their agency both innate and developed within the student-directed classroom can be

used in a socially conscious way. The privileged student can be empowered to use their

agency to help change things, to begin to equalize the playing field. That is a large ask,

and it is something we are a long way from, but it remains a possibility. Thus, the advent

of student-directed learning in our classrooms both privileged and not is something that

can benefit all students and benefit our communities as a whole. As Gardner (1984) says

about expanding our view of education, "We should be painting a vastly greater mural on

a vastly more spacious wall. What we are trying to do is nothing less than build a greater

and more creative civilization, (p. 128)." It is something I saw happen on a small scale,

that, if extended, I believe can be one avenue to change not just the landscape of our

classrooms, but the world in which our students operate beyond the school bell. For it is

there, that the effects of what we teach truly matters.

      With that in mind, I will end this paper by returning to the question posed at its

start by Peter Hutton. "What if we were able to enable students to design and control their

own education? What if instead of doing education to students, we actually allowed them

to use the staff and school and the wider community to manage and design their own education, (TedX, 2014)?" My class took the challenge of that what if and together created something that grew beyond traditional learning. We became a collective learning environment that worked together for similar goals with our own agency intact. We learned from each other. We learned together, and the students learned about themselves. More than that, though, my classroom created a type of learning that struggled against the status quo of traditional teaching. We resisted the belief that learning had to occur in one way to be successful, and, more importantly that there was one way to define what it meant for them to succeed in the classroom. As a result, education was most certainly not done to my students because of that resistance. They made choices about how to learn, and through those choices found the empowerment to succeed beyond what traditionally is defined as academic success. Sure, their test scores were good. Their grades were well above passing. Their behavior was satisfactory by school standard. The success they achieved and I was able to witness was so much more, though. It was the type of success that can only happen when one is in control of their own progress, their own journey. And what better thing to teach students and bring to our schools, the idea that the journey is as important, if not more so, than the end result. The journey is what matters because the journey and the choice of how to make it are what are remembered. I am hopeful that for my students, their journeys will certainly be remembered and the empowerment they felt in making their own choices spills over into all aspects of society they encounter. Perhaps, it is there that the true effect of student-directed learning will begin- when the agency found in learning becomes agency felt and exercised in other decision-making moments, processes. That will be the ultimate gauge of success, for me, their teacher,

their co-learner. I look forward to seeing just where they will decide to go and the changes they will hopefully make to their world and mine, for the greatest change they gifted to me was a change in what I understood education to be and, most importantly, through their eyes the change in what education's potential is to one day become.

References

ABC News. (August 8). One night on a deadly border crossing. Retrieved from

  http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/story?id=132089

About National School Choice Week. Retrieved from

  https://schoolchoiceweek.com/about/

Agamben, G. (2003). *Homo sacer*. Paris: Seuil.

Agamben, G. (2003). *État d'exception: Homo sacer, II, 1*. Paris: Seuil.

Aldine Independent School District. Aldine Independent School District: Special

  education services. Retrieved from

  http://www.aldine.k12.tx.us/cms/main.cfm?siteID=20&PageID=195

Alexander-Bloch, B. (2011, January 29). St. Bernard multifamily-housing battle opens

  new front. *The Times Picayune*. Retrieved from

  http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2011/01/st_bernard_multifamily-

  housing.html

Alexander, M. (2012). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of*

  colorblindness. New York, NY: The New Press.

Althusser, L., & Brewster, B. R. (2008). *On ideology*. London: Verso.

Anzaldúa, G. (2012). *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera*. San Francisco, CA:

  Aunt Lute Books.

A.S. Niell's Summerhill. Retrieved from http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/q-a.php

Babbie, Earl (2001). *The practice of social research (9th ed.).* Belmont: Wadsworth.

Balbus, I. D. (2010). *Governing subjects: an introduction to the study of politics*. New

  York, NY: Routledge.

Balfour, K. L. (2011). *Democracy's reconstruction: thinking politically with W.E.B. du Bois*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bennis, D. What is Democratic Education? Institute for Democratic Education in America. Retrieved from http://democraticeducation.org/index.php/features/what-is-democratic-education/

Blake, A. (2017, March 12). Betsy Devos's botched '60 Minutes' interview, annotated. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/03/12/betsy-devoss-botched-60-minutes-interview-annotated/?utm_term=.b230c4037487

Brophy, J. (1985). Classroom management as instruction: Socializing self-guidance in students. *Theory Into Practice, 24*(4), 233-240.

Bruenig, M. (2017). Experientially learning and teaching in a student-directed classroom. *Journal of Experiential Education,* 40(3), 213-230.

Campbell, C. (1999). Empowering Pedagogy: Experiential education in the social work classroom. *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue Canadienne De Service Social, 16*(1), 35-48.

Chassin, L., Eason, B., & Young, R. (1981). Identifying with a deviant label: The validation of a methodology. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44(1), 31-36.

Checkley, K. (1995, December). Student directed learning: balancing student choice and curriculum goals. *Educational Update*, 37(9).

Chenail, R. (2009). Interviewing the investigator: Strategies for addressing

    instrumentation and researcher bias concerns in qualitative research. *The*

    Qualitative Report, 13(4), 14-21.

Chertoff, E. (2013). No Teachers, no class, no homework; Would you send your kids

    here? *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from

    https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/12/no-teachers-no-class-no-

    homework-would-you-send-your-kids-here/265354/

Concepts, L. (2013, December 20). The glossary of education reform: Student voice

    definition. Retrieved from http://edglossary.org/student-voice/

Council for Exceptional Children. 'Behavior Disorders: definitions, characteristics &

    related information. Retrieved from http://www.ccbd.net/about/ebddefintion

Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced

    mixed methods research designs. *Handbook of mixed methods in social and*

    behavioral research (pp. 209-240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N.K. (1994). The art of politics of interpretation. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln

    (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of*

    Education. New York, NY: Macmillan.

DiGangi, S., Maag, J., & Rutherford, R. (1991). Self-graphing of on-task behavior:

    enhancing the reactive effects of self-monitoring on on-task behavior and

    academic performance. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 14(3), 221-230.

Dignath, C., Buettner, G & Langfeldt, H. (2008). How can primary school students learn

    self-regulated learning strategies most effectively?: A meta-analysis on self-

    regulation training programmes. *Educational Research Review,* 3(2), 101-129.

Diller, J.V. & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural Competence: A primer for educators.*

    California: Thomas Wadsworth.

Douglas, C. & Morris, S. (2014). Student perspectives on self-directed learning. *Journal*

    of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 14(1) 13-25.

Du Bois, W. (2005). *The souls of Black folk.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster

    Paperbacks.

Emma, C., Wermund, B., & Hefling, K. (2016, December 9) Devos' Michigan schools

    experiment gets poor grades. *Politico.* Retrieved from

    https://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/betsy-devos-michigan-school-

    experiment-232399

Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality, Volume 2: The use of pleasure.* New

    York, NY: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison.* New York, NY:

    Vintage Books.

Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Wang, J. (2011). Choice without equity: Charter

    school segregation. *Education policy analysis archives,19*, 1-96.

Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of hope: reliving pedagogy of the oppressed.* London:

    Bloomsbury.

Gamoran, A. (1996, October). Do Magnet Schools Boost Achievement? *New Options for Public Education,* 54. 42-46.

Gardner, J. (1984) *Excellence: Can we be equal and excellent too?* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Glum, J. (2017, August 8). Public education in U.S. threatened under Betsy Devos, union leader Randi Weingarten says. *Newsweek.* Retrieved from http://www.newsweek.com/betsy-devos-anti-public-education-weingarten-648040

Giroux, H. (1983). Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education:A critical analysis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53(3), 257-293.

Gonzalez-Barrera, A., & Krogstad, J. M. (2017, March 02). What we know about illegal immigration from Mexico. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/02/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/

Gooding-William, R. (2011). *In the shadow of Du Bois: Afro-modern political thought in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Guggenheim, D. (Director). (2010). *Waiting for Superman* [Motion picture on Streaming service]. United States: Participant Media.

Haddon, H. (2015, August 16). Donald Trump says he would deport illegal immigrants. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-saying-illegal-immigrants-have-to-go-targets-obama-orders-1439738967

Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Hanson, W.E., Creswell, J.W., Clark, V.L.P., Petska, K.S., & Creswell, J.D. (2005). Mixed methods research designs in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,* 52, 224-235.

Harney, S., Moten, F., & Empson, E. (2013). *The undercommons: fugitive planning & black study.* Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions.

Harris, K., Graham, S., Reid, R., McElroy, K., & Hamby, R. (1994). Self-monitoring of attention versus self-monitoring of performance: Replication and cross-task comparison studies. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 17(2), 121-139.

Hooker, J. (2009). *Race and the politics of solidarity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Houston Sudbury School. Retrieved from http://www.houstonsudburyschool.org/enroll Houston Sudbury Schools tuition assistance policy 2018-2019 school year. Retrieved from

http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/a9d8d7_78c864011df9420bbdd4ef99cde6484f.pdf.

Jensen, E. (2009). *How Poverty Affects Behavior and Academic Performance.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Jervis, R. (2009, November 23). Katrina case raises costly question. *Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved from https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2009-11-22-levees_N.htm

Johnson, R. & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher,* 33(7) 14-26.

Jordan, M. (2016, September 20). Number of illegal immigrants in U.S. holds steady at 11 million. *Wall Street Journal* Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/number-of-illegal-immigrants-in-u-s-holds-steady-at-11-million-1474394518

Kates, R.W., Colten, C.E., Laska, S. & Leatherman, S.P. (2006, October 03). Reconstruction of New Orleans after hurricane Katrina: A research perspective. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,* 103(40), 14653-14660.

Krogstad, J. M., Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. (2016, November 03). 5 facts about illegal immigration in the U.S. *Pew Research Center.* Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/03/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/

LaPlante, A. (2005, June 1). The surprising reason urban schools attract less qualified teachers. *Stanford Graduate School of Business.* Retrieved from https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/surprising-reason-urban-schools-attract-less-qualified-teachers

Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. (2006). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

M Live (2017, August 28). 10 facts about demographics of Michigan school districts. *Michigan News.* Retrieved from http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2017/08/10_facts_about_demographics_of.html

Marcus, F. F. (1988, September 19). Chalmette Journal; After 22 Years, the girls are
    where the boys are. *New York Times.* Retrieved from
    http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/20/us/chalmette-journal-after-22-years-the-
    girls-are-where-the-boys-are.html

Mayring, P. Qualitative Content Analysis. Retrieved from
    http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewArticle/1089/2385

Mehra, B. (2002). Bias in qualitative research: Voices from an online classroom. *The
    Qualitative Report*, 7(1), 1-19.

MI School Data. Retrieved from
    https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/Kindergarten12thGradeLa
    ndingPage.aspx?NavStateText=Kindergarten+-
    +12th+Grade&NavStateValue=%2fDistrictSchoolProfiles2%2fKindergarten12th
    GradeLandingPage.aspx

Mohatt, G.V., & Thomas, L.R. (2006). "I wonder why you would do it that way?" Ethical
    dilemmas in doing participatory research with Alaska native communities. In J.E.
    Trimbel & C.B. Fisher (Eds.), *The handbook of ethical research with
    ethnocultural populations & communities.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

National Education Agency. (2008). Promoting educators' cultural competence to better
    serve culturally diverse students. Retrieved from
    http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB13_CulturalCompetence08.pdf

Nuestatter, A. (2011). Summerhill school and the do as you like kids. *The Guardian.*

    Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/aug/19/summerhill-

    school-at-90

O'Connor, J., & Gonzalez, S. (2011, December 14). Florida charter schools failing

    disabled students. *NPR.* Retrieved from

    http://www.npr.org/2011/12/14/143659449/florida-charter-schools-failing-

    disabled-students

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N., & Collins, K. M. T. (2008). Interviewing the interpretive

    researcher: A method for addressing the crises of representation, legitimation, and

    praxis, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7. Retrieved from

    http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0

Orfield, G., Kucsera, J., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2012, September 19). E

    Pluribus...Separation: Deepening double segregation for more students. *The Civil*

    Rights Project. Retrieved from https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-

    education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/e-pluribus...separation-

    deepening-double-segregation-for-more-students/

Pezalla, A., Pettigrew, J. & Miller-Day, M. (2012). Researching the researcher-as-

    instrument: an exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity. *Qualitative Research,*

    12(2), 165-185.

Poggenpoel, M., & Myburgh, S. (2003). The researcher as research instrument in

    educational research: A possible threat to trustworthiness? *Education*, 124(2),

    418-21, 320.

Ponteroto, J., Mathew, J., & Raughley, B. (2013). The value of mixed methods designs to

social justice research in counseling and Psychology. *Journal for Social Action in*

Counseling and Psychology, 5(2), 42-68.

Rawls, K. (2012, January 24). The ugly truth about "school choice." *Salon.* Retrieved

from https://www.salon.com/2012/01/24/the_ugly_truth_about_school_choice/

Rothstein, R. (2013, December 13). We can't meaningfully integrate schools without

desegregating neighborhoods. *Economic Policy Institute.* Retrieved from

http://www.epi.org/blog/we-cant-meaningfully-integrate-schools-without-

desegregating-neighborhoods/

Saldana, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.* London: Sage

Publishing.

Samee Ali, S. (2017, February 4). Why Betsy Devos is riling up education advocates.

NBC News. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/why-betsy-

devos-riling-education-advocates-n716491

Schanzenbach, D. W., Boddy, D., Mumford, M., & Nantz, G. (2016, March 24).

Fourteen economic facts on education and economic opportunity. *The Hamilton*

Project. Retrieved from

http://www.hamiltonproject.org/papers/fourteen_economic_facts_on_education_a

nd_opportunity

School-to-Prison Pipeline [Infographic]. *American Civil Liberties Union.* Retrieved from

https://www.aclu.org/infographic/school-prison-pipeline-

infographic?redirect=racial-justice%2Finfographic-school-prison-pipeline

Slate, J., & Saudargas, R. (1987). Classroom behaviors of LD, seriously emotionally

disturbed, and average children: A sequential analysis. *Learning Disability

Quarterly*, 10(2), 125-134.

Smith, C., & Scuilli, S. (2011). "I can't believe we read this whole book!" How reading

for their own purposes affected struggling teens. *The English Journal*, 101(2),

30-36.

Stake, Robert E. (2000). Case studies. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *Handbook of

qualitative research* (pp. 435-453). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Steinberg, Z., & Knitzer, J. (1992, February). Classrooms for emotionally and

behaviorally disturbed students: Facing the challenge. *Behavioral Disorders*,

17(2), 145-156.

Strahan, D. (1989). Disconnected and disruptive students. *Middle School Journal*, 21(2),

1-5.

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. (2002). The evolution of discipline practices: School-wide
positive

behavior supports. Child & family behavior therapy, 24(1-2), 23-50.

TedX Talks. (2014, November 20) What if students controlled their own learning?

Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMxqEkg3wQ0&t=229s

The Council of the Great City Schools. (2015, October). Student testing in America's

Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis. Retrieved from

https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/Testing%20Re

port.pdf

Transcript of Donald Trump's Immigration Speech. (2016, September 01). *The New York Times.* Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/02/us/politics/transcript-trump-immigration-speech.html?_r=0

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). 2013-2014 Civil rights data collection a first look: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2009, November). Race to the Top program executive summary. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2014, October 28). U.S. Department of Education announces resolution of South Orange-Maplewood, N.J., school district civil rights investigation. Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-resolution-south-orange-maplewood-nj-school-di

Wannarka, R., & Ruhl, K. (2008). Classroom Seating and Achievement: Seating arrangements that promote positive academic and behavioural outcomes: a review of empirical research. *Support for Learning*, 23(2), 89-93. Retrieved June 12, 2017.

Warren, K. (1988). The student directed classroom: A model for teaching experiential education theory. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 11(1), 4-9.

Word Aloud. (2011, February 05). M. NourbeSe Philip reads "Discourse on the Logic

    of Language" from *She Tries Her Tongue*. Retrieved from

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=424yF9eqBsE

Xu, M. & Storr, G. (2012). Learning the concept of researcher as instrument in

    qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report,* 17(21), 1-18.

Yin, Robert K. (1981). The case study crisis: Some answers. *Administrative Science

    Quarterly*, 26(1), 58-65.

Yin, Robert K. (2003). *Case study research, design and methods* (3rd ed., vol. 5).

    Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Ysseldyke, J., Thurlow, M., Christenson, S., & McVicar, R. (1988). Instructional

    grouping arrangements used with mentally retarded, learning disabled,

    emotionally disturbed, and nonhandicapped elementary students. *The Journal of

    Educational Research*, 81(5), 305-311.

Appendix A

Correspondence with the Institutional Review Board

RE: IRB Question

Griffin, Danielle

Mon 3/19/2018 8:55 AM

To: Schlafly, Ashley L <aschlafl@Central.UH.EDU>;

Good Morning

You are correct that IRB approval is not required for your study. Under our federal definition, research with one person or on yourself, does not constitute human subjects research. Additionally, since no student records, names or any of their work is being used we would not need to review that aspect of the research either. The use of publically available de-identified data does not constitute as human subjects research. As long as your notes on disciple referrals are not identifiable and cannot be linked to any students then this is also not human subjects data. No IRB approval is required in this instance.

Please let me know if there is anything else you need.

Danielle Griffin, MS, CIP
Compliance Specialist
713-743-4057
Dgriffi5@central.uh.edu

Send Kudos: Recognizing someone for a job well done can do wonders. If a member of the Division of Research staff provided you with good customer service or did an exceptional job, send them Kudos.

From: Schlafly, Ashley L
Sent: Thursday, March 15, 2018 10:40 AM
To: Griffin, Danielle
Subject: IRB Question

Ms. Griffin,

My name is Ashley L. Schlafly, and I am a doctoral student here at the University of Houston. I am emailing today to request information regarding the need for an official IRB application. We had met in August of last year, and I wanted to confirm the lack of IRB application needed as I am getting close to defense!

My dissertation is a case study of my classroom for the 2016-2017 school year. I am the sole participant in the process, as I am using a journal of notes I kept throughout the year to self-reflect on a type of instructional methodology I employed with my classes. None of the students are mentioned by name, nor is there any student work displayed or included. The only specifics about students are a few anecdotes that I recorded in my classroom journal throughout the year. When I do discuss them, I discuss these anecdotes using fake names and removing any identifying information about the students, other than their grade level, which is implied because it is known which grade level I taught.

Further, the only quantitative data points I refer to are STAAR test data and the discipline referrals I wrote throughout the year. The STAAR test data is public knowledge, and my discipline referrals I tracked throughout the year. I do not provide any specifics regarding students for these referrals, nor do I mention what they referrals were for. I only use them to talk holistically about my classroom. Again, this data is also collected by the school and school district.

Figure A1. Part One of IRB Correspondence

Please let me know if you feel a formal IRB application is necessary. To summarize, I am the sole participant of my case study, and it is a self-reflection of my time in the classroom. Students are not mentioned specifically, nor were are they participants in my process.

Thank you for your help!!!

Ashley L. Schlafly
Lead Coordinator/Coach
Consistency Management & Cooperative Discipline®
University of Houston, College of Education
422 Farish Hall
(713) 743-8691
aschlafl@central.uh.edu

Figure A2. Part Two of IRB Correspondence
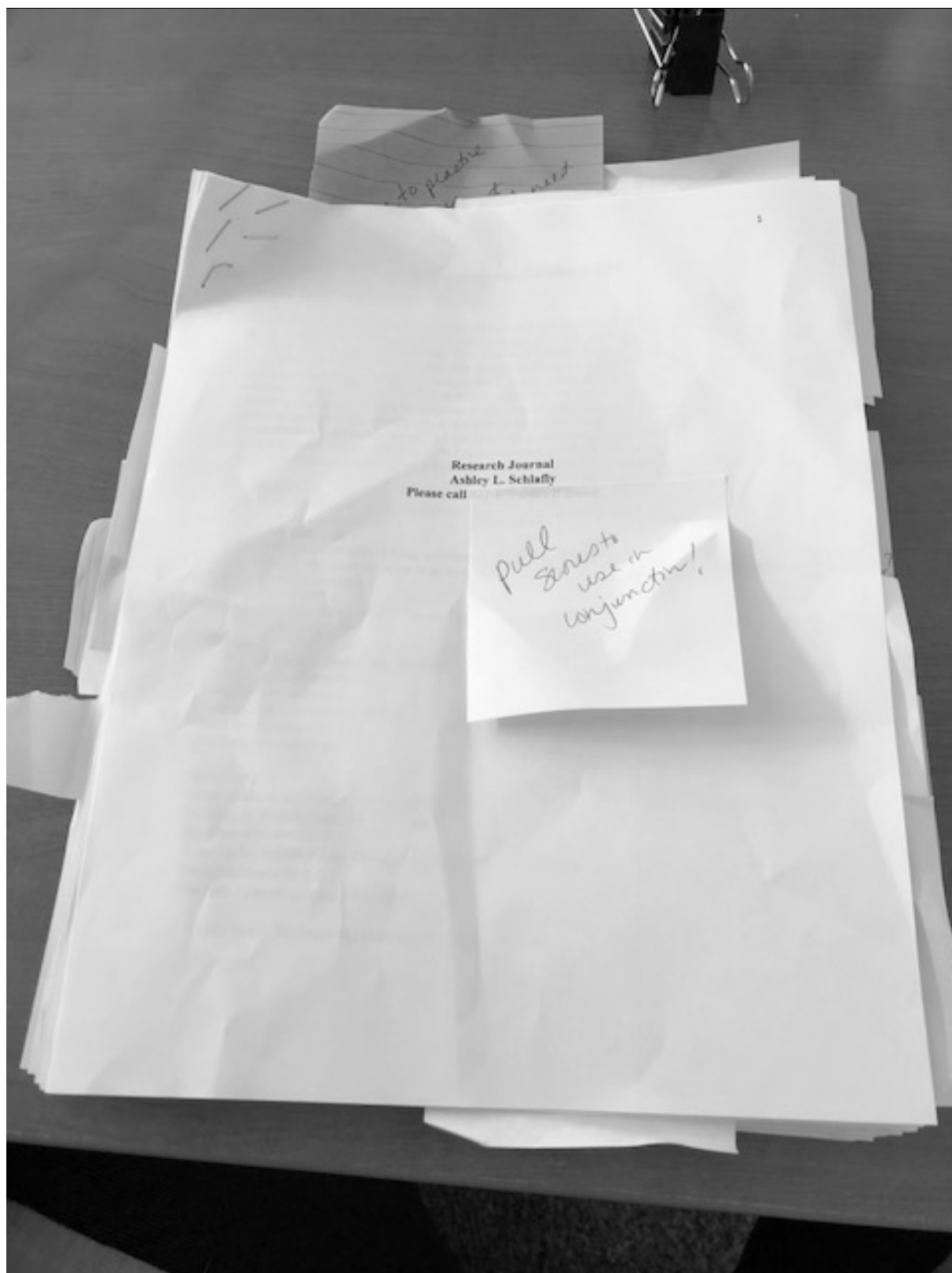
Appendix B

Photographs of Research Journal

Figure B1. Photograph of Research Journal

I continued trying today to work from teacher-directed model in order to
would respond. I have to say that I am also uncomfortable teaching in th
not be considering the kids, but I think it is important to both try to teach
dialogue with the students about how the class in being run. It is only th
truly exhausted. I can feel that I am doing so much more work than I no
the classroom. How strange is it to think that so many educators are actu
this way. In truth, I am feeling really awful about how my kids are feelin
feeling a bit beaten down. How could they not when they are literally ha
figure out how to talk to them better. I think I am going to continue to ha
when all of this is over.

1-2 Block:
Total Instructional Time Lost: 38 minutes
Number of Redirections: 71
Number of Referrals: 0
Reasons for Redirections: Removing shoes in the middle of class, doing the running man during
a lesson, screaming at another student, touching one another's property, getting up without
permission, demanding to leave the classroom, talking, refusing to do work, refusing to
participate
Students Involved: 6
Students Absent: Subject 7 (in GAP classroom)

6-7 Block:
Total Instructional Time Lost: 9 minutes
Number of Redirections: 23
Number of Referrals: 0
Reasons for Redirections: Talking, sleeping
Students Involved: 1
Students Absent: None

8-9 Block:
Total Instructional Time Lost: 12 minutes
Number of Redirections: 21
Number of Referrals: 0
Reasons for Redirections: Talking, sleeping, refusing to participate, putting head down, refusing
to take off book bag and place it on the ground or the back of chair

Students Absent: Subject 10 in SAC

3. Entry Date: Thursday, October 13, 2016

So day three is no better. In fact, the kids are pretty much worse, if that is possible. When
looking at my absences, I had multiple students trying to skip today. I get it. Why would you
want to be in here? I don't want to be in here. I hate the way my classroom feels. The total tone
is changed, but we talked again today about why I am doing this, that its an experiment of sorts,
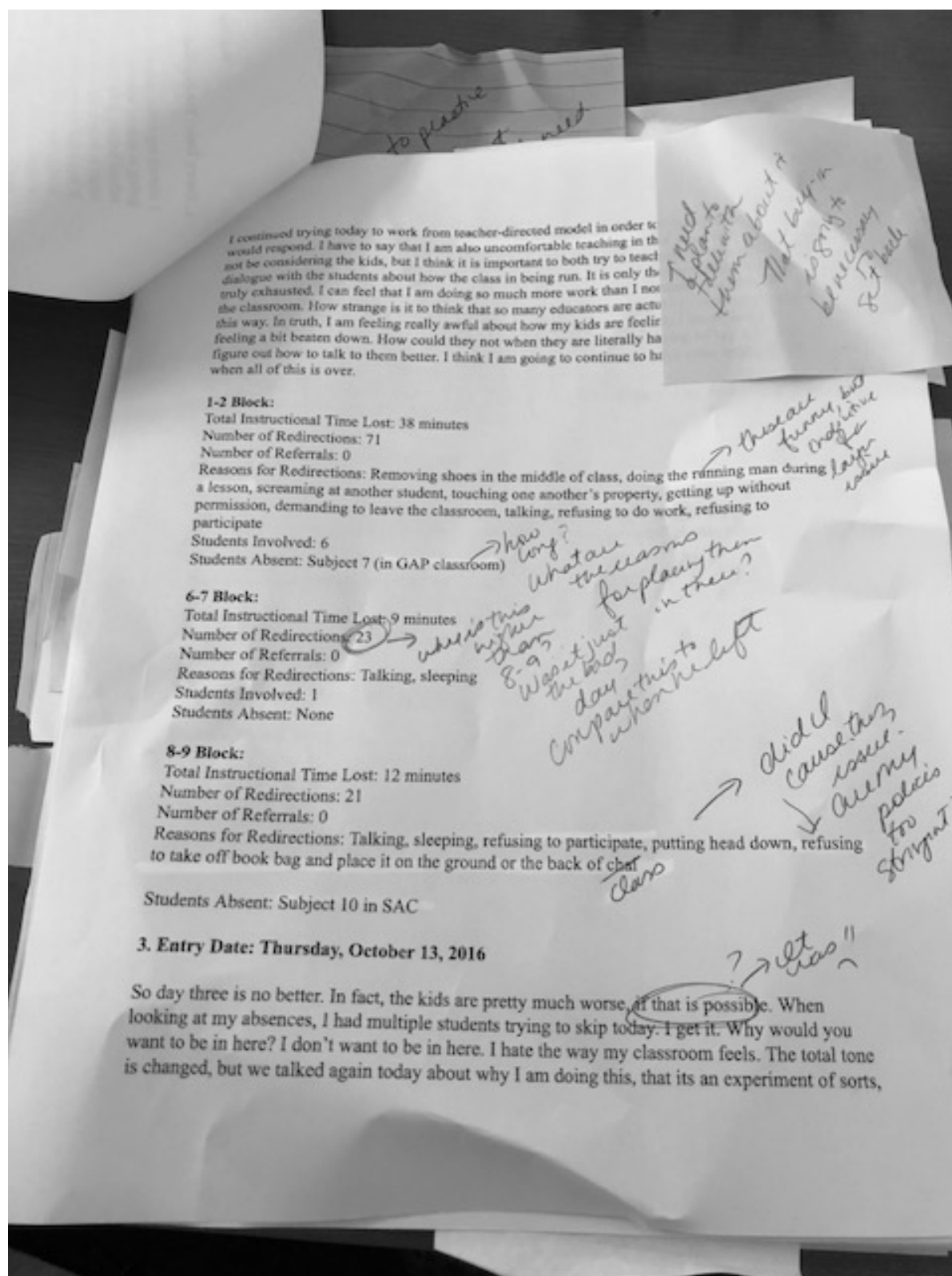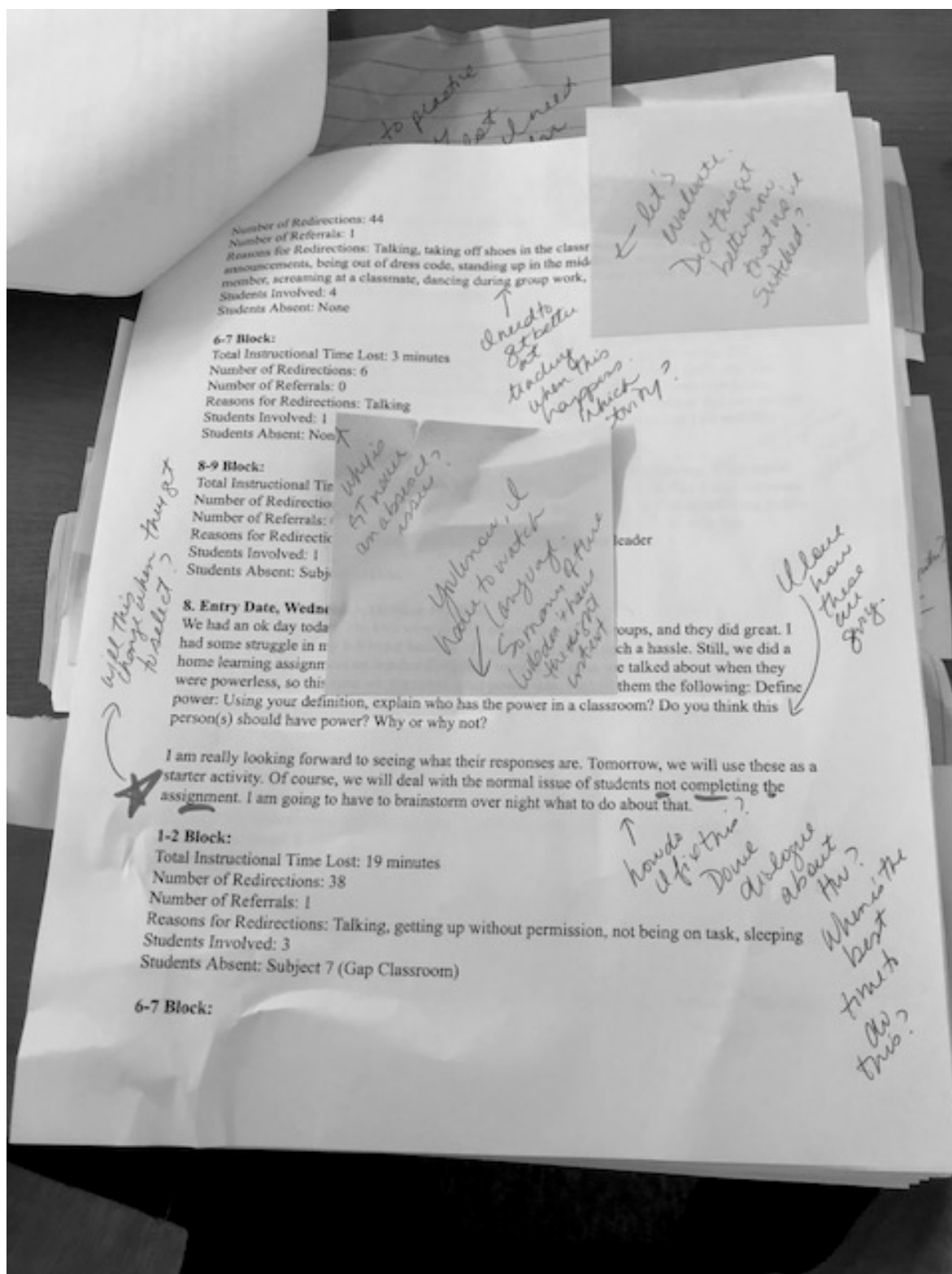
Figure B2. Photograph of Research Journal

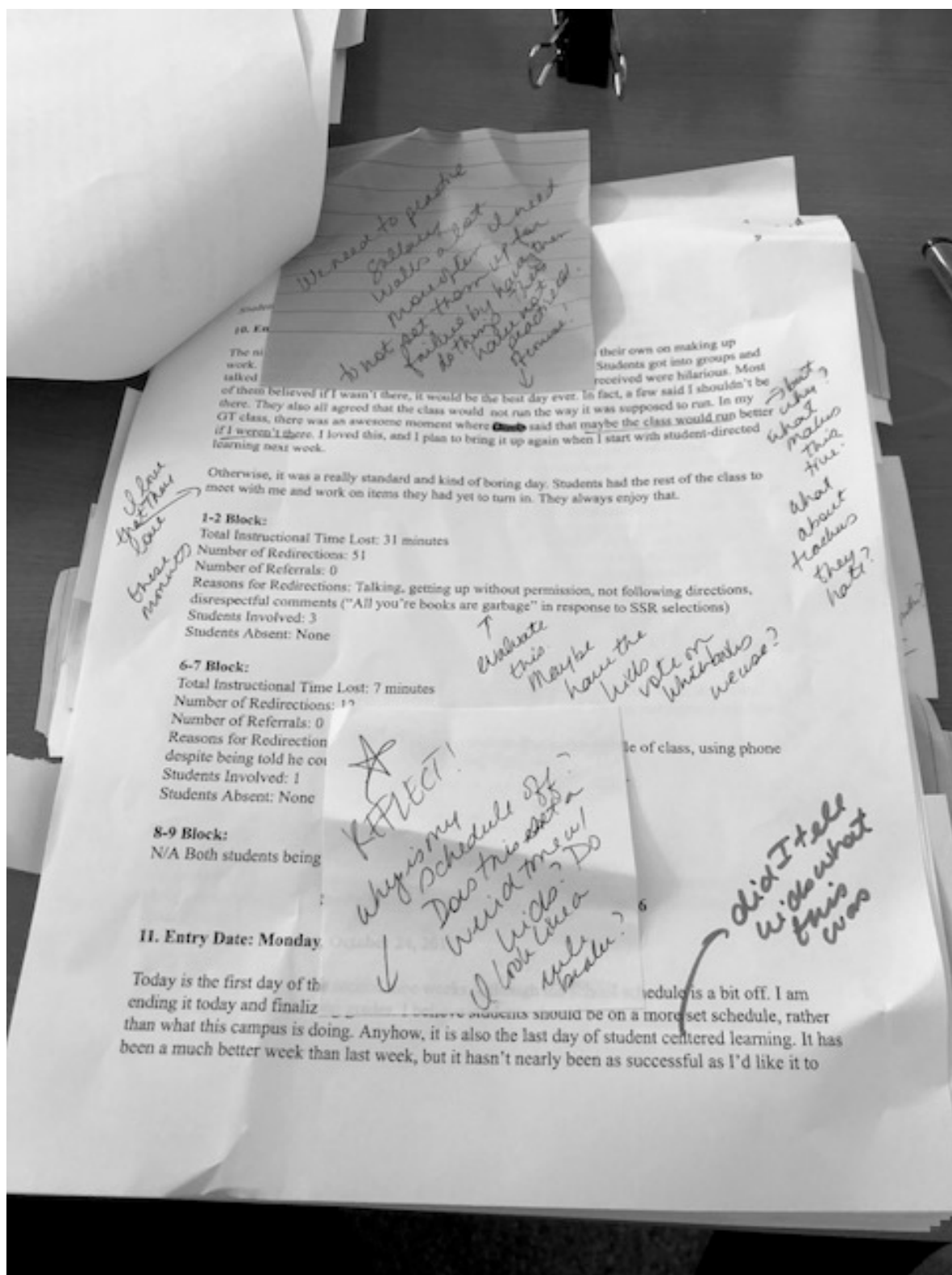*Figure B3.* Photograph of Research Journal
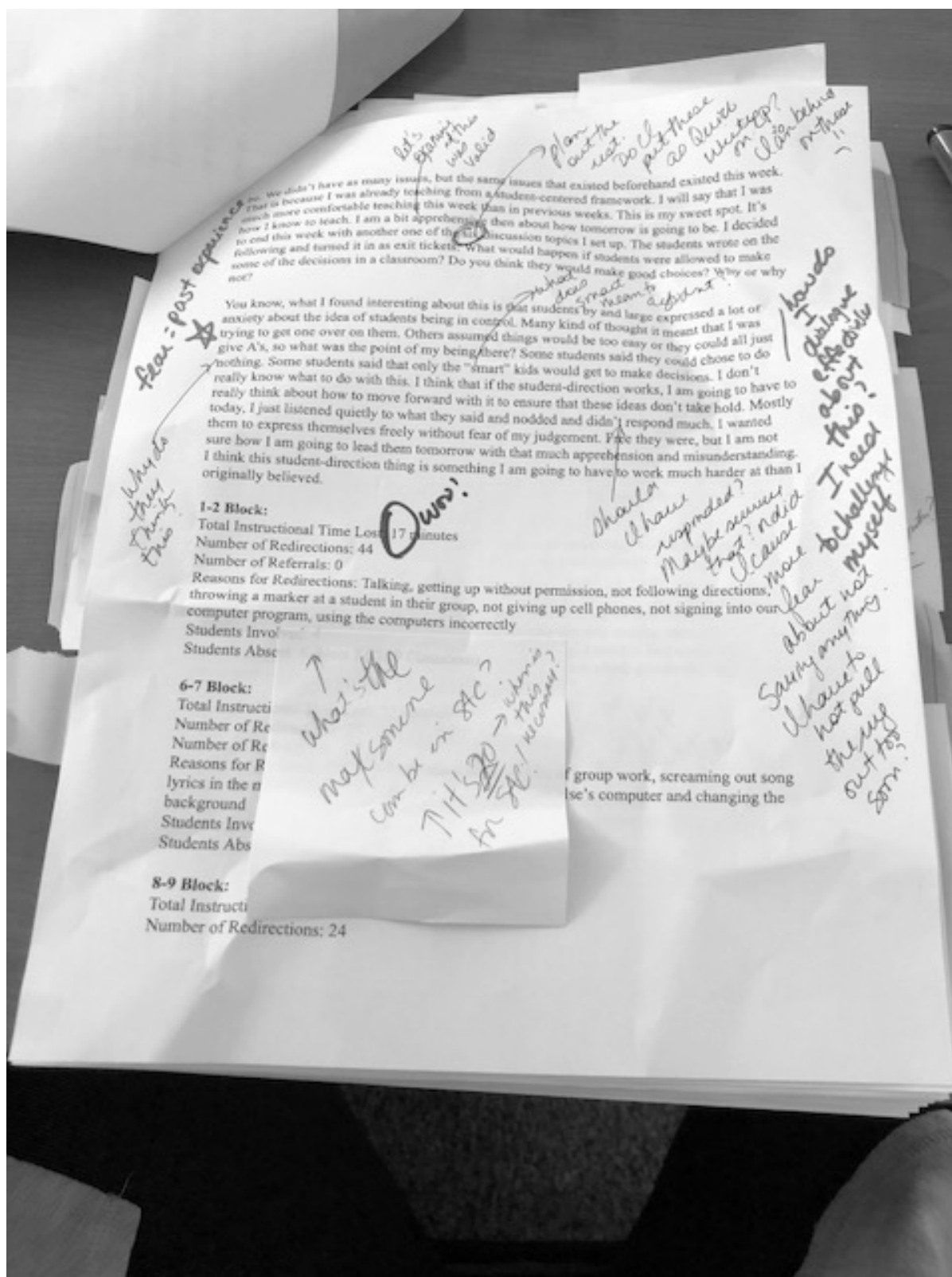
Figure B4. Photograph of Research Journal

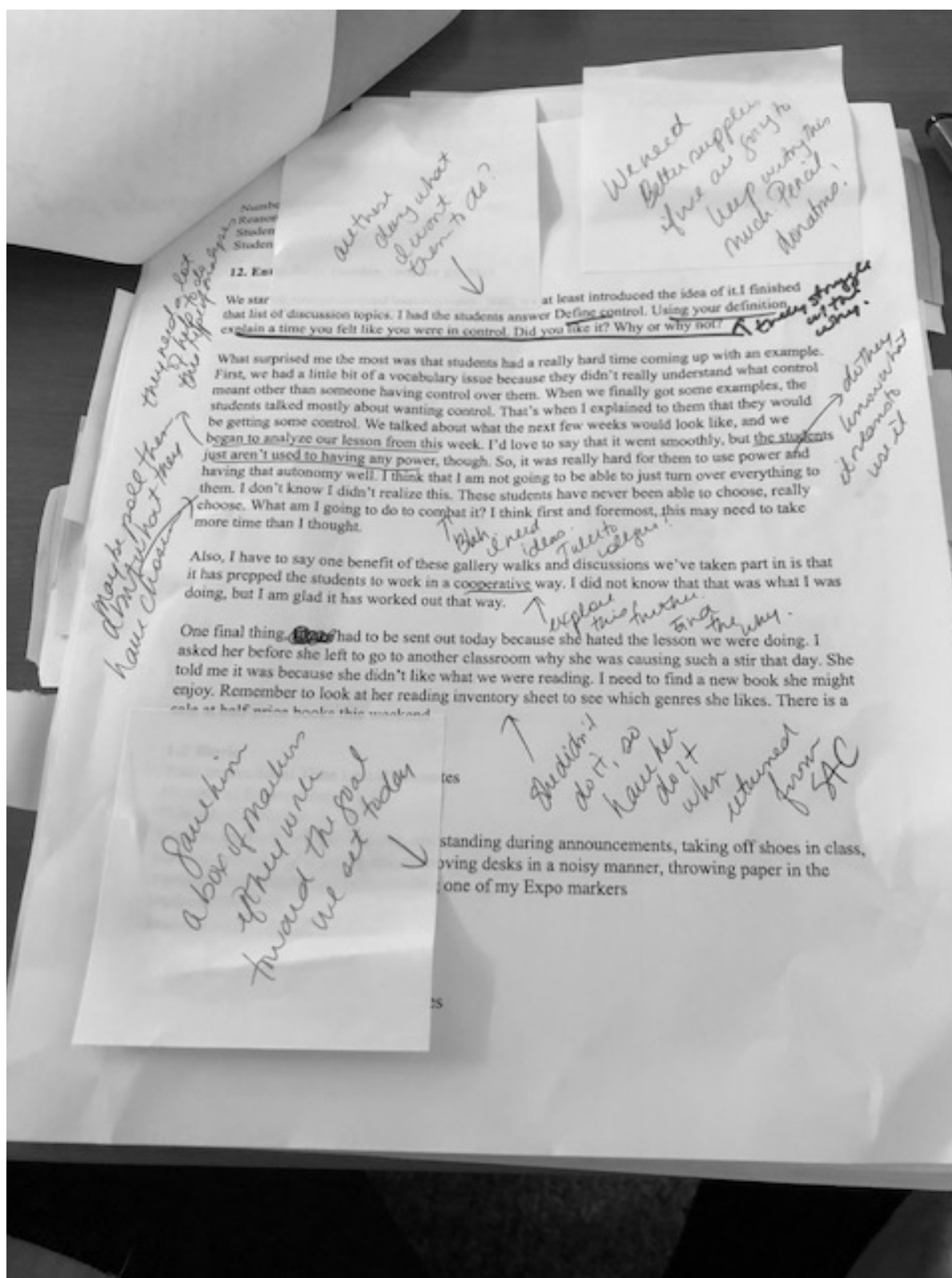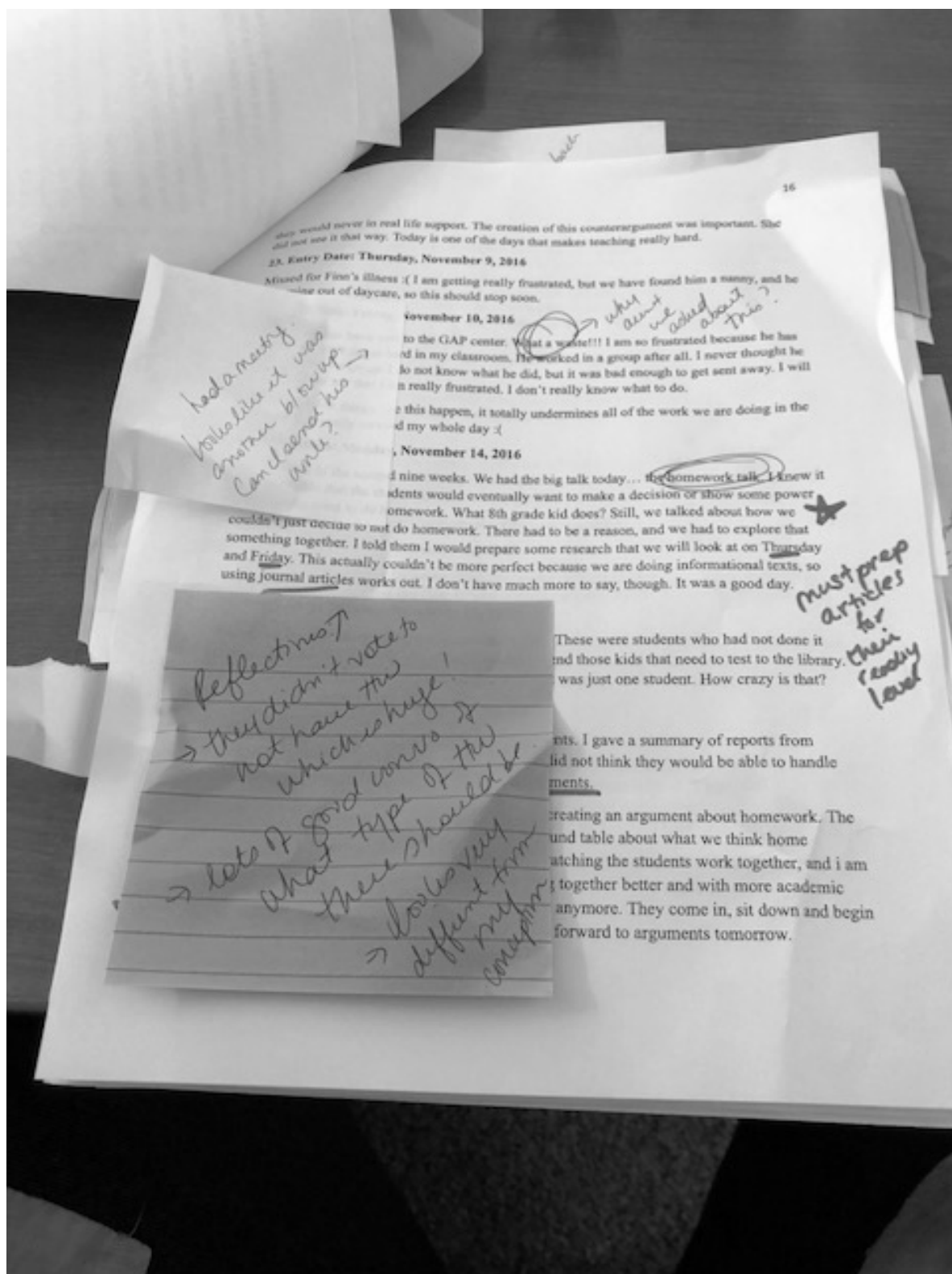*Figure B5*. Photograph of Research Journal

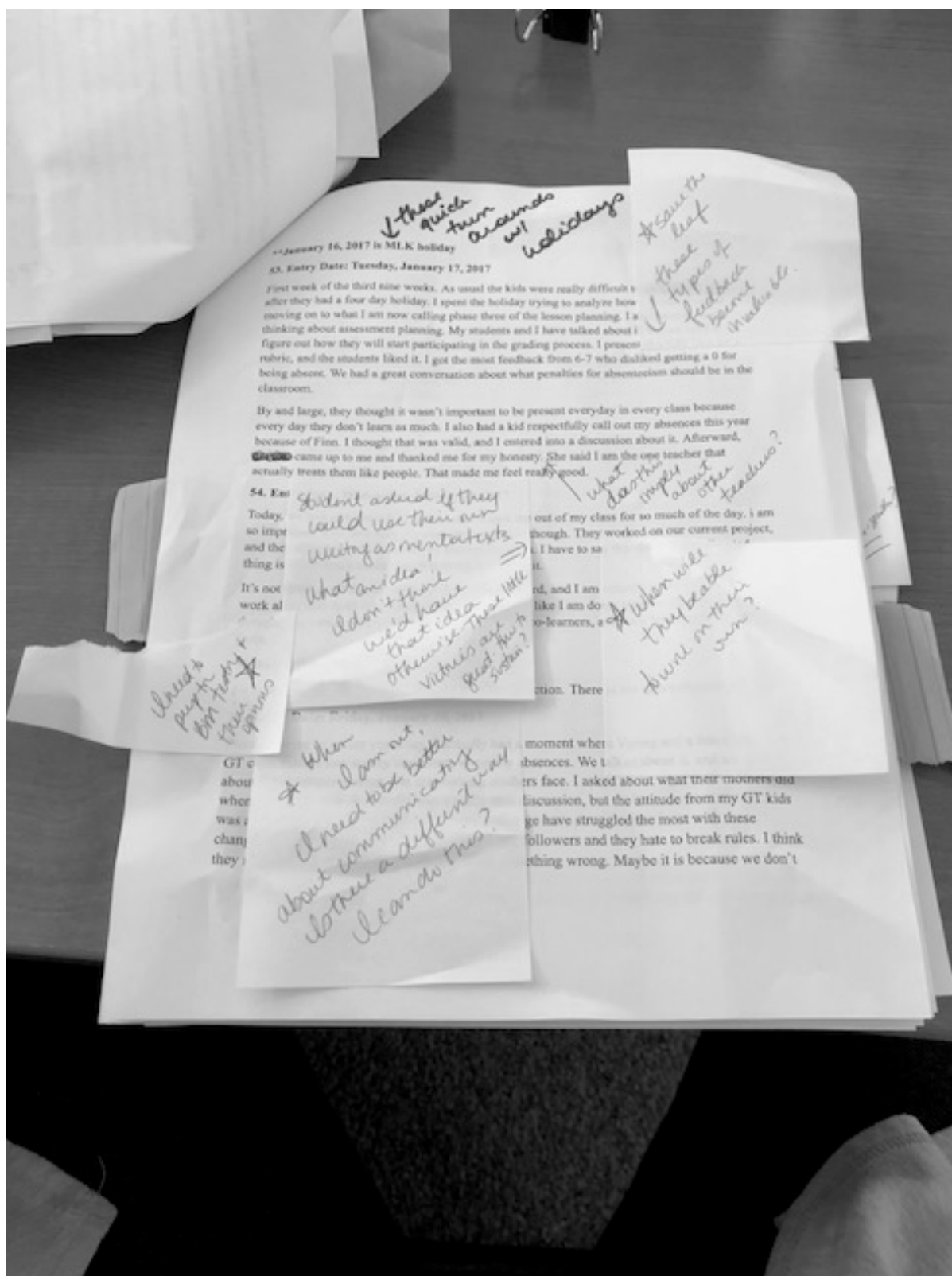*Figure B6*. Photograph of Research Journal

Figure B7. Photograph of Research Journal

Figure B8. Photograph of Research Journal