

TEACHERS' DEFICIT THINKING AND PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATIONS:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EFFICACY AND LONG-TERM STUDENT OUTCOMES

by

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(Under the Direction of Sheneka Williams)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research case study was to find opportunities for teachers to engage with parents as a way of addressing deficit thinking. Teachers were asked to engage with parents through the use of an online tool, Class Dojo, and parent conference times were increased to a four-hour block with the assignment of an interpreter. Teachers were interviewed one on one, through focus groups, and artifacts were collected. Teachers perceived language as a barrier. Additionally, they felt that families lacked value in education. These perceptions did not change through continuous opportunities to engage with parents. Additionally, the AR team made the following conclusions: (a) given the necessary tools, teachers will make an attempt to improve communication with parents; (b) it is not enough to address deficit thinking through increased face time with parents of a culturally different background than teachers; and (c) addressing deficit thinking is a slow process that requires a great deal of reflection.

INDEX WORDS: deficit thinking, parental engagement, case study, Latinx students

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DEDICATION

To Mami, Papi, Denise, Tony, Pamela, Danny, Ely, Dominick, Victoria, Josie

My family

Thank you for your constant support! I can finally make it to sibling brunch!

AND

Faysal Akbik

My husband

Thank you for always allowing me to realize my potential. I can get rid of the paper monsters

now. Flick!

AND

Zaki Akbik

My son

I love you forever, I love you for always, as long as I'm living my baby you'll be. Thank you for teaching me patience and a love so deep I can't describe. Realize that possible is always hidden in the impossible.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Local School Context.....	2
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Moving toward Change.....	7
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
Deficit Thinking in Education .....	9
Teachers’ Perceptions .....	12
Addressing Deficit Thinking.....	14
Gaps in the Literature.....	18
3 METHODOLOGY .....	19
The Action Research Approach .....	19
Entry Process .....	20
Case Study Action Research as Qualitative Inquiry .....	24
Data Collection .....	25
Data Analysis .....	27

	Coding.....	28
	Validity and Reliability.....	29
	Roadblocks and Limitations .....	30
	The Promise of Action Research .....	31
4	CASE STUDY .....	34
	Local School Context.....	35
	Pre-Step: Context and Purpose .....	36
	The AR Team.....	38
	Main Steps .....	41
	Story and Outcomes .....	45
	Research Reflection .....	47
5	KEY FINDINGS.....	48
	Research Question #1 .....	49
	Research Question #2 .....	59
	Additional Findings .....	65
	Summary.....	66
6	ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	68
	Analysis.....	68
	Conclusions.....	70
	Implications.....	72
	Future Research .....	74
	Summary.....	75
	REFERENCES .....	76



APPENDICES

A STUDIES ON DISPORPORTIONALITY .....82

B STUDIES ON COUNTERING DEFICT THINKING.....84

C CONSENT FORM.....85

D DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN .....87

E PARENT SURVEY RESPONSES.....89

F INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....93

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Qualitative Data and Analysis Approach for Each Research Question.....	27
Table 2: Four Categories of Deficit Thinking.....	29
Table 3: Initial Interview Themes and Responses .....	50
Table 4: Follow up on ClassDojo Themes and Responses .....	54
Table 5: Parent Conference Themes and Responses .....	57
Table 6: Individual Teacher Perceptions of Parental Involvement and Teacher’s Role.....	60
Table 7: Teacher Perceptions through the Categorical Lens of Deficit Thinking .....	61
Table 8: Individual Teacher Perceptions through the Categorical Lens of Deficit Thinking.....	64

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: DES State Rating.....	3
Figure 2: Elementary School Comparison.....	3
Figure 3: Demographics of DES.....	4
Figure 4: Deficit Thinking Cycle.....	6
Figure 5: Research Goal.....	7
Figure 6: The Action Research Cycle.....	22
Figure 7: Roles of the AR Team.....	38
Figure 8: Perceived Barriers to Teachers in Parent Communication.....	58

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When I began a doctoral program, I was working as an Assistant Principal in a large metropolitan district in the Southeast. During this time, I was working towards restructuring the academic programs within a diverse school that served a growing Latinx population. While this was not my first time working with Latinx students, it was the first time that I experienced the disparities between schools and the opportunities that were afforded to more affluent students. These disparities were also seen within the school itself, especially in how teachers communicated with parents. I found that teachers spent a considerable amount of time building relationships with the parents of students that came from White middle-class households, while the relationships with the Latinx community were not as strong. While language was a barrier in communication, teachers assumed that parents in the Latinx community did not value education as much as other parents. At the time, I could not find a way to define the phenomenon that I continued to see in the school house. I did not feel comfortable with the term racism, since it did not fall into what most would see as outwardly racist, but it was an attitude that I saw in the schools I worked in across the United States. In research, I found that the term “deficit thinking” most clearly defined what I had seen. It is the belief that students who fail in school do so due to “internal deficits or deficiencies” (Valencia, 1997, p. 2). Valencia (1997) went on to state, “In the light of the long-standing existence of deficit thinking and its powerful influence on educational practice, it is incongruous that very little has been written on the concept of deficit

thinking” (p. 2). Deficit thinking had an impact on the expectations educators had on students which in turn to lower performance.

Recently, I was afforded the opportunity to lead an elementary school as a school principal that had been on every list within the state labeling it as nothing more than failing. In this school, I saw many of the same teachers with the same attitudes with the additional element of large teacher turnover. At this time, I found the need to explore ways to challenge the perceptions of Latinx students and their families. As a Latina educator, this research became a personal endeavor into finding ways of facilitating the relationships between Spanish speaking parents and English-speaking teachers.

### **Local School Context**

Desmond Elementary School (DES)<sup>1</sup> is a Title I Pre-K through grade 5 elementary school in a metropolitan area in the Southeast. With a student-teacher ratio of 15:1, DES offers a wide spectrum of compensatory and selected programs to ensure the progress and achievement of all students. Within these programs, 76.4% are enrolled in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 79.5% are enrolled in the Early Intervention Programs and 6% are enrolled in Special Education. Additionally, DES offers music, art, physical education, health, and science enrichment courses for K-5 students. Out of the 873 students who attend DES, 91% receive free or reduced lunch. Prior to the 2017-2018 school year, student performance in the standardized state assessment was poor and was a reflection of the school’s overall grade from the state (Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> District, school, and individuals’ names are all pseudonyms

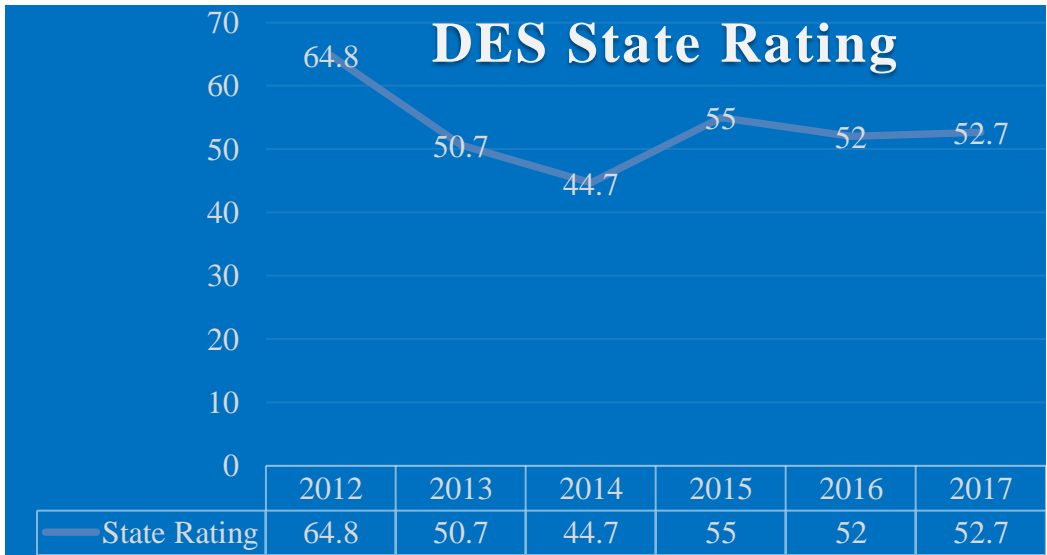


Figure 1. DES State Rating, 2012-2017 (GaDOE, retrieved May 2017 ).

When compared to other elementary schools within the district with similar demographics, which includes a large Latinx/Hispanic community combined with low socioeconomic status, the academic performance of students at DES falls short (Figure 2).

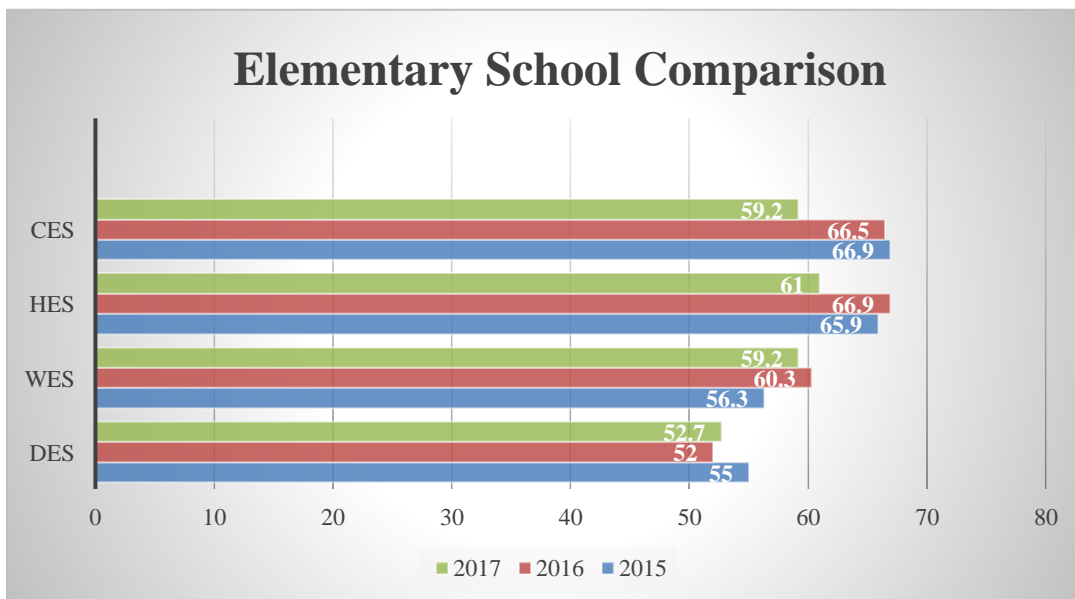


Figure 2. Elementary School Comparison

Scores indicate that the four schools have overall systematic concerns that continue to fail Latinx students, yet Desmond had the lowest scores in the region three years in a row. Throughout the last few years, teachers have been caught in a remediation cycle in attempts to address the needs reflected on state assessments and district benchmarks. The school feeds into a middle school and a high school with very similar demographics (Figure 3).

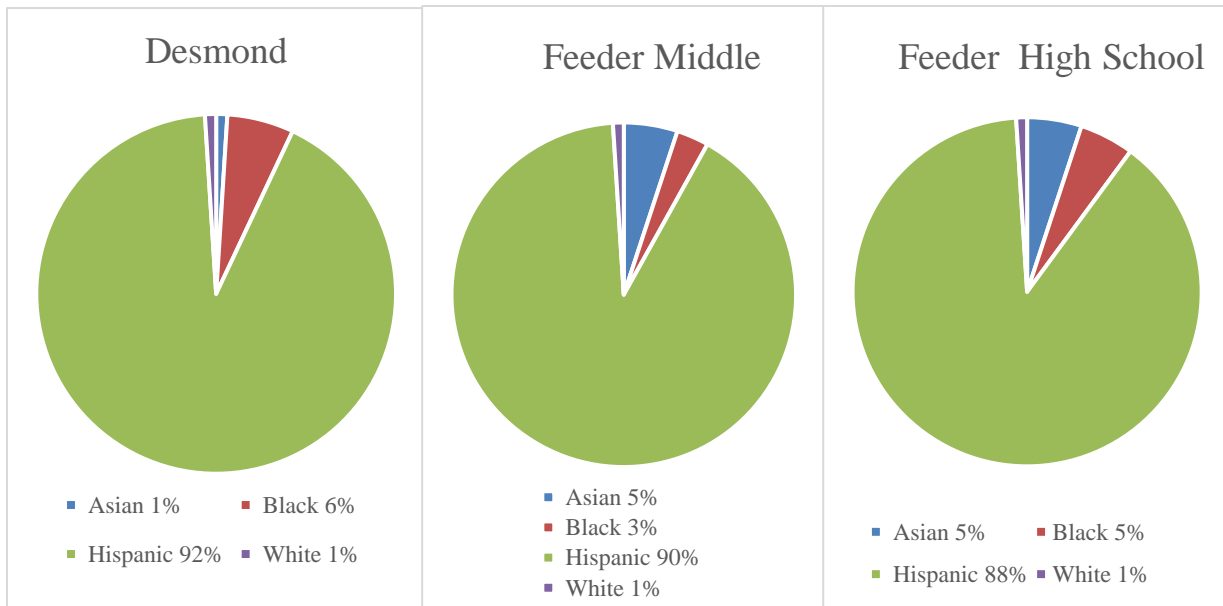


Figure 3. Demographics of DES and middle and high school in feeder pattern (GOSA, retrieved February 2019) .

In speaking with other leaders in the cluster, I have found that parent participation within the cluster is lacking. Additionally, other leaders acknowledged the fact that historically, DES has had the lowest attendance in parent workshops hosted by the cluster.

### Problem Framing

Teachers and stakeholders at DES work extensively to look at data and differentiate instruction for students. However, there is a need to work towards ensuring that we review our biases and perceptions in order to provide students with opportunities for success. In efforts to differentiate, some teachers are making assumptions and excuses that create roadblocks for

student success. According to Nieto (2010), “teachers are not disconnected from society, but deeply embedded within it, they relate in complicated ways with the political ideologies that surround them” (p. 30). The current sociopolitical situation occurring within the school community has impacted the way teachers have addressed student needs for years. Lack of student success leads to teachers exhibiting low levels of self-efficacy and a decline in staff morale.

I aimed to improve DES by undertaking an action research problem that worked towards finding opportunities for teachers to engage with parents as a first step in combating deficit thinking. In the current context, teachers hold the long-standing view that “linguistic differences lead to trouble, conflict, and school failure” (Valencia, 1997). In this context, the view of linguistic differences is seen as a deficit rather than just a difference. Action research is the appropriate method to look at the issue as it allows me to work collaboratively with teachers and stakeholders to develop interventions and supports. Our teachers truly care about our students, but personal biases and past experiences often create roadblocks towards potential success. By taking a look at our personal beliefs matched with best practices, we can work towards creating an environment that supports to continuous growth of our students. Thus, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

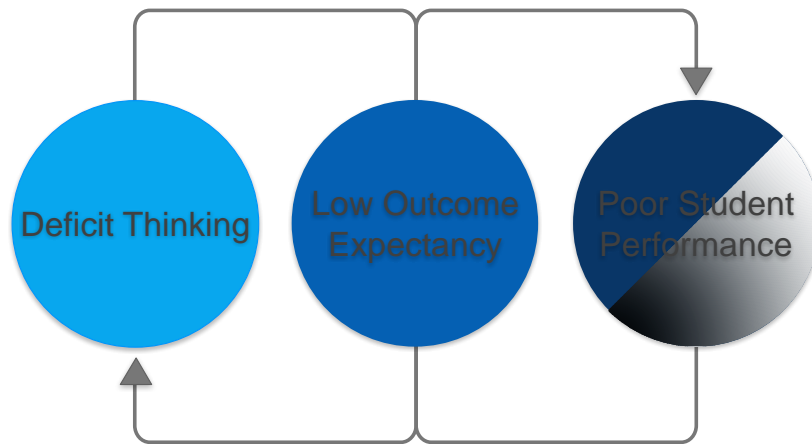
- How can an AR team encourage teachers to communicate more frequently with parents?
- How do teachers’ perceptions change as they interact more with parents in the community?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of the action research is to create a space in which members of the community can address how school culture is defined within the community and work towards

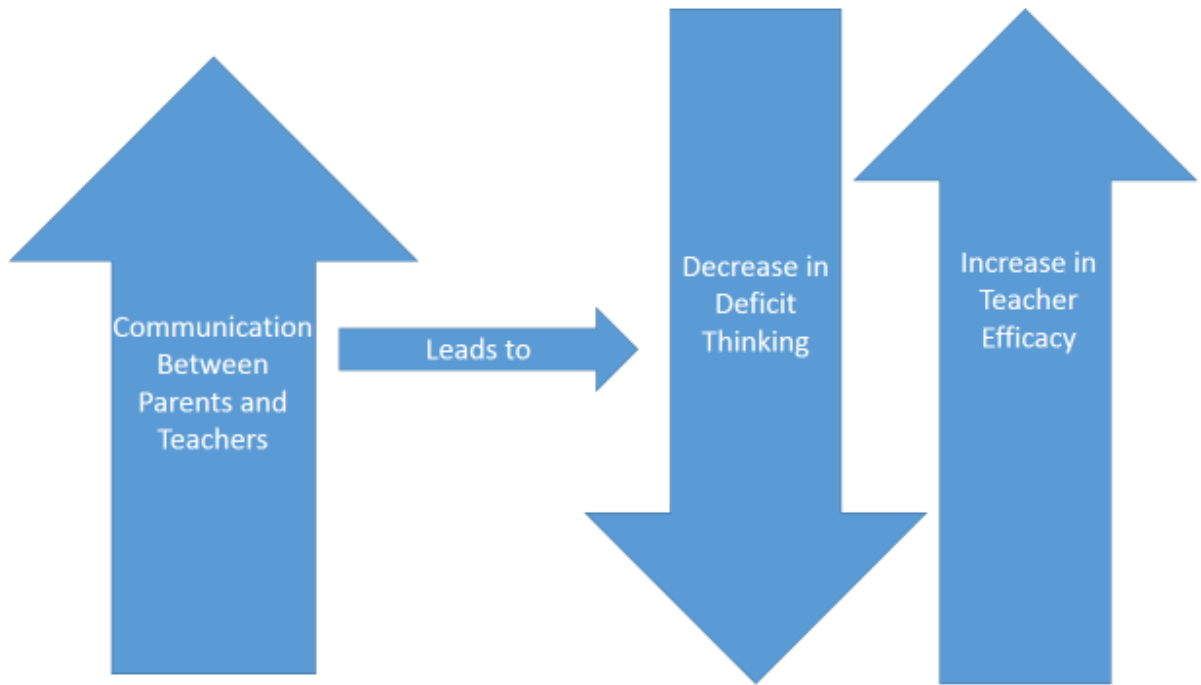


combating deficit thinking as it relates to linguistic differences. When members of a community share a particular culture, they become invested in continuous progress. Nieto (2010) sees culture as: “dynamic; multifaceted; embedded in context; influenced by social, economic, and political factors; created and socially constructed; learned; and dialectical” (p.79). Due to the various characteristics that impact culture, the purpose of this action research is for the members of the school community to grow both collectively and individually. The action research will address deficit thinking by creating opportunities for teachers to have better opportunities to engage with parents and build a school culture that promotes student success. The goal is to move beyond the cycle of student failure due to deficit thinking (Figure 3) towards a more dynamic approach through by increasing parent communication.



*Figure 4. Deficit Thinking Cycle*

By engaging in action research, teachers are able to develop a sense of purpose and ownership for the work beyond a professional learning workshop. The team will look for ways of increasing communication between parents and teachers which will potentially lead to a decrease in deficit thinking and an increase in teacher efficacy (See Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Research Goal*

The AR team examined local resources available, current school practices, and technology resources to develop ways to engage parents in the school community to achieve its goal.

### **Moving toward Change**

Educational policy conversations have included equity and justice for diverse student populations since the Civil Rights Movement (Nieto 2010, Cuban 2009, Milner 2010). *Brown vs. Board of Education* worked against policies and laws that support between school segregation in 1954, but our schools and society continue to see segregation in various forms within our

school districts, school buildings, and classrooms. Policy and laws allow for de facto segregation where more students are more segregated now than in the 1990s (Reardon and Owens, 2014). . We either actively ignore what occurs in our school houses or fail to notice. Our mindset and way of thinking have a significant impact on future generations, but few of us engage in the cognitive dissonance that challenges our personal cultural biases and allows us to see how our intentions to help children creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure rather than success (Delpit, 2006). More than 60 years have passed since we have ruled de jure segregation unconstitutional, yet our classrooms are more segregated than ever as we develop preconceived expectations for children based on standardized assessments within the first few days of the school year in a failed attempt to differentiate instruction. The following chapter addresses these issues through an in-depth analysis of the literature that addresses how deficit thinking is embedded implicitly into our school system and impacts the core of teaching and learning especially for Latinx students in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the literature review is to analyze the body of research that addresses deficit thinking in schools. The complexity of deficit thinking is multilayered and spans across various areas of research. The purpose of this literature review is to unfold how deficit thinking has seeped into our educational programs. In order to address this phenomenon, this chapter will review: (a) the definition of deficit thinking, (b) the impact of deficit thinking as it relates to the educational trajectory of various groups of students, (c) deficit thinking through the lens of self-efficacy, and (d) how researchers have worked towards addressing deficit thinking.

#### **Deficit Thinking in Education**

For the purpose of this research study, deficit thinking is defined as the belief that a student's failure is due internal deficits or deficiencies such as low socioeconomic status, non-dominant race or ethnicity, or use of non-dominant language at home (Valencia, 1997). These are the same indicators used when the federal and state government agencies determine if students are considered at-risk for accountability measures, which perpetuates deficit thinking in our educational institutions. McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Heilig (2008) argue that children in schools are seen as either assets or liabilities depending on their backgrounds. The authors noted that although the accountability measures were intended for improving educational opportunities for all, there has been a significant negative impact on students who were "poor, immigrant, English-language learning, African American, or Latino" (p. 37). Milner (2010) noticed that as

teachers focused on the achievement gap, the difference in educational attainment between students who are White in good socioeconomic standing versus students coming from culturally and linguistically diverse households grew, possibly due to the fact that teachers designed their instruction with the belief that “culturally diverse students are underachievers, poorly prepared and lagging behind White classmates” (p. 9). As teachers are trained to differentiate between the needs of students, we see students fail and receive the blame for their failure based on the assumption that various groups within our society have deficits that prevent them from achieving academic excellence (Milner,2010).

Delpit (2006), links this to the “culture of power” defined by five aspects:

1. “Issues of power are enacted in classrooms
2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is there is a ‘culture of power
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture who has power.
4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
5. Those with power are frequently least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existence. Those with the less power are most aware of its existence.” (p.24).

The “culture of power” is White middle class normative expectation. Delpit (2006) sees teachers as being in the “ideal” in helping students of different culture backgrounds to engage in dialogue by “being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen, no, to *hear*, what they say” (p.47).

## **Disproportionality: The Impact of Deficit Thinking**

One of the strongest indicators of this deficit thinking is the disproportionality that is found in our schools' instructional programs. Very little has changed since 1970 when Ray Rist's study, "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectation," was published, describing how teachers have different expectations for students based on their initial perceptions of the child. Rist (1970) found that teachers began determining whether or not students were going to be successful based on their parents and appearance and provided them with the instruction based on the results they expected from each child starting as early as Kindergarten. In doing so, teachers provided limited instruction to students they deemed were poor performers. According to Rist (1970), "to understand what the teacher considered as 'success,' one would have to examine her perception of the larger society and whom in that larger society she perceived as successful" (p. 149). Teachers' low expectations for students from diverse backgrounds is a recurring theme throughout research in urban education. Teachers' expectations can impact the way teachers interact with parents (Lightfoot, 2004; Horvat, Weiniger, & Lareua, 2003), discipline students (Skiba, et al., 2011), allow them access to accelerated and rigorous learning (Ford & Grantham, 2003, Bruton & Robles-Pina, 2009), and refer them for special education. The following table reviews some of the empirical studies that have determined the disproportionality of educational opportunities offered to students due to their backgrounds. Appendix A provides a table with an overview of research on disproportionality that was reviewed for this study.

Teachers are responsible for both negative and positive referrals; thus, their personal perceptions of students have a direct impact on their educational trajectory. Bruton and Robles-Pina (2009) found that in order to change the outcome of underachievement for students of color,

there needed to be a change in “teacher disposition through self-reflection and education, recognition of deficit thinking and its effect, communicating high academic expectations to Hispanic students, and the implementation of a curriculum that demands equalitarian instruction for all students” (p. 47).

## **Teachers’ Perceptions**

### **Self-Efficacy**

Guyton and Wesche (2005) concluded that “teacher’s beliefs in their personal teaching efficacy were positively related to teachers’ maintenance of a secure, accepting classroom climate” (p. 25). Self-efficacy has been identified as one of the most influential factors in determining teacher performance and student outcome. Hoy and Miskel (2013) define teacher efficacy as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute a course of action required to successfully accomplish a specific task in a particular context” (p.163). The teacher efficacy framework suggests that highly effective teachers exhibit high levels of self-efficacy in their belief that students can learn without regard to external factors such as family background, IQ, and school conditions. On the contrary, those who believed they have little control over student achievement are less likely to initiate behaviors that support student growth. Thus, if a teacher feels capable of delivering instruction to a class, that teacher is more likely to perform more efficiently than one with the same skill set that does not have self-efficacy. Hoy and Miskel (2013) explain self-efficacy in the following way:

- Individuals who have stronger beliefs about their capabilities are more successful and persistent in their efforts.
- Individuals tend to avoid tasks and situations that exceed their capacity.
- Individuals seek activities they judge themselves capable of handling.

- Individuals develop self-efficacy through mastery experiences, modeling, persuasion, and physiological arousal. (p.162)

Gibson and Dembo (1984) conducted a three-phase study to develop an instrument to measure teacher efficacy as defined by Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. According to data gathered in phase 1 and 2, their Teacher Efficacy Scale supported Bandura's theory that "one's behavior is determined by both a general outcome of expectancy (belief that behavior will lead to outcomes) as well as a sense of self-efficacy (belief that one has the requisite skills to bring about the outcome)" (p. 574). It is important that teachers are not only efficacious in typical classroom practices, but also in the area of multicultural education and equity pedagogy to meet the needs of the population. Following Gibson and Dembo's (1984) development of the teacher self-efficacy scale, several researchers have combined Gibson and Dembo's findings with multicultural education and equity pedagogy research to create tools to measure multicultural efficacy.

### **Multicultural Efficacy**

Researchers have found that although teacher preparation courses include lessons on culturally relevant pedagogy, and multicultural education, the level of teacher efficacy within these programs vary significantly (Martin & D'Agostino-Kalniz, 2015; Benton Borghi & Chang 2012; Siwatu, 2011). With most of the research based on responses from white-middle class women, teacher efficacy was dependent on their experiences. Yang and Montgomery (2011) found that cultural competence consists of knowledge and praxis. To measure the degree of teacher knowledge and praxis, or application, of multicultural or culturally relevant pedagogy, several researchers have developed scales through the teacher efficacy lens (Martin & D'Agostino-Kalniz, 2015; Benton Borghi & Chang 2012; Siwatu, 2007, Guyton & Wesche,



2005). The results of the research, the majority of the subjects being preservice teachers and white-middle class women, found that although the preservice teachers were open to gain cultural awareness, their level of efficacy in the area of multicultural education was low. In all three research studies, it was apparent that preservice teachers are not necessarily entering the classroom with sufficient levels of efficacy to be able to support the needs of a diverse community. Yang and Montgomery (2011) found that given “an encouraging environment where they feel a sense of personal control (p. 14), teachers are “will be more likely to act as agents of change and practice culturally relevant pedagogy” (p. 14). Thus, developing an environment that supports the ideals behind a multicultural mindset can allow teacher efficacy to grow. For the research to be successful, teachers need to feel efficacious in the endeavor.

### **Addressing Deficit Thinking**

In order to begin moving away from deficit thinking, there needs to be a commitment towards understanding the relevance of culture in the school setting. Ladson-Billings (2014) defined culture as “an amalgamation of human activity, production, thought, and belief system.” A single culture has various layers embedded within its system making unique the area, group, or community. Within the topic of multicultural education lies a history of sociopolitical implications and the realities that we define multicultural education through services historically disadvantaged youth. Bennett (2001) describes multicultural education as “a hopeful and idealistic response to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s that developed into a Black Power movement and spread to include many other minority groups including women” (p.171). She divides 12 genres of multicultural education into four clusters: “curriculum reform,” “equity pedagogy,” “multicultural competence,” and “societal equity” (Bennett, 2001). Banks and Banks (1995) define equity pedagogy as “teaching strategies and classroom

environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society” (p.152). Equity pedagogy is embedded within the hidden curriculum and culture of the school through student achievement expectations, discipline practices, and student grouping (Bennett, 2001). According to Bennett (2001), those with multicultural competence exhibit “dispositions of open-mindedness, and the absence of racial or cultural prejudice and knowledge about the worldviews and funds of knowledge associated with various culture groups, as well as the diversity within and across ethnic groups” (p.191). In much of the literature, multicultural education is viewed as a product rather than a process where educators become aware of facts and figures used to generalize groups of students.

Even with knowledge of multicultural needs, many teachers and educational leaders engage in overgeneralizations about communities that lead to deficit mentalities (Nelson and Guerra, 2014). The ideas include feeling that certain groups of parents are not as involved as others, students not having the background experiences to engage in higher levels of learning, and assuming students are at risk due to their demographic characteristics (Garcia and Guerra, 2004). On the other hand, some educators see multicultural education as all-inclusive failing to see that “everyone does not benefit equally from schooling as it currently operates, which is what multicultural education is trying to change. Movements dissipate when they lose a sense of who is their constituency and who is the opposition” (Sleeter, 1996, p. 243).

Although the ideals of multicultural education are universal, by attempting to focus on everyone, we fail to acknowledge the imbalance of power within our communities (Sleeter, 1996).

Schmeichel (2012) warns against culturally relevant pedagogy as a way to increase cultural

competency through a genealogical study of the discourse and history of culturally relevant practices. The researcher found that the history is intoxicated with deficit language by comparing different cultures to the white- middle class norm. Schmeichel concluded that this type of mentality does the opposite of what it is intended to do as it places one race or culture above all others. Although Schmeichel was asking for a complete dismissal of culturally relevant pedagogy, this is the area in which mental models need to shift. This can be made difficult when literature is filled with deficit language. Similarly, Lightfoot (2004) found that many articles discussing parental involvement see low-income, urban, and/or immigrant parents as “empty of useful knowledge” (p. 94). The idea that educators are the saviors of the poor perpetuates a deficit mentality. Rather than expecting students to assimilate to a particular norm, seeing students as resources to learn with and culture as something that is fluid rather than static, the deficit discourse can be acknowledged as an issue and overcome. This idea can, and should, create deep levels of cognitive dissonance since all educators are asked to challenge the ways in which they view their role within the educational system. Appendix B lists empirical research on how educators have worked against deficit thinking.

### **Connecting with Parents**

Deficit thinking is deeply embedded in school policy and practices. In order to begin to combat it, it is important to begin with teacher perceptions on community beliefs. In a longitudinal study Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001) found that:

1. Latinx parents want their students to pursue schooling beyond a K-12 education
2. The amount of time in the United States “does not lead towards negative attitudes toward schooling” (p. 576)

3. Latinx parents hold high expectations for their children, but the expectations are higher if students do well in school.
4. Through elementary school, a child's achievement is not linked to parents' expectations.

The last finding is most important to note since everyday discourse, educators discuss the link between parent expectations and student achievement. On the other hand, students are found to show more motivation and a higher interest in learning when parents are involved (Gonzalez-Dehass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005). Yull, Blitz, Thompson, and Murray (2014) conducted a participatory action research to help build partnerships between families and school with families of color. Parents in the study noted feeling that there was a lack of cultural enrichments, such as field trips to museums and live theater, a feeling of isolation, and overall colorblind racism and cultural ignorance. The AR allowed the district to change policies to address parent concerns in focus groups. On the other hand, in attempts to “normalize” what parental involvement looks like without taking into account the home environment, the school can create a barrier to possible meaningful interactions between the school and home (Parsons, Walseman, Jones, Knopf, & Blake, 2018). According to López, Scribner and Mahitivanichcha (2001), if parents are viewed in nonfavorable terms, then the expectation placed on them is minimal; relegating them to marginal players in the schooling process.” Their study worked towards identifying how a school revised their expectations of parental involvement and provide services that allowed parents to be engaged in various ways. Thus, in order to connect with parents, teachers and administrators need to also consider parent perceptions in the process.

## **Gaps in the Literature**

There seems to not be a large body of research connecting how teacher perceptions change with parental involvement. The following chapter addresses how this action research begins to address deficit thinking through developing opportunities for teachers to communicate and interact with parents on a more consistent basis. Through their funds of knowledge research, Luis Moll, et al, worked with teachers as researchers to find the rich cultural experiences in children's households outside of the four walls of the classroom. Concurrently, Delpit (2006) found that a great deal of academic research has found people of color to be "genetically inferior, culturally deprived, and verbally deficient" (p.31). The following action research case study directly asks teachers to process their perceptions in ways that go against their current mental models.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this action research case study was to work towards addressing deficit thinking through a series of interventions that allowed teachers opportunities to engage with parents, reflect on their perceptions, and receive feedback. As detailed in Chapter 2, the body of research has placed an emphasis on the parent and researcher perspective of deficit thinking, but little research has been collected about the teacher's perspective. Through a series of one on one semi structured interviews, written feedback, artifact collection, and focus group transcriptions, data was gathered and triangulated in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- How can an action research (AR) team encourage teachers to communicate more frequently with parents?
- How do teachers' perceptions change as they interact more with parents in the community?

#### **The Action Research Approach**

In order to explore interventions, action research cannot be done alone and requires the identification and the creation of an AR team, which consists of a group of individuals collaborating towards a common goal or purpose as researchers. According to Sagor (2011), action research is “any investigation conducted by the person or the people empowered to take action concerning their own actions, for the purpose of improving their future actions” (p.5). The purpose of the following section is to discuss the process of engagement with those involved

in the action research process for DES. This includes the entry process, identification of major stakeholders, contracting process, and the cycles of intervention.

## **Entry Process**

### **Engagement of Stakeholders**

The purpose of this AR case study was to engage teachers in reflection and intervention in the area of deficit thinking. Teachers that had volunteered for the family and parent partnership program were asked if they wanted to be part of the research study. All participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to the research starting (Appendix A). Out of the group, informal teacher leaders were identified and approached to be part of the AR team due to having a strong interest in assisting with the missions of building relationships between teachers and parents. The participants included in the case study were four teachers who were identified as wanting to receive support in actively engaging parents in the community. The term “research participants” is used to indicate that research is being done with the participants through the case study rather than simply stating that data is being gathered about the participant (Simons, 2009).

### **District Engagement**

District engagement entails the alignment of the action research project and the districts’ goals, mission, and vision. This was necessary in order to have research approval, but also an integral part of job-embedded research. In reviewing the district’s strategic plan (Appendix B), the action research was aligned to three of the overall goals:

- 1) Goal I: Student Success with Equity Access
  - “Provide equitable access to academically rigorous courses and programs”
- 2) Goal II: Stakeholder Engagement
  - “Increase stakeholder involvement and engagement”

### 3) Goal III: Self-Efficacy and Excellence

- “Improve district processes to attract highly qualified staff”
- “Develop a highly effective and an accountable workforce”
- “Retain highly qualified staff” (DCSC, Strategic Plan)

The AR team worked toward providing opportunities for the school community to engage in dialogue that allowed them to work towards building shared responsibility and leadership by creating programs that value the cultural differences in the community. The goal was to provide a model for schools that have communities serve a diverse student population through the development of strategies that support community input aimed towards student growth and achievement. By aligning the action research to organizational goals, the research findings can be used in the district as a guide towards providing support to teachers with parental engagement.

#### **Contracting Process and Initial Steps**

The AR team included three teachers, one academic coach, two assistant principals, and me. All 15 teachers and two administrators in the school committee signed the consent form, but only eight members were included in the study as they were the most consistent and dedicated to the research and reflection. The AR team consisted of two groups: (a) the first group included an academic coach, ESOL teacher, an Assistant Principal, and me; (b) the second group consisted of five general classroom teachers. Although both groups shared the responsibility of decision-making, they played different roles in the AR process. During the initial meeting, we discussed the research problem and analyzed parent feedback surveys that were given to a group of parents at the beginning of the year (Appendix C) and the themes that we found in the semi structured interviews. This allowed us to determine our focus: Increase opportunities for teacher to communicate with parents. While we were working towards increasing these opportunities, we



decided that we would have reflective interviews with teachers and provide them feedback on next steps. These interviews, along with a collection of artifacts were used for data analysis purposes and next steps.

### Action Research Approach

The Action Research involved three cycles (Figure 6). The figure currently demonstrates the cycles, modeled after Coghlan and Brannick’s (2014) Spiral of Action Research Cycle. The AR team met at the end of each cycle of intervention.

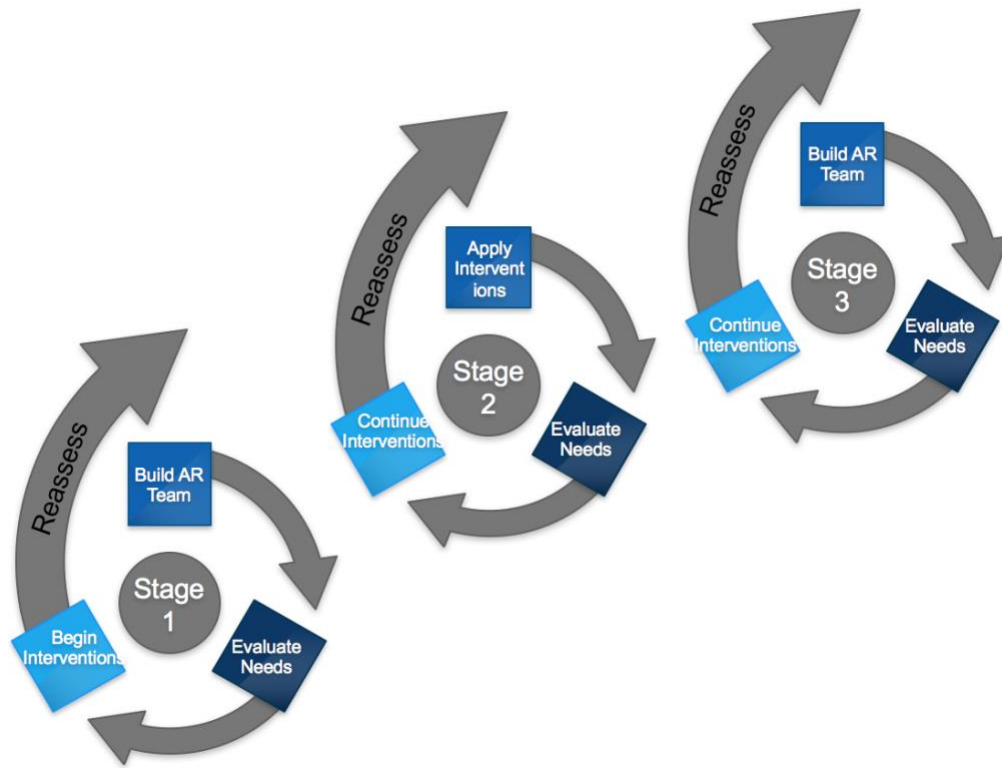


Figure 6. The Action Research Cycle, diagram based on the work of Coghlan and Brannick (2014).

### Intervention Cycle 1

After analyzing initial data, deciding on research questions, choosing research participants, and setting the focus on increasing parent communication, the AR team decided to

begin by providing teachers with more time to meet with parents during parent teacher conferences. Traditionally, a small group of parents met with teachers for approximately 5-10 minutes after school during teacher conference night twice a year. They designated a two-hour block for this night. Using teacher input, the AR team decided to move parent teacher conferences to a four-hour block during the day twice a year. Observations occurred during the parent teacher conferences. After brief observations, the AR team developed questions for the teachers to respond to using Forms. After analyzing teacher written feedback, a follow up interview was conducted.

### **Intervention Cycle 2**

After the first iteration, the AR team decided that teachers needed to have more opportunities to interact with parents in the community. At the beginning of the school year, the school had adopted the use of ClassDojo as a tool for teachers to report behaviors to parents. The teachers were then trained on how to use ClassDojo's chat feature and Class Story to communicate with parents more frequently. Following a few weeks of using the program, teacher interviews were conducted, artifacts were collected, focus group was conducted, and data was analyzed by the AR team to decide on the next intervention cycle.

### **Intervention Cycle 3**

After a discussion with the AR team, research participants, and teachers on the school community committee, it was decided that the last intervention cycle was to consist of supporting teachers in obtaining and training room parents to develop a deeper relationship with the community. Teachers were asked to use ClassDojo to reach out to parents and to assign one of the parents in their homeroom class as a room parent. A meeting was held to train parents, but only four parents, out of 34 homeroom classes. The AR team decided to continue to work with

teachers on ensuring that parents were connected to ClassDojo and develop steps to communicate with parents that were not connected to ClassDojo through the use of an interpreter.

### **Case Study Action Research as Qualitative Inquiry**

The concept of deficit thinking is something that cannot be quantitatively measured. Thus, a qualitative approach was taken to analyze perspectives and find themes in discussion. When determining how to frame the research and collect necessary data to answer the research questions, the AR team decided it was best to use the case study approach. According to Simons (2009), a case study includes participant perspectives, is responsive to the needs of the audience, and is “attentive to the process and dynamics of implementation and interpretation of events in their socio-political contexts” (p. 23)

Concurrently, a case study is useful when documenting multiple perspectives, and for “exploring and understanding the process and dynamics of change.” Since the purpose of this research is focused on perceptions and their relationship to deficit thinking, both of which cannot be quantitatively measured, the case study approach allowed the AR team to take a qualitative inquiry approach through the case study.

Yin (2018) maintains the idea that a case study is most relevant “the more that your questions seek to explain some contemporary circumstance” (p. 4). He emphasizes the importance of choosing a case study to answer *how* or *why* questions. In this case, the following research questions are relevant to the application of case study research:

- How can an AR team encourage teachers to communicate more frequently with parents?
- How do teachers’ perceptions change as they interact more with parents in the community?

The case is bound within the context of DES. The members of the AR team and the teacher participants all work full time at the school and were intrinsically motivated to challenge deficit thinking.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection began immediately after district research approval and participants signing consent forms. Data was collected through interviews, observations, artifacts, and focus groups (Table 1). Various forms of data collection allow for triangulation. According to Maxwell (2013), triangulation “involved using different methods as a check on one another, seeing of methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion” (p.102).

**Interviews.** I collected all interview data and sat down with the AR team to analyze the transcripts. The AR team gave suggestions on next steps and other questions that should be asked during the interview. According to Simons (2009) interviews have four major purposes:

1. To gain the interviewee’s perspective on a topic.
2. To promote active engagement and learning for the interviewer and interview on the topic.
3. The flexibility to change direction, probe a topic, or engage in dialogue that deepens the understanding of the topic.
4. Allows for unobservable feelings to be uncovered.

The semi-structured interview format begins with a set of questions (Appendix D) and then the interview unfolds itself into a conversation as the research participant answers the questions. Structure allows us to remain on task, while the open conversation allowed both myself and the person being interviewed the ability to engage in meaningful conversation.

**Unstructured Participant Observations.** According to Maxwell (2013), observation can enable you to draw inferences about [a person's] perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data" (p.103). Observations occurred during conferences between teachers and parents during the first cycle. There were limitations in this setting due to various aspects. First, as the principal of the school, teachers and parents were not able to disconnect my role as a school leader and that of a researcher. Although it was clearly stated that no punitive action would be taken and a positive rapport was established, the concept of "deficit thinking" made participants hyper aware of their thoughts and actions. Additionally, my role as a principal did not allow me to focus on observing the conferences since I was managing the logistics of the day. While Yin (2018) describes participant observation as "a special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer," (p. 123), I found it occasionally difficult to balance.

**Focus Groups.** Yin (2018) describes focus groups as the counterpart to the interview. The focus group is a discussion moderated by the research which allows participants to discuss some aspect of the case study (Yin, 2018). The focus group discussions allowed for participants to come together and discuss deficit thinking. While the primary purpose was to collect data on participants thoughts, there were secondary benefits as well. During the interviews, I worked with the participants individually to offer next steps in order for them to improve their practice. Alternatively, the focus group setting allowed the participants to discuss their thoughts about the case, review their trails and errors, and work collectively to provide each other with support.

**Artifacts.** Yin (2018) describes artifacts as one of the six sources of evidence that provide valuable data for a case study. Artifacts collected include conference logs and communication to parents using ClassDojo. In addition to the individual interviews, the artifacts

collected throughout the research provided substantial data on how teachers were communicating with parents in the community.

Additionally, during the coding process, analytical memos provided insight as to how the AR team made decisions about interventions. Saldana (2016) describes analytical memos as being “comparable to research journal entries or blogs—a place to ‘dump your brain’ about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation” (p.42 ). Since action research was a team effort, analytical memos provided insight on the thinking of the researchers throughout the process.

Table 1

*Qualitative Data and Analysis Approach for Each Research Question*

Research Question	Qualitative Data Collected	Analysis Approach
1. How can an AR team encourage teachers to communicate more frequently with parents?	Focus Group Data Analytical Memos Conference Logs	In Vivo Coding Concept Coding
2. How do teachers’ perceptions change as they interact more with parents in the community?	Semi structured Interviews Written reflections Focus Group data Artifacts of teacher communication	In Vivo Coding Concept Coding

*Note.* All data was triangulated to ensure validity.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of data occurred throughout the research process as it informed the AR team on next steps. Data analysis efforts were concentrated on the presence of deficit thinking as defined by Valencia (1997): “The deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory – positing the student who fails in school does so because of deficits or deficiencies.” All data was analyzed in terms of the characteristics of deficit thinking as described by Valencia (1997): “1) blaming the victim; 2) oppression; 3) pseudoscience; 4) temporal changes; 5) educability; 6)

heterodoxy.” The following table describes how data describes the triangulation of data for the case study.

### **Coding**

The coding process was completed by the three members of the AR team, including myself, in a collaborative effort. The purpose of collaborative coding allowed for us to “cast a wider analytical net” (Saldana, 2016, p. 37). The two other members of the AR team both hold doctoral degrees and had experience in coding. Due to the fact that we were coding data as we went through the AR cycle, their experience proved to be invaluable in ensuring validity of our analysis. We did not include the entire AR team in the process. Saldana (2016) suggests that “group dynamics suggest that a team meeting regularly to collectively code should consist of no more than five people. More than five individuals makes problem-solving and decision-making exponentially more difficult” (p. 37). We presented the analysis to the rest of the team during AR meetings to proceed with next steps.

Coding was completed in two cycles. The first cycle was the InVivo coding. According to Saldana (2016), InVivo coding, “uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record as codes” (p. 294). This allowed us as researchers to not be presumptuous with our data analysis. Furthermore, Saldana (2016) suggests the use of InVivo coding for beginning qualitative researchers. Pattern coding followed InVivo coding. Saldana (2016) stated that pattern coding, “organizes the corpus into sets, themes, or constructs and attributes meaning to the organization” (p. 296). The AR team aimed to classify and code the final data into four categories of Valencia’s (1997) characteristics of deficit thinking (Table 2).

Table 2

*Four Categories of Deficit Thinking*

Categories of Deficit Thinking	Meaning
Blaming the victim	The need to improve on the skills of the child rather than fix the system that perpetuate inequalities and racism.
Oppression	The use of authority and power to keep people in their place (ie compulsory ignorance laws and school segregation)
Educability	Referring to deficits or deficiencies based on culture, linguistic differences, families, socioeconomic background
Heterodoxy	Anti-deficit thinking

**Validity and Reliability**

The purpose of this research was to explore the presence of deficit thinking as teachers have more opportunities to engage with parents. Through the coding process, we analyzed trends using interview data, focus groups, written reflections, and documentation of parent interactions. We used Valencia’s (1997) classifications, *blaming the victim*, *oppression*, *educability*, and *heterodoxy*, to identify patterns.

**Construct Validity**

According to Yin (2018), to ensure construct validity the case study must have multiple sources of data/evidence and “have key informants review draft and case study reports” (p.24) The use of multiple data sources is evident through as listed above. The AR process aided in having key informants since members of the AR team regularly reviewed the data and provided input on the final report.



## **Internal Validity**

Yin (2018) states that internal validity is measured by the following criteria: “pattern matching, explanation building, addressing rival explanations, and using logic models” (p.45). Internal validity was achieved through the two-cycle coding process. The first cycle consisted of InVivo coding in which we found natural patterns in what was said, written, and observed. The next cycle of coding consisted of using Valencia’s classifications of deficit thinking to group the patterns.

## **External Validity**

According to Yin (2018), external validity is a test of whether or not the study is generalizable outside of the context. Researchers have found the presence of deficit thinking in schools, as discussed in Chapter 2. The purpose of the research study is to describe how teachers perceive students and parents after providing them with additional opportunities for interacting and communicating with parents. According to Yin, “descriptive case studies deal with the “how” of a situation” (p. 45). The sample size is too small to develop any statistical generalizations, but can be a springboard for further investigation into the topic.

## **Roadblocks and Limitations**

There were several roadblocks and limitations that the study needed to address. While they did not compromise the overall results of the study, they need to be considered when reviewing the results.

The first roadblock encountered was obtaining district research review board approval. The delay in approval condensed the original timeline of the research. In addition to the delay, I went out on maternity leave for 12 weeks. Due to this, the research covered two partial academic years. Teachers continued to meet with parents during my leave, but there was no

immediate data collection and reflection at that time. Data collection resumed during the following fall semester.

When I began my research at DES, the school was under state sanctions due to historically failing test scores. Due to this, teachers and administrators were engaged in restructuring the instructional programs. While the workload for teachers was already heavy, the workload at DES, along with the pressure from the district and the state to show what was dubbed as *quick wins* made it difficult to convince a team to add another layer of work. The team was limited to individuals who were passionate about taking a holistic approach toward school improvement.

While the research was conducted, I had to manage the political implications of serving as both the school leader and a member of the AR team. As both an administrative leader and researcher, I had to match the role I have within my career to the temporary function of the researcher. My goal in the project was to ensure a collaborative setting. To allow for the success of the action research, the barrier between administrator and teacher needed to be taken down when working towards meeting the goals set forth by the AR team. Ultimately, the overall process was determined by the members of the AR team.

### **The Promise of AR**

Action Research allows for a team to work together towards a common purpose. When discussing culture and social justice, AR allows for all members of the team to take part of the learning process. AR has the balance of both engaging in new ideas and action that leads to change. This is a shift in the power dynamics typically seen at the school between administrators and teachers, staff and parents, and district and school level leadership. It provides opportunities

for dialogue that encourages systemic changes in the mindset of individuals. This supports Freire's (2002) argument that states:

since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by discussants. (p. 89)

Typically, the school is structured so that knowledge and guidance takes a top-down approach. The district offers a structure communicated to administrators, and administrators communicate the structure to school stakeholders. The characteristics of AR do not allow for this structure, which challenges much of the traditional aspects of the management of a school house. Facing this challenge is necessary in order to address the traditional practices that have potentially supported the social injustices that occur within school communities.

This particular research study took a collective look at the deficit thinking that contributes to teacher low expectations. These low expectations contribute to the reason that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have continuously failed to achieve at the same rates as other students. The research had an emphasis on teachers as they are the first line of contact for individual students and have significant influence on school culture. As Nieto (2010) states, "school conditions and climate, in conjunction with attitudes and beliefs of educators that undergird the climate, can foster or hinder learning" (p. 35). Educational practices are a reflection of the mindset of the sociopolitical forces beyond the school community. By reflecting on our image of culture and the implications it has on educational

opportunities, we are able to make changes towards practice. The following chapter tells the story of DES through teacher reflections and insight.

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDY

DES is part of a large linguistically and culturally diverse school district in the Southeast. The school's population is 93% Latinx with 76.4% of students enrolled in the ESOL program, which does not match the diversity of the district. Prior to interviewing to work at DES, I researched the school's history and analyzed the school data. At the time, DES was on all of the state sanctioned list and the governor of the state was petitioning to take over the school. When I was going through a three-part interview process for DES, I ended each interview by asking the stakeholders what kind of leader they would like for the school and taking note of this for potential future use. The superintendent asked for a social justice leader and a fresh set of eyes. The regional superintendent wanted a turnaround leader who would be able to show quick wins. The parents asked for more communication between the school and home. The teachers at DES wanted a leader with an instructional vision.

I was hired in August 2018 and began working with teachers and students at DES and aimed every single day to make myself the principal they needed. In a single year, we made a 12.3 point gain in state scores and the state sanctions were removed. This did not mean that the work was finished or that we had sudden school turnaround, but it was a quick-win that helped with morale. Many of our students are still not reading and writing at grade level, but school turnaround is not a fast process.

## **Local School Context**

Desmond Elementary School (DES) is a Title I Pre-K through grade 5 elementary school in a metropolitan area in the Southeast. With a student-teacher ratio of 15:1, DES offers a wide spectrum of compensatory and selected programs to ensure the progress and achievement of all students. Within these programs, 76.4% are enrolled in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 79.5% are enrolled in the Early Intervention Programs and 6% are enrolled in Special Education. Additionally, DES offers music, art, physical education, health, and science enrichment courses for K-5 students. Out of the 873 students who attend DES, 91% receive free or reduced lunch. Prior to the 2017-2018 school year, student performance in the standardized state assessment was poor and was a reflection of the school's overall grade from the state. Between 2012 and 2013, DES State Rating dropped from 64.8 to 50.7, with an even larger decline in 2014 to 44.7. Scores were in the 50s until the 2017-2018 school year, my first year as a school principal at DES, when the score went up to 65.

Throughout the last few years, teachers have been caught in a remediation cycle in attempts to address the needs reflected on state assessments and district benchmarks. The school feeds into a middle school and a high school with very similar demographics (Figure 3 in Chapter 1). In speaking with other leaders in the cluster, I have found that parent participation within the cluster is lacking. Additionally, other leaders acknowledged the fact that historically, DES has had the lowest attendance in parent workshops hosted by the cluster.

The following chapter details one of the many interventions that took place during the 2017-2018 school year and continued into the 2018-2019 school year at DES. Although we worked on instructional strategies, embedded in the work was transforming the way teachers thought about our students and their families.

### **Pre-Step: Context and Purpose**

According to Coglan and Brannick (2014), the AR process begins with the *pre-step* which includes setting the context and establishing “collaborative relationships with those who have ownership” (p.10). The following section describes the context in terms of perspectives of parents and teachers regarding the school climate. Then, I describe the engagement of the AR team, the research participants, and their contributions to the research.

#### **Parent Perspective**

Upon my arrival at DES, I began having meetings with parents and stakeholders on a monthly basis called Coffee and Conversations. The meetings began with an overall topic where I shared with parents how to access various types of information in order to support students at home. Only two parents attended the first meeting held at the beginning of August. At that time, I realized that there was an issue with the way information was disseminated to the parents. More parents attended the second meeting, and by the end of August, half of the cafeteria was filled with parents. During the late August meeting, I distributed anonymous surveys for parents to complete. The survey asked basic questions about what the school was doing well and what needed to be improved. Across many of the survey answers, parents mentioned that communication with teachers as a concern.

#### **Teacher Perspective**

When teachers were surveyed at the beginning of the year, many of them felt that parents were disconnected from the school. Teachers believed that language was a barrier in communication, even though the school employed a bilingual assistant principal, a bilingual front office clerk, and an interpreter who was at the school twice a week to attend teacher conferences. In previous years, teachers communicated student behavior and assignments with

parents through an agenda planner that all students were required to purchase. As a new principal, I had not realized this was what the teachers used for communication; a week before school began, I committed the first of many mistakes when I told the company that were not going to purchase the planners. At the time, parents were expected to buy a planner even though many parents did not have the money to pay for it. I regained teachers' trust after suggesting the use of a free online tool that allowed for teachers to communicate behavior and assignments. ClassDojo became a schoolwide communication tool, although it took several months and the creation of an AR team for it to be used effectively.

In addition to language being seen as a barrier, many teachers felt that parents were not engaged with education. They felt that parents had too much going to be able to participate in school-related activities.

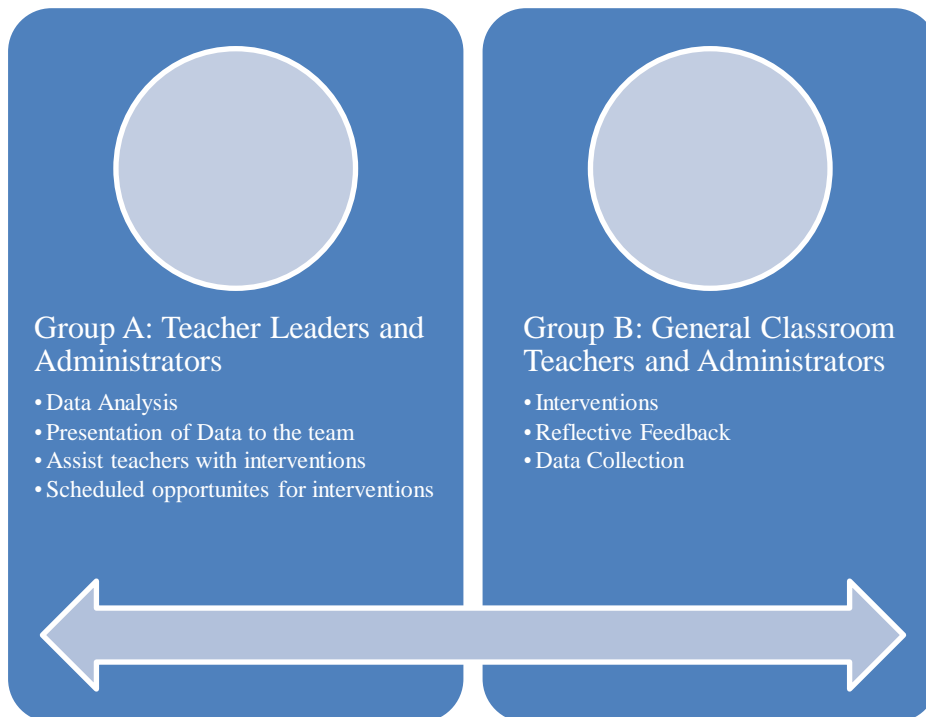
### **School Climate**

In the past few years, the school climate at DES did not promote the academic advancement of students. With high teacher turnover, it became a place where teachers who had difficulty in other schools transferred. One of the two assistant principals of the school began her teaching career at DES and has seen it transform from being one of the top performing schools in the region to one of the worst performing schools in the state. She referred to DES as a dumping ground for ineffective staff since parents in the community were not very vocal. When I arrived at DES, the culture was far from being student-centered. According to Nieto (2010), "school conditions and climate in conjunction with attitudes and beliefs of educators that undergird that climate can foster or hinder learning" (p. 35). With a few new teachers hired, we began to move toward restructuring the school climate.



## The AR Team

After spending a couple of months at the school getting to know the members of the community, I was able to approach several people about joining the AR team. Initially, I had asked one of the school committees to serve as the AR team, but due to the high demands of the school climate, I created another layer to the AR team to assist me with data analysis. All 15 teachers and two administrators in the school committee signed the consent form, but only eight members were included in the study as they were the most consistent and dedicated to the research and reflection. The AR team consisted of two groups: (a) the first group included an academic coach, ESOL teacher, an Assistant Principal, and me; (b) the second group consisted of five general classroom teachers. Although both groups shared the responsibility of decision-making, they played different roles in the AR process



**Figure 7.** Roles of the AR Team

Figure 7 shows the roles of the two AR teams, Group A and B. Although they had different roles, they participated in the decision-making process for the interventions conducted in the research.

### **Group A**

Group A was created as I was getting to know some of the teacher leaders at the school. Two of the members, the academic coach and the ESOL teacher, had previous experiences in coding and research which proved to be vital in the data analysis process. They provided complex feedback that allowed us to assist and support classroom teachers. Additionally, they taught me how to code teacher interviews and focus group transcriptions. This was a long and intentional process that allowed us to have meaningful conversations with individuals related to the topic of deficit thinking.

The Assistant Principal (AP) and I are bilingual and was able to provide connections with the parents in the community. Both the AP and I assisted teachers and parents communicating with each other when linguistic differences were present.

### **Group B**

Group B consisted of five teachers: Betty, Susan, Fiona, Denise, and Brian. These teachers provided me with feedback on the interventions through interviews and focus groups. They willingly volunteered to participate in the data collection process. After each interview and focus group, teachers were given next steps to assist them with parent communication. It is important to note that three of the participants, Betty, Susan, and Fiona, have personal relationships with each other outside the context DES. Those three are novice teachers, while Denise and Brian are both veteran teachers.

*Betty.* When the research began, Betty was a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. At the end of the 2017-2018 school year, Betty stated that she would prefer to move into the lower grade levels. She began teaching Kindergarten students at DES for the 2018-2019 school year. When asked to describe her teaching style, Debbie stated that she tries to be as interactive as possible. She explained, “I try to do as much interaction and modeling for sure with kindergarten.” Betty is in her second year of teaching and has preferred to work in Kindergarten this year. Betty participated in interviews and focus groups throughout the research project. Betty also provided written reflection about parent conferences.

*Fiona.* Fiona is a novice teacher with three years of teaching experience. Having taught first grade at another school, she provides a different type of insight compared to the novice teachers who have only taught at DES. When asked to describe her teaching style, Fiona stated that she has a “modern style” with “flexible seating.” She explained that she is “fun” because “learning can be fun!” She stated that her classroom is “organized chaos” so that students are able to move around and learn in different ways. During the 2018-2019 school year, Fiona was teaching in a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade co-taught special needs inclusive classroom. Her special education co teacher left on medical leave during the school year. There was a significant difference in her mindset from the beginning of the research to when her co-teacher left. Fiona participated in interviews and provided written reflections, but due to schedule constraints was not able to attend focus group meetings.

*Denise.* Denise was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher during the 2017-2018 school year. She transitioned into a reading interventionist during the 2018-2019 school year for 4<sup>th</sup> grade students who had not passed the state reading assessments in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. She has six years of teaching experience. Denise described herself as a creative teacher who strives for student independence.

During her initial interview, she stated that she likes “students to be very independent in their work.” Denise participated in interviews, focus groups, and provided written reflections.

*Brian.* Brian has over 10 years of experience in education. He previously worked as an assistant principal in another school district, but after taking a leave of absence decided to go back to the classroom. As the only parent in the group, he brought a critical perspective about parental involvement. In his initial interview, Brian stated that he sees himself to be “eclectic.” He stated that he tries to be “flexible with what the kids need,” even though he labeled himself as a “control freak.” Brian participated in interviews, focus groups, and provided written reflections.

*Susan.* Susan is a Kindergarten teacher with three years of teaching experience. She serves on the school’s leadership team as the grade level chair for Kindergarten. Additionally, she serves on the school improvement committee and provides feedback on the school’s continuous improvement plan. She sees herself as a teacher that provides students with new experiences that allow them to learn information in ways that “are fun and also meaningful.” During her interview, she described the use of small group lesson with manipulatives. Susan participated in interviews, focus groups, and provided written reflections.

## **Main Steps**

### **Constructing**

After the AR teams were formed, meetings were held to discuss the first set of interventions based on parent and teacher perception surveys. Survey results indicated that communication between parents and teachers was an issue. Teachers did not have a consistent tool for communicating with parents given the linguistic differences between parents in the community and the DES teachers.

Epstein, et al. (2009) found that “schools in more economically depressed communities make more contacts with families about difficulties their children are having, unless they work at developing balanced partnership programs that also include contacts about the positive accomplishments of students” (p.13). The AR team studied the six types of partnerships described by Epstein, et al. (2009) which include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. They decided that they were going to put in place three interventions to increase communication, type 2, between parents and teachers in order to address the needs parents described. The hope was to initiate the creation of Epstein’s (2009) Action Team for Partnership (ATP) after setting some much needed interventions into place. The first iteration was an online communication tool that allowed teachers to contact parents more readily. The second iteration was to provide teachers with additional time and interpreters for parent conference. The third iteration was to train a room parent as a liaison between the teacher and the parent community. This room parent was to take part in the ATP. Due to an interruption in the cycle, the third intervention was changed.

### **Taking Action**

The goal of the interventions was to increase communication with parents and embody the theory of overlapping sphere of influence (Epstein, 2009). According to the overlapping spheres of influence theory, school, family, and community work together to ensure that students are getting what they need (Epstein, 2009). During initial interviews, all 5 of the participants exhibited the belief of separate spheres of influence. This is the idea that if parents did their part at home then teachers are able to do their part at school. Additionally, the belief that parents were not doing what they were supposed to be doing at home signaled deficit thinking.

*Iteration #1 Class Dojo.* The AR team decided that they were going to use ClassDojo, an online tool that teachers started using at the beginning of the school year to track student behavior, as a communication tool with parents. ClassDojo allows teachers to chat with parents through a messaging system that has an automated translation feature. Although not perfect, teachers were trained to not use idioms and phrases that would not translate well. Teachers were also encouraged to communicate general classroom information through the Class Story. This included posting homework assignments, videos to help students understand concepts, and general announcements about what was going on in the classroom. Following the implementation of ClassDojo, Betty, Fiona, Denise, Brian, and Susan were interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to see how they were engaging with parents and what perceptions they developed. Using interview transcripts and InVivo coding, AR Team A evaluated the trends and themes they saw in the interview transcripts. While all teachers found ClassDojo useful for communication, a main theme that popped up across 3 out of the 5 interviews were teachers wanting to see parents face to face. Teachers felt that there was still a group of parents that were not communicating back with them through the chat feature. They wanted face to face meetings with interpreter services.

*Iteration # 2: Increasing Face to Face time with Parents* Traditionally, teachers at DES had two parent conference nights every year lasting two hours long. One conference occurred in the fall and another in the Spring. In order to provide teachers and parents with opportunities to engage, teachers were given half days to conduct parent conferences. The traditional parent conference nights were turned into Literacy and Math family nights. During the half day conferences, teachers were supposed to receive a Spanish interpreter to assist them in communication. Furthermore, if the parents were not able to meet on the day of the conference,

a part time school interpreter was available twice a week. In the past, the district assigned interpreter assisted with translating documents for the school. Based on teacher feedback, the interpreter's priority became assisting with parent teacher conferences throughout the day. Following conferences, teachers were interviewed to discuss the two iterations of interventions, a focus group was held, and teachers provided written feedback.

*Iteration #3: Developing Partnerships with Parents.* The original plan for the third iteration was to have teachers seek out Room parents that would become liaisons between the classroom and the home. The room parents of the research participants were supposed to make up the Action Team for Partnership. Due to district regulations that stopped data collection after March and going on maternity leave. The third iteration began in the Fall of 2018. The research participants had a difficult time setting up room parents and when the first ATP meeting was held, only teachers and one food service employee that was also a mother of a child at DES attended the meeting. According to Epstein (2009), "the development of an excellent partnership program is a process not a single event" (p. 24). During the ATP meeting, both AR teams were present. After reviewing the Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 2009), we began developing a one year plan to work with parents to increase reading scores. The meeting was recorded and transcribed, the parent's information was redacted from transcription to ensure privacy. Final data was collected during a focus group discussion.

### **Evaluating Action**

Data collection ceased due to district research review board timelines, but there was sufficient data collected to analyze how teachers perceptions changed with increased opportunities for parental involvement. The AR team found that while teachers were more open to reach out to parents, they were also more open to discuss deficit thinking. At the beginning of

the research, teachers gave very vague answers on practice, but they did not discuss their actual thoughts. As they became more open in discussion, it seemed that the presence of deficit thinking was more prominent. In actuality, the interviews became longer and the discussion allowed for teachers to engage in true discussions that challenged what they have been taught to believe about Latinx students coming from a different cultural background than their own. The interviews, focus groups, and reflections are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

### **Story and Outcomes**

I began my doctoral program in August 2015. At this time, I was working as an Assistant Principal at another elementary school in the same region as DES. Although it was in the same geographic region, the school was vastly different and more diverse in the sense that about 43% of the school population was White, middle-class. I had been hired by my principal at the time to work with the community in involving the parents and to support teachers in the educational outcomes of the growing Latinx population. Being Latina, I had a strong passion for the work and was discouraged by the constant reminder of statistical evidence, the achievement gap, and the culture of poverty. I too was once an English Language Learner, from a big Latinx family, with little in terms of financial resources. I wanted to be a model of success, not only for the students, but for the teachers that continuously found barriers in how students were achieving.

Following the election of Donald Trump in November 2016, I became increasingly aware of how powerful speech and mindset were related to outcomes. In the region, but not in the school in which I worked, teachers had been asked to resign after targeting students in the Latinx community. A school board member, feeding off of what was going on in the community, asked if the Latinx students in our school's feeder pattern could have a high school built for themselves. He went as far as to justify having more support for English Language Learners and



allowing them to have their own community. Idealistically, my hope in the action research was to have conversations to challenge the deficit discourse by pushing teachers towards human interactions that would challenge abstract theories that have been taught through our policies and programs. I felt that teacher efficacy played a role in the way teachers viewed themselves in what actions they took to involve parents in the learning process. If teachers were not secure in their ability to meet the needs of students in their class, then they would be less likely to reach out to parents for support. I went through IRB approval to do a similar research project and gained district approval for the 2017-2018 school year.

In 2017, I was afforded the opportunity to work as the principal at DES and resubmitted my proposal due to the change. As I waited for approval, I took time to get to know the community and update my literature review Chapter 2 for Critical Milestones 2. The process of engagement is detailed in Chapter 3. During the 2017-2018, many changes took place in order to establish processes and procedures that aligned with a common instructional vision. Part of the change process is detailed in this research as I worked with teachers to become better connected with parents. Towards the end of the school year, I went out on maternity leave which disrupted the third iteration of data collection. Due to complications in delivery, the 6 week leave was extended to 12 weeks. This meant that I needed to carry the research over into the new school year and ask for an extension from the district's research review board.

In one year, the school's state score went from 52.7 to 65. Rather than being on the state list for needing extensive support, DES was now on the list for Beating the Odds. Although student achievement scores were down, the score in student progress was 90 out of 100, surpassing the district and the state. At the beginning of the year, 2 parents arrived at my first

meeting, before I left on maternity leave attendance in meetings were up to 50. While this is was not the full community, it was a very positive start.

### **Research Reflection**

The action research process allowed me to look at the complexities of deficit thinking through the lens of other researchers in the group. Teachers were involved in the deciding what interventions were going to take place allowing for more buy in. Having members in the AR team that were familiar with research and coding, not only taught me how to code, but taught me about the value of various perspectives. The collective coding process allowed me to see patterns that I did not catch at first glance. They also reminded me about my role as a principal and researcher. There were times when I did not realize that a participant's response was more in line with my role as a principal than as a researcher. This is discussed more indepth in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### KEY FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this AR case study was to work toward addressing deficit thinking through a series of interventions that allowed teachers opportunities to engage with parents, reflect on their perceptions, and receive feedback. Through a series of one-on-one semi structured and open interviews, written feedback, artifact collection, and focus group transcriptions, data was gathered and triangulated in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- How can an AR team encourage teachers to communicate more frequently with parents?
- How do teachers' perceptions change as they interact more with parents in the community?
- What can an AR team learn about a school community to improve the educational opportunities of Latinx students?

Table 1 shows the data that was collected and the method in which it was analyzed. Focus group interviews and one to one interviews were transcribed using an online subscription tool. The first round of InVivo coding was done in collaboration with two members the first AR team. Concept Coding was completed using three characteristics of deficit thinking as described by Valencia (1997): “1) blaming the victim; 2) oppression; 3) pseudoscience; 4) temporal changes; 5) educability; 6) heterodoxy” (p. 3).

**Research Question: # 1: *How can an AR team encourage teachers to communicate more frequently with parents?***

During the first round of interviews, teachers focused on various barriers that prevented them from communicating with parents. These communication barriers were discussed when I asked the questions, “*How do parents play a role in student achievement?*”, “*What contributes to student performance/achievement?*”, and “*What role do teachers play in student performance?*”. The initial interviews lasted an average of 10 minutes with the shortest interview from Susan at five minutes and the longest interview was with Brian at 15:40 minutes. A theme found in the data included language and home value as perceived barriers that prevent teachers from communicating more frequently with parents (See Table 3).

Table 3

*Initial Interview Themes and Response*

Teacher	Language	Home Value of Education
Betty	<i>is intimidating sitting down for example at a conference where there wasn't a translator here...I can't have small talk because you're here and you're not able to translate/ I don't know what they are saying. They don't know what I'm saying".</i>	<i>think teachers have a huge role obviously in student achievement. I would like think that teachers and parents had 50/50, but since I now my kids don't get that at home I have to make sure that I am picking up the slack and being their sole academic [provider]."</i>  <i>have a few select parents that are very much involved, help their kids at home".</i>
Fiona	<i>referring to parents supporting at home: especially with one who don't speak, English. They can help with behaviors and providing the right attitude when for when they come to school"</i>	<i>think [parents] need to be more involved just like, kind of like their cheerleader, like their supporter."</i>  <i>think [parents] are communicating a positive outlook on school"</i>
Brian	<i>is language barrier and language issues sometimes get lost in translation"</i>  <i>is breakdown in communication sometimes can hinder the child's learning"</i>  <i>would like to learn more Spanish, just to communicate with our population"</i>	<i>there has to be a home value for education"</i>  <i>referring to factors that contribute to student performance: think another thing is the family and personal value on learning"</i>
Denise	<i>not mention language during initial interview</i>	<i>parents should interest in their child...asking questions at home, what they've learned, showing an interest in their homework....at least being interested in what the child was doing"</i>  <i>is students that are doing better in school have parents that care at home or that want to care"</i>
Susan	<i>not mention language as it relates to communications with parents, but stated: "my lowest performing students have minimal English proficiency"</i>	<i>parents help students by making that home school connection, asking 'What are you doing at school?' and seeing how they can reinforce it at home.</i>

**Home Value of Education.** Overwhelming, interview coding data had themes pertaining to home value of education. The AR team coded “home value of education” when teachers discussed how the perceived family expectations of educational outcomes. The theme was most prominent when teachers discussed who was responsible for student outcomes. The

idea of “value” derived from Brian’s repeated use of the term in interviews and focus groups.

Brian repeatedly brought up the idea that student outcomes are directly impacted by how families value education in the home. He believed that if parents don’t value education at home, students won’t value education at school.

Teachers felt that they were most responsible for student outcomes because parents were not doing their part at home. Betty stated, “I would like think that teachers and parents had 50/50, but since I know my kids don’t get that at home I have to make sure that I am picking up the slack and being their sole academic [provider].” Throughout the process, Betty doubted whether or not she was “placing judgement” on parents, but continued to feel that she was providing the opportunities that students “lacked” due to their home experiences. She connected home value to the frequency in which parents responded to her forms of communication. Although she stated that she was not, “big on homework,” she struggled with the idea of parents not responding to the assignments being sent home.

Similarly, Fiona felt that when parents reinforced what was being done at school, students were successful. She felt that parents that parents could achieve this by asking students questions about what they did at school and following up with teachers. She found it important that parents responded to teachers when teachers contacted the parents.

Both Brian and Denise equated home value of education to parents caring about their children. They felt that parents that cared about their children focused on education by responding to teacher’s request to communicate. Interview and focus group data showed that Brian and Denise focused on teachers reaching out to parents and parents responding not vice versa. The home value of education was seen primarily through the lens of teachers initiating communication with parents and parents reciprocating that communication, not parents

communicating with teachers. This could be due to the fact that at Desmond, it is rare for parents to initiate communication with teachers.

**Home Value of Education and Efficacy.** Overall, teachers felt as if they had no control about how parents interacted with their children at home. While they felt in control of what goes on in their classroom, they did not feel in control about how parents responded. Rather than viewing the potential of a collaborative partnership, teachers, like Brain, felt that “we cannot control what happens at home, we can only control what happens at school.”

**Language.** The majority of parents at Desmond speak Spanish only, while the majority of the teachers at Desmond speak Spanish. Thus language became a major theme (Table 5). When the exception of one Assistant Principal, 3 teachers, an interpreter that is only available twice a week, and myself, there are limited resources to assist with teacher-parent communications. Class Dojo had an interpretation tool that allowed for a rough translation through the chat feature. It did not allow for in-depth conversations, but allowed teachers to plan meetings with parents and a Spanish-speaking person. During teacher parent conferences, the district provides teachers with interpreters using Title III funds.

All teachers viewed language as a barrier that they could not control when communicating with parents. Betty stated, “It is intimidating sitting down for example at a conference where there wasn’t a translator there...I can’t have small talk because you’re there and you’re not able to translate/ I don’t know what they are saying. They don’t know what I’m saying.” Additionally, teachers saw language as a barrier in providing academic support at home. When describing their lowest performing students, 4 teachers, with the exception of Fiona, stated that their lowest performing students were their English Learners.

**Language and Efficacy.** Similar to Home Value, language is something teachers felt they lacked control over. They frequently used language as a reason as to why they were not able to engage parents further in the education of their child.

**Follow up Interview and Focus Group Analysis: Class Dojo.** During the coding process, the AR team viewed language themes as a need to provide teachers with further support through the use of interpreters and translation services. The theme of home value of education coincided with frequency of communication. When teachers questioned the value of education, the AR team provided them with supports and alternatives in reaching out to parents. For example, when the value of education was tied to parents' responses in ClassDojo, we worked towards active reflection with teachers to analyze alternative ways of reaching out to parents. It was essential for the AR team to meet with teachers to discuss the barriers they saw in communication.



Table 4

*Follow up on ClassDojo Themes and Responses*

Follow up on ClassDojo Themes and Responses		
Teacher	Language	Home Value of Education
Betty	Did not mention language as it relates to ClassDojo	<p><i>“She could be 100% involved I her child’s overall life, but I don’t see it as being involved in her academics because she is not responding”</i></p> <p><i>“If I were her mother, she’s not giving her what I would want her to have at home.”</i></p>
Fiona	<p>During follow up interviews, Fiona mentioned that she was not using ClassDojo with fidelity:</p> <p><i>“I noticed myself, I kind of lack communication, there in the middle of fall semester, and then in January, I tried to pick it back up consistently...I don’t know [why I pulled away from communication], I noticed I felt the same way, I was like I haven’t talked to the parent about this...you want to keep it consistent once a day consistently looking at Dojo, [so when] they get the report card, they’re not like wow, I have no idea what is happening”</i></p>	
Brian	<p><i>“It’s a little more immediate, but for more in-depth communication, I prefer to do either language line or interpreter”</i></p> <p><i>“If they don’t respond after a couple of tries on Dojo, then I ask the interpreter to make the contact and then phone numbers don’t work or left a message and no one ever responds. It’s difficult without having the ability to go knock on the door and say, ‘hi, I speak Spanish and let me have a conversation with you.”</i></p> <p><i>“The language barrier and the language issues sometimes get lost in translation”</i></p>	<p><i>“Parents who are, ‘here’s my kid, teacher, you know what goes on in school goes on in school. If something goes on at home, I’ll take care of it there, but you’re in charge of taking care of what goes on at school” and they stay out of the school no matter how much you invite them.”</i></p> <p><i>“For parents who stay in contact with the school, it provides more immediate communication”</i></p> <p><i>“It gives those involved parents a way to keep at and keep up on things”</i></p>
Denise	<p>After transitioning into a new teaching role, Denise did not use ClassDojo, when talking about parental involvement she stated:</p> <p><i>“They should show interest in their child. I mean asking questions at home, what they’ve learned in school, showing an interest in their homework, being available for the teacher when she calls signing up for Class Dojo, and responding to messages.”</i></p>	
Susan	Language was not mentioned	<p>Referring to the effectiveness of ClassDojo:</p> <p><i>“I think its helped people who want to be helped, or who have that connection...I was able to give them like consistent updates and informed information so they had easier access to them”</i></p>

During follow up interviews and focus groups, teachers became progressively more open to discussing the challenges allowing the AR team to identify needs (Table 4). Follow up interviews generally increased by 1.5x the amount of time that was given in the first interview. During follow ups, I asked clarifying questions, but the interviews were generally open with the research participants dominating the conversation.

While the theme of language became less prevalent as it related to ClassDojo, the theme of home value became more prevalent in all follow up interviews and focus group discussions. Following the implementation of ClassDojo, an online tool that allows teachers and parents to contact each other via a messaging system, interviews were held with each teacher to discuss the implementation of ClassDojo. The intervention was set to promote a two-way avenue for communication. Teachers that used it with fidelity found value in it, but teachers began to correlate parents' value of education with whether or not they consistently responded on ClassDojo. For example, Betty felt the following about a parent: "She could be 100% involved in her child's overall life, but I don't see it as being involved in her academics because she is not responding." In this, Betty is placing herself as the one directing the child's education and parents as supporting her guidance. Whereas, if a parent does not respond to her inquiries, then the parent is not involved in the academic life of their child.

**Follow up Interview and Focus Group Analysis: Parent Conferences.** The discussions, one on one interviews and focus group interviews, and written feedback following parent conferences brought back the theme of language (Table 5). This time, the theme of the value of education was tied to whether or not parents attended the scheduled conference. The data suggests, that according to teachers, lack of attendance equated to little value on education and coming to the meeting to receive information was equated to a high value on education. The

increase in the theme of language could be due to the fact that teachers had more face time with parents.

The home value of education was further questioned for parents that did not attend parent conferences. Fiona reflected the following about a parent was invited to attend the parent conference, but was not able to attend: “Its parents like that. Those are the ones who we needed to speak with and they don’t come. Those are the ones that we want on Dojo. Those are the ones that we want to communicate with and we don’t know how to like bring them into their child’s life.” Fiona is equating a child’s life to what is going on in school.

Table 5

*Parent Conference Themes and Responses*

Teacher	Language	Home Value of Education
Betty	<i>“Interpreters did not show... Conferences this time around were slightly torture”</i>	<i>“I scheduled for probably almost my whole class and had about half show...”</i> Referring to a parent that did not go to the scheduled conference: <i>“With this parent, I just have a really hard time, like the child is struggling and I don’t feel like the parent is helping. And I said, I feel like I am passing bad judgement on this parent. But I think it’s because I don’t know from the parents’ point of view. I don’t understand. Like is it because she thinks that it’s solely my job? Is it because she doesn’t care? Is it because of culture like that? I can’t say that this parent doesn’t care. They’re like...I don’t know”</i>
Fiona	Speaking about a parent that did not attend the conference: <i>“I have called her and yes we spoke to her. The student spoke to her in Spanish but I was telling her what to say”</i> <i>“I really think a lot of it is language. I think they know I don’t speak Spanish and I don’t think they really know the resources that we have”</i>	<i>“First I invited parents where I saw concerning behaviors and/or concerns in academics. Then, I asked parents we haven’t had as much communication with or didn’t see at the last conferences.”</i>  <i>“Its parents like that. Those are the ones who we needed to speak with and they don’t come. Those are the ones that we want on Dojo. Those are the ones that we want to communicate with and we don’t know how to like bring them into their child’s life”</i>  <i>“Cause from conferences I learned that the majority of parents, they gift their kids something if they get 100s. Which is great. So, I think they are afraid to show their parents things that aren’t [100]. So, it’s somehow like changing the parent’s mindset as well as the student’s mindset that all the work is just like a learning process”</i>
Brian	<i>“I like the fact that we have interpreters right there in one location”</i> <i>“I can’t have a casual passing conversation with families...I have to set up a very formal thing with a formal interpreter and it becomes difficult”</i>	<i>“I think that is the struggle for us to understand the culture, what they believe is their role, because I’ve been at schools where they said Hispanics believe that you’re the teacher, you’re the expert, it’s all on you. You do the teaching and make sure their basic needs are cared for at home We’re not the specialist in teaching. And I’ve heard other ones say differently so I don’t know because I can’t have that conversation with parents freely.”</i> <i>“I left messages and we get no response back, so that to me isn’t a language that’s a home situation that they just don’t want to be in school for whatever reason”</i>
Denise	The same themes did not appear with Denise. This could be due to the fact that she had a different type of parent conference. She received incorrect information from the assistant principal making the meeting confusing for all parties involved.	
Susan	On feedback from conferences: <i>“Confirm with interpreters the day before “</i>	<i>“They went well except for the four that didn’t come”</i> <i>“Everybody was really flexible and appreciated the opportunity to meet, even if their child was doing totally fine, they were like, ‘there’s an opening, I want to talk to the teacher”</i> <i>“I’ve had parents that I don’t meet until I’m like, ‘you have to come in for a meeting’ because they couldn’t come to open house because of work. And then they send their kid on the bus and it’s just, I don’t have a face to connect to that child.”</i>

## Further Findings and Themes

Figure 8 shows additional perceived barriers teachers presented when they discussed difficulty with parent communication.

Class Dojo	Conferences	Cultural Sensitivity- Professional Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Need for guidance on what to post on the class story versus what to send out in a message</li><li>• Need assistance in getting parents to use it and sign up</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communication has to be consistent from administrators to teachers</li><li>• Interpreters need to be present at all meetings</li><li>• Parents were more likely to go to conferences scheduled after 12:00. There were more "no shows" during morning conferences</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Would like to understand what is part of "culture" and what is "no response"</li><li>• Not sure what to do when parents do not go to the school</li></ul>

Figure 8. Perceived barriers to teachers in parent communication.

During the research, the AR team responded to teacher concerns, by either offering an alternative, by stating, “*Have you tried...?*”. Additionally, systemic changes occurred, such as providing teachers with interpreters and assisting parents with ClassDojo. Out of all the interventions, the supportive feedback and follow up encouraged teachers to communicate more with parents. Due to time constraints, Fiona and Betty did not have as much follow up as other members of the group. They used the chat feature from ClassDojo far less than other research participants.

## **Research Question #2: How do teachers' perceptions change as they interact more with parents in the community?**

The hope of the research was to decrease deficit thinking through additional interactions with parents. Following InVivo coding to find themes within the transcriptions of focus groups, interviews, written reflections, and analytical memos, we found that there was little change in teachers' perceptions.

### **Parental Involvement and the Role of the Teacher**

One of the main themes that teachers discussed extensively at the beginning was parent's role versus teacher's role (Table 6). The table provides a detailed overview of how each individual teacher reflected on what parental involvement looks like.

The teachers reflected on the parent teacher relationship in terms of the teacher reaching out to the parents and responding to the needs of the school. This practice placed the burden of responsibility on the parents and families to adapt to school culture not for the school to adapt to family life. Collectively, the teachers felt that there was a significant difference between the responsibilities of parents and teachers. More specifically, teachers believed that teachers were in charge of academics while the parents were responsible for instilling a value in education. There was one moment in the last focus group when Betty and Susan mentioned moving into the area and how interesting it was to see the students and their families after hours. Susan stated, "[Betty] and I saw a kid, a kid I taught in Kindergarten and [Susan] teaches now with his mom at 5:30 with his backpack on like she had picked him up from the babysitter ad like, that's something I wouldn't know about the kid if I wasn't in the area." This was a break in the discussion in how they viewed the parent teacher relationship at the beginning. The teachers then discussed the possibility of doing home visits, but the discussion of language as a barrier

halted the discussion. Even with the suggestion of pairing up with a native Spanish speaker to visit homes, the eagerness dissipated.

Table 6

*Individual Teacher Perceptions of Parental Involvement and Teacher's Role*

Teacher	Parental Involvement	Role of the Teacher
Betty	Quality time with children at home and responding to teacher	To <i>"pick up the slack"</i> and sole academic model
Fiona	Being a "cheerleader" and <i>"communicating a positive outlook on school"</i>	Doing whatever it takes to help students meet behavior and academic goals, <i>"even if it's something that is not in your job description"</i>
Brian	Instill a <i>"personal value on learning"</i> Families fuel the desire to learn	Teach students who have a desire to learn
Denise	Show <i>"interest in their child," "asking questions at home," "interest in their homework,"</i> and <i>"being available when the teacher calls"</i>	<i>"Facilitate the learning"</i>
Susan	Reinforcing what is done at school, supporting the teacher, <i>"building a relationship to where you both understand what the students need"</i>	Plan ways to advance each student based on the level they come in

During the last AR meeting, we began moving towards creating an Action Team for Partnership and the teachers discussed having a reading buddy program with parents. The discussion showed progress in the reduction of deficit thinking as teachers began to see the value of parents volunteering at the school and reading to students in Spanish. There was only one teacher that showed a bit of resistance towards the idea wondering whether other teachers would buy in to the idea.

## Themes through the Lens of Deficit Thinking

Table 7 represents themes through the categorical lens of deficit thinking. These themes were consistent from the beginning of the research and continued through the end. As teachers had more opportunities to communicate with parents, they also became increasingly more comfortable to share more details on their thoughts about parents and families. Table 7 displays various examples of how the categorical lens of deficit thinking were present in teacher's reflections.

Table 7

### *Teacher Perceptions through the Categorical Lens of Deficit Thinking*

Categories of Deficit Thinking	Meaning	Themes within Teacher Perceptions
Blaming the victim	The need to improve on the skills of the person rather than fix the system that perpetuate inequalities and racism.	Parents don't know how to be involved, thus they need to be taught what parental involvement looks like
Oppression	The use of authority and power to keep people in their place (ie compulsory ignorance laws and school segregation)	Expectation of for the parental involvement is designed by the school and/or teacher
Educability	Referring to deficits or deficiencies based on culture, linguistic differences, families, socioeconomic background	When referring to student performance, the following themes were found: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Basic understanding</li> <li>- Language as a barrier to learning</li> <li>- Lack of desire/motivation/mindset</li> </ul> When referring to parents and their participation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language barrier</li> <li>- Knowing how to participate</li> </ul>
Heterodoxy	Anti-deficit thinking	Home Visits (1 time occurrence- not considered a theme) Reading buddy program with parents (1 time occurrence- not considered a theme)

Out of the five teachers, Brian presented more signs of heterodoxy in his want to learn Spanish to communicate with parents. On the other hand, Susan originally suggested home visits as a way of reaching out to parents in the community. Almost all reflections were focused on



how we can fix the community rather than work towards improving how the school functions within the community. Teacher perceptions are reflective of policies, teacher training, and societal expectations which continues to perpetuate deficit thinking in schools. Table 8 details individual perceptions through the categorical lens of deficit thinking. The data was gathered throughout the process.

**Blaming the Victim.** Rather than see how the educational system was not set up with families with linguistic differences in mind, teachers assumed that student performance was linked to parent mindset. When discussing a child that was not performing well, Fiona blamed the parent for the performance. “I think this mindset is passing onto the child... this loosey goosey mindset is definitely passing onto the daughter because then she feels like everything is no big deal.” Brian places emphasis on how he believes the Hispanic community values education differently: “I know that in some Hispanic communities they see the teacher as having the of expertise so everything is up to them. They may be resistant because of the norm.” He sees the community as being resistant to adapting or becoming acculturated to the expectations of the American education system.

**Oppression.** Teachers were not looking towards changing the status quo, rather, the expectation was for parents to adjust to the current situation. Rather than working on collaboration towards a common understanding, teachers want to define what parental involvement looks like. When discussing how parents do not do enough for their kids, Denise stated, “I think in this community parents expect teachers to do everything...I told a parent your child should be practicing math facts with flashcards. She asked me if I was going to send it home with the student. I told her to go to Dollar Tree.” In this situation, the parent has asked the teacher for support, but the teacher felt that it was something the parent should be doing at home.

Rather than supporting the parent, Denise expected the parent to conform to her request. On the other hand, Brian feels that parents should just be more engaged and argues, “It would be nice to get parents in and actively engaged in what the kids are doing, instead of just the typical photocopy, die cut, and plan a party.” In this, he does not consider other perspectives, especially how parents might feel they want to be involved.

**Educability.** Educability was the most prominent theme in discussions. Teachers saw language as a barrier rather than a difference. When referring to an English learner, Fiona stated, “I say she is my lowest [performing student] because nothing would stick to her brain no matter what I tried.” They referred to students as lacking “basic skills” preventing them from learning. While comments about language were indirect, with teachers assuming that I knew what they meant when they discussed language as being a barrier. During the last focus group, Denise was direct in her statement, “language is an issue at this school,” when asked to clarify she was referring to both student achievement and parent engagement.

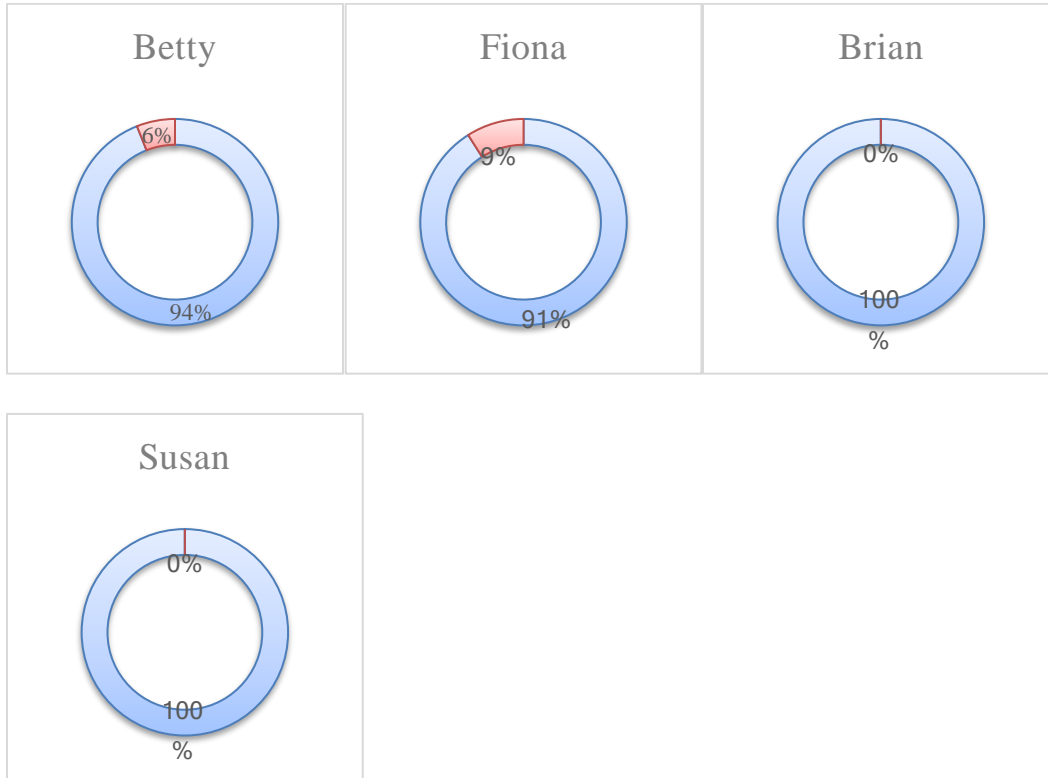
Table 8

*Individual Teacher Perceptions through the Categorical Lens of Deficit Thinking*

Teacher	Blaming the Victim	Oppression	Educability
Betty	<i>"If a child is struggling, I don't feel the parent is helping"</i>	<i>"My parents of the students that struggle are my parents that I have the hardest time getting in touch with, I don't normally see them."</i>	<i>"My lowest perform students have very limited English language. We are working on very basic skills"</i>
Fiona	<i>"I think this mindset is passing onto the child...this loosey goosey mindset is definitely passing onto the daughter because then she feels like everything is no big deal."</i>	<i>"I think the parents and the students, they think [parental involvement] is sitting next to you doing work with you. I don't think that is necessarily what it is. I think communicating a positive outlook on sleep is how they could help, especially the ones who don't speak English."</i>	<i>"I say she is my lowest [performing student] because nothing would stick to her brain no matter what I tried"</i>
Brian	<i>"I know that in some Hispanic communities they see the teacher as having the of expertise so everything is up to them. They may be resistant because of the norm"</i>	<i>"It would be nice to get parents in and actively engaged in what the kids are doing, instead of just the typical photocopy, die cut, and plan a party"</i>	<i>"It's hard to tell with the few students who are at the lowest level which comes first, the inability to do it or the lack of desire to do it. With their math skills, they just don't know facts, basic understanding"</i>
Denise	<i>"I think some of these parents don't know how to be involved because I feel like school is done differently in other countries"</i>	<i>"I think in this community parents expect teachers to do everything...I told a parent your child should be practicing math facts with flashcards. She asked me if I was going to send it home with the student. I told her to go to Dollar Tree"</i>	<i>"Language is an issue at this school"</i>
Susan	<i>"I think it's helped people who want to be helped, or who have that connection...I was able to give them like consistent updates and informed information so they had easier access to them"</i>	<i>"I've had parents that I don't meet until I'm like, 'you have to come in for a meeting' because they couldn't come to open house because of work. And then they send their kid on the bus and it's just, I don't have a face to connect to that child."</i>	<i>"My lowest performing students have minimal English"</i>

### Additional Findings

When presented with opportunities to connect with teachers at the school, the majority of the parents participated. The following are the percentages of parents enrolled in Class Dojo:



- i. Betty: 94% parent participation
- ii. Fiona: 91% parent participation
- iii. Brian: 100% parent participation
- iv. Susan: 100% parent participation

The following are the percentages of parents that attended their scheduled conferences:

- v. Betty: 88%
- vi. Fiona: 56%
- vii. Brian: 79%
- viii. Susan: 100%

It was easier for parents to engage in communication with teachers through Class Dojo than it was for them to attend parent conferences. Susan used Class Dojo to schedule her parent conferences, while Betty, Fiona and Brian sent a letter home to parents. Brian followed up with phone calls to make sure parents were going to conferences.

Given resources, teachers are willing to attempt efforts towards communicating with parents.

All research participants were actively engaged in the use of Class Dojo and parent conferences. When resources, such as interpreters were not available teachers found it more difficult. Betty described it as “torturous.”

Teachers need to participate in explicit professional learning as it relates to building relationships with parents. After reviewing the notes taken during transcriptions (analytical memos), the theme for continuous professional learning was prevalent:

- ix. “Teacher is continuously seeing the school separate from home”-  
Notes taken after an interview with Brian
- x. “The teacher seems to perceive communication as just being initiated from the teacher”- Notes during a focus group session
- xi. “Deficit thinking still pervasive, provide teachers with Ray Rist’s article”- Notes after the final focus group

### **Summary**

Little research has been done that focuses on interventions to address the educator perceptions through the lens of deficit thinking. The purpose of this research study was to see if providing teachers with more opportunities to work with parents, analyzing barriers that might impede those opportunities, and addressing the barriers, would create a shift toward reducing deficit thinking at DES. The reality is that deficit thinking is, as Pearl (1997) described it,

“deeply embedded in every aspect of American life” (p. 211). On the other hand, there were shifts that were beginning to occur at the end of the research project. During the study, research participants received feedback about ways they could better engage with parents. Near the conclusion, research participants decided that home visits and inviting parents to volunteer as reading buddies were self-initiated. The time limitations of the research might have impeded the opportunity to truly measure change in perceptions.

## CHAPTER 6

### ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

I aimed to improve DES by undertaking an action research problem that worked towards finding opportunities for teachers to engage with parents as a first step in combating deficit thinking. The research looked to answer the following questions:

- How can an AR team encourage teachers to communicate more frequently with parents?
- How do teachers' perceptions change as they interact more with parents in the community?

While the research questions guided the data analysis, other themes emerged in the data. The following chapter provides a summary of the findings detailed in Chapter 5. Following the analysis of the data reported, conclusions, implications, and my role as a researcher are discussed. The chapter concludes with the potential for future research.

#### **Analysis**

During my first year at DES, I spent the first half getting to know the parents and the teachers at the school. It was apparent that there was a communication gap between teachers and parents. Teachers were asked to engage with parents through the use of an online tool, Class Dojo, and parent conference times were increased to a four-hour block with the assignment of an interpreter. Teachers were interviewed one-on-one and through focus groups, and artifacts were collected. Through using InVivo coding to identify themes and applying Valencia's categories of deficit thinking, I analyzed the data and reported findings in Chapter 5. The main themes that emerged were a) language, and b) home value of education.

## Language

Teachers saw language as a barrier with students when it came to learning. When describing students in their class, they referred to their lowest performing students as those who had limited English proficiency. They did not specify what tool or measurement was used to determine this performance, but more than likely it was based on standardized assessment results which are geared towards native English speakers. This view is defined as deficient under *educability*. Rather than seeing the student as someone that merely speaks a different language at home, the research participants viewed language as a deficiency that impacts performance on a standardized assessment. Pearl (1997) states, “students are labeled as deficient because of their failure to meet arbitrarily defined standards” (p. 216).

Teachers also felt that language was a barrier when communicating with parents. The implementation of ClassDojo reduced the theme of language when having conversations about parent communication with teachers. This could be due to the fact that there is a translation feature that provides teachers and parents with a rough translation. The theme of language emerged again after parent conferences. Out of the two parent conference days that occurred during the time of the research, the last day there was a mix up with the district office, and interpreters were not sent. While waiting for the interpreters to arrive, teachers felt intimidated by the inability to make small talk. Additionally, teachers found that their inability to speak Spanish did not allow them to build relationships with parents, even with the resources provided (Bilingual administrators, parent liaisons, interpreter, and interpretation tool).

The view of language as a barrier did not change throughout the entire process. Teachers were given feedback and were provided additional support to assist with the language difference,



but they continued to view it as a problem in the community. One of the last quotes that was collected in a meeting was, “language is a major issue.”

### **Home Value of Education**

Teachers felt that they viewed school much differently than parents. They were taught that cultural differences meant that parents were disconnected from school. This aligns with Epstein’s description of the separate sphere’s of influence where teachers are not aware of what is going on at home and parents are not aware about what is going on at school.

Teachers assumed that parents who did not contact school did not care. Additionally, teachers were more concerned about parents responding to what they were sending home. They showed little concern about how they were responding to home life. In other words, the expectation is for parents to be accommodating to school needs rather than for teachers accommodate parent needs. According to Nieto (2010), in order for students to be successful, “accommodation needs to be shared by everyone” (p.129).

### **Conclusions**

#### **Conclusion #1: Given the necessary tools, teachers will make an attempt to improve communication with parents**

All of the research participants worked diligently to engage parents in the community using ClassDojo and invited them to attend parent conferences. We provided the teachers with interpreters and bilingual support when interpreters were not available. Although this practice did not change their perception as language as a cultural difference rather than a barrier, it did allow them to feel more confident in reaching out and communicating with parents.

**Conclusion #2: It is not enough to address deficit thinking through increased face time with parents of a culturally different background than teachers.**

When Luis Moll (1992) worked on a collaborative research project with teachers in which they identified funds of knowledge in the community, they found, “an important aspect of the teacher’s participation in the household research became the more sophisticated understanding they developed about the children and their experiences” (p. 79). Conversely, I found that deficit thinking themes were more prevalent in later reflections with the teachers. It could be due to the fact that teachers were becoming more trusting and open, thus they were sharing more. Either way, AR team A concluded that professional learning in the area of cultural awareness needed to occur.

**Conclusion #3: Addressing deficit thinking is a slow process that requires a great deal of reflection**

According to Pearl (1997), deficit thinking is “so much part of the landscape that it is difficult to recognize, let alone address.” Teachers have been trained on cultural awareness and cultural competence models, yet deficit thinking is embedded in the way teachers were trained about students. The purpose of this research was to do more than a professional learning activity by developing partnerships with parents at home. This follows Epstein’s (2009) belief that “an excellent partnership program is a process, not a single event.” Although themes of deficit thinking increased in later reflections, teachers began to discuss the possibility of home visits and inviting parents to read to students. Both suggestions were far from what was discussed before the research began.

## **Implications**

Although this AR case study is not generalizable, the study supports research in the area of deficit thinking at the school, district, state, and national level.

### **School**

There is a lot of work that needs to be done as it relates to how teachers view Latinx students in their class, their language differences, and their cultural backgrounds. First, we need professional learning in the area of cultural relationships. According to Hoy and Miskel's (2013) explanation on self-efficacy which includes:

- Individuals who have stronger beliefs about their capabilities are more successful and persistent in their efforts.
- Individuals tend to avoid tasks and situations that exceed their capacity
- Individuals seek activities they judge themselves capable of handling
- Individuals develop self-efficacy through mastery experiences, modeling, persuasion, and physiological arousal (p.162),

along with research findings in which teachers felt a lack of control over linguistic differences and the perception that parents in the Latinx community held different values of education than their own, it is imperative that school leadership work towards assisting teachers in creating mental models that allow them to seek opportunities to engage with parents in the community.

Secondly, we need to continue the practice of finding ways to engage more effectively with families in the school. Home visits, as suggested by the AR team would be a great next step, but the school needs to figure out the ways that allow parents to engage more effectively with the school. The study began with an analysis of perception surveys in which parents asked for more communication with the school. Parents responded positively to ClassDojo which

provided opportunities for two-way communication. Additionally, the continued development of the Action Team for Partnership would bring parents into the school for decision-making practices.

Principals should also consider language and cultural understanding when hiring new teachers. Although Desmond has a few Latinx professionals, such as myself, we are seen as an anomaly to the larger Latinx population. The perception is that our success is due to factors that are not associated with our language abilities, yet my bilingualism has opened many doors for me including leadership. By hiring more bilingual Latinx teachers that share similar experiences to students, other staff members are able to challenge their current mental models of the potential of Latinx students.

### **District**

The district needs to analyze professional learning in cultural competence to ensure that deficit mindset is not promoted. During the research project, teachers quoted beliefs they heard from their own professional learning which suggests that parents have a different motivation than teachers in regard to education. This is especially true for parents in Latinx communities and parents from varying socioeconomic background. The “culture of poverty” is an idea that the district currently promotes. Being that the majority of children of color in the district come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the study of the culture of poverty enhances the mental models that promote deficit thinking.

### **State and Federal**

State and federal policies that differentiate expectations for different demographic groups based on historical data needs to be analyzed. In attempting to close the achievement gap, state and federal policies promote the disaggregation of data into demographic groups referred to as

subgroups. These policies promote deficit thinking in the area of educability. The mindset is that students from various cultural backgrounds do not perform as well as their White counterparts on assessments geared towards White, native English speakers. The continuous push towards standardized tests produces pseudoscientific results of student performance (Valencia, 1997).

Additionally, the state's current funding model promotes the use of local taxes to fund public schools. This means that while students of color in low income communities are receiving the bare minimum in regards to funding, yet expected to perform at the level of their more advantaged counterparts. This continues to perpetuate mental models that Latinx students cannot perform at the same rate of their White, monolingual counterparts.

### **Future Researcher**

This case study could be replicated with the following considerations in mind:

1. A longitudinal approach should be used to better track the shifts in teachers' perceptions of deficit thinking. Due to the limitations in the timeline, there was little shift in the data due to the fact that I was asking teachers to reflect on practices and beliefs that have been long held.
2. More research participants should be considered that offer that offer a variety of experiences. This will hopefully allow for a greater variety, especially during focus group interviews where a researcher can cross-reference multiple focus groups on the same topic.
3. Parent perceptions in the process would add further insight to the research. While this study focused on the teachers, the AR team felt that getting the parents' feedback would have been vital in answering the third research question.

Overall, there needs to be further research on how deficit thinking impacts student achievement. There is a dearth of research that reveals how teachers can work toward addressing years of professional learning that promotes a deficit mindset.

### **Summary**

This action research worked to find opportunities for teachers to engage with parents as a way of addressing deficit thinking. Teachers were asked to engage with parents through the use of an online tool, Class Dojo, and parent conference times were increased to a four-hour block with the assignment of an interpreter. Teachers were interviewed one on one, through focus groups, and artifacts were collected. The AR team used InVivo coding and Valencia's categories of deficit thinking. Teachers perceived language as a barrier. Additionally, they felt that families lacked value in education. These perceptions did not change through continuous opportunities to engage with parents. Additionally, the AR team made the following conclusions: (a) given the necessary tools, teachers will make an attempt to improve communication with parents; (b) it is not enough to address deficit thinking through increased face time with parents of a culturally different background than teachers; and (c) addressing deficit thinking is a slow process that requires a great deal of reflection.

Although the AR team learned a great deal about how deficit thinking is embedded in the school, a longitudinal approach with more research participants would add value to the body of research in the area deficit thinking.

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## APPENDIX A

### Studies on Disproportionality

Author and Title	Methods	Findings
<p>Skiba, Horner, Chung, Raush, May, Tobin (2011). Race is Not Neutral: A National Investigation of African America and Latino Disproportionality in School Discipline</p>	<p>Researchers reviewed the documented reports of discipline in 364 elementary school during the 2005-2006 school year.</p>	<p>Students of color are more likely to receive office referrals for “minor” misbehavior</p> <p>Students of color are more likely to receive more serious consequences</p> <p>Hispanic students are 2 times more likely to be suspended or expelled in elementary school</p> <p>Low SES continues to be a risk factor for school suspension</p>
<p>Nelson and Guerra (2014). Educator Beliefs and Cultural Knowledge: Implications for School Improvements and Efforts</p>	<p>In this qualitative study, researchers provided 111 educators, consisting of teachers and educational leaders, were asked to respond to a series of scenarios involving various aspects of schooling. Participants were to respond to various culture clashes and results were coded in three ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Deficit or pluralistic</li> <li>b. Culturally unaware, culturally aware, or culturally responsive</li> <li>c. Subtractive or additive</li> </ol>	<p>The majority of the educators in the study held general awareness of culture, but hold deficit beliefs about families and students.</p> <p>Teachers seemed to have more knowledge about culture than education leaders, but also expressed more numerous and severe deficit beliefs.</p> <p>Rather than self-reflection about culturally responsive learning environments, educators look towards technical fixes blaming students for lacking certain characteristics. This in turn slows down educational progress.</p>
<p>Carillo &amp; Rodriguez (2016). She doesn't even act Mexican: smartness trespassing in the new south</p>	<p>The researchers evaluated a mentorship program by conducting interviews, collecting documents, and attending the program's training session. The primary data comes from a specific case study of a Latina student and how she perceived herself.</p>	<p>High-achieving Latin@ students are seen as outsiders trespassing into a white, middle class culture</p> <p>There is a difference between engaging in culture rather than being defined by culture</p> <p>In order to empower Latin@ students, teachers need to be trained in working with students in finding their funds of knowledge</p>
<p>Conchas (2001). Structuring Failure and Success: Understanding the</p>	<p>The qualitative study consisted of data collection for two years of participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. The purpose of the study was to observe how a</p>	<p>The programs at the school allowed for Latin@ students to be academically engaged at various levels</p>

Variability in Latino School Engagement	high school school attempted to create a learning community within a setting that was racially polarized through specialized instructional programs (medicine, computer graphics, general).	Even though schools mirror social inequalities, programs can be created within a community with the support of teachers and students to break the cycle of injustices.
Ahram, Fegus, and Noguera (2011). Addressing racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: Case Studies of Suburban School Districts	The research used a mixed methods approach using the data of two multiracial suburban school districts in New York, assisting the districts in identifying factors that contribute to disproportionality, and developing a 3 year professional learning plan. Participants included teachers and administrators.	Deficit thinking related to race and SES drives many of the decisions to refer students to Special Ed There are not sufficient safeguards to prevent referrals African American students were more likely to be diagnosed ED and MR White students were more likely to receive an Autism diagnosis Latin@ students were more likely to receive a diagnosis in the area of speech and language
Orosco (2010). A Sociocultural Examination of Response to Intervention with Latino English Language Learners	The article was an analysis of research concerning RTI and Latin@ English Learners.	In order to have a successful RTI process, teachers need to have culturally responsive practices in Tier I.

## APPENDIX B

### Studies on Countering Deficit Thinking

Author and Title	Methods	Findings
Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992). Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Classrooms	Using an ethnographic approach, researchers worked with teachers to study household knowledge, look beyond stereotypes, build “confianza” or trust with families, and experiment with their practice. Teachers were to observe and collect information regarding “funds of knowledge.”	<p>Teachers served as co-researchers allowing them to develop participatory pedagogy.</p> <p>It is useful to use home visits with teachers for research purposes</p> <p>By assuming the role of the learner, teachers were able to develop a better relationship with the families of their students</p>
Sanchez, Colegrove, and Adair (2014). Countering Deficit Thinking: agency, capabilities and the early learning experiences of children of Latino/a immigrants	The ethnographic study analyzed an elementary classroom with a Latino student majority to observe how students grew academically when given agency and choice.	<p>Students demonstrated higher levels of inquiry and participation</p> <p>Students used Spanish as a bridge to English</p> <p>Students were able to initiate their learning and show greater understanding of subject material that would not have been evident in a benchmark test</p>
Cammarota and Romero (2011). Participatory Action Research for High School Students: Transforming Policy, Practice, and the Personal with Social Justice Education	Students worked with researchers to document their experiences at school from AP courses to language acquisition. They presented their views regarding school policies based on their personal experiences to work towards institutional changes.	<p>Participatory action research allows for the personal growth of participants.</p> <p>Social justice education pedagogy allowed the young researchers to develop awareness</p>
Yang, Y., & Montgomery, D. (2011). Behind Cultural Competence: The Role of Causal Attribution in Multicultural Teacher Education.	<p>Participants included 793 preservice teachers reporting their attributions of cultural awareness</p> <p>Canonical correlation analysis</p>	<p>There is a relationship between casual attributions and cultural competence</p> <p>Teachers need to be provided with opportunities to engage in self-driven meaningful activities</p>
Castro, A. J. (2014). Visionaries, reformers, saviors, and opportunists: Visions and metaphors for teaching in the urban schools.	Participants in the study were urban teacher candidates. The researchers conducted focus groups and follow up interviews to determine why teachers chose teaching as a career.	<p>The study found that participants fell into four dominant categories:</p> <p>Visionaries- want to contribute to society and view students as community members</p> <p>Reformers- want to improve the quality of education and see students as receivers of information</p> <p>Saviors- want to save the children who are victims of their environment</p> <p>Opportunist- see urban schools as a secure job and students as part of the job</p>

## APPENDIX C

### UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

#### Shifting Teachers Perceptions through Parent Partnerships

##### Researcher's Statement

I am/We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

**Principal Investigator:** *Sheneka Williams*  
*Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy*  
[smwill@uga.edu](mailto:smwill@uga.edu)

##### Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- Be an active participant of the parent committee and the action research team
- Participate in a semi-structured interview at the beginning and end of the school year
- Provide an audio recording or written reflection following each meeting

##### Risks and discomforts

We do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in the research study.

##### Benefits

- Ongoing professional learning in the area of parental involvement
- Opportunity to be directly involved with making decisions about school activities and functions

##### Alternatives

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, you may participate in any other school committee that is not involved in this research study.

##### Incentives for participation

There are no monetary benefits or incentives for participating in the research study.

##### Audio/Video Recording

All meetings, reflections, and interviews will be audio recorded. You have the option to write your reflections rather than recording. All recordings will be transcribed into field notes.



Recordings will be destroyed after transcription. During meetings, if you do not want to be recorded, you may ask the researcher to stop the recording.

Please provide initials below if you agree to be recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want to have this interview recorded.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

**Privacy/Confidentiality**

All notes for the interview will remain confidential. Transcribed notes will be kept on a cloud database online that requires password access. As a participant in the research, you will be given a pseudonym to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The research notes will include details under your pseudonym about your gender, race, job description, and years of experience. The school and school system will also be given a pseudonym to ensure privacy.

**Taking part is voluntary**

Participation in the research is part of being an active member of the parent committee and it is strictly voluntary. If you choose to discontinue your participation, you may do so at any time by joining a different committee and notifying the investigator on site, Mrs. Baez. If you decide to withdraw in the middle of the research, your data will be kept up to the point of your withdrawal and may be analyzed and used as part of the final report.

**If you have questions**

If you have any questions, please see Mrs. Baez at any time. The main researcher conducting this study is Shenka Williams , an associate professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Sheneka Williams at [smwil@uga.edu](mailto:smwil@uga.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

**Research Subject’s Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

## APPENDIX D

### District Strategic Plan

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#### **Vision**

To inspire our community of learners to achieve educational excellence

#### **Mission**

To ensure student success, leading to higher education,  
work, and life-long learning

#### **Motto**

Inspire•Achieve•Excel

#### **Based on our core beliefs, we commit to:**

- Focusing on teaching and learning
- Embedding an equitable and accessible 21st century learning environment supported by the use of emerging technologies throughout the curriculum
- Providing a safe and orderly learning & working environment
- Improving organizational effectiveness
- Maintaining fiscal responsibility
- Ensuring effective district & school leadership
- Ensuring that an effective teacher instructs every class
- Communicating to stakeholders in an open, honest, and accurate manner
- Embracing our community's linguistic and cultural diversity & using it to enhance the educational environment through equity and access
- Creating an environment where everyone is valued and respected, encouraged to contribute, and recognized for his/her efforts
- Holding everyone accountable for educational excellence

#### **Goal Areas and Performance Objectives**

##### Goal Area I: Student Success with Equity and Access

- Improve student's mastery of learning standards
- Provide equitable access to academically rigorous courses and programs
- Increase graduation rate for all students

##### Goal Area II: Stakeholder Engagement

- Provide a safe, orderly, and positive school environment
- Increase stakeholder involvement and engagement

- Increase use of technology and innovative strategies

**Goal Area III: Staff Efficacy and Excellence**

- Improve district processes to attract highly qualified staff
- Develop a highly effective and accountable workforce
- Retain highly qualified staff

**Goal Area IV: Internal and External Communication**

- Improve and ensure district internal communication
- Bridge and improve communication with external stakeholders

**Goal Area V: Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency**

- Develop an efficient organizational structure that supports a performance-based culture
- Establish a decision-making model that sustains a high performance organization
- Improve efficient use of resources, processes and management structure to support system innovation

Retrieved from <http://www.dekalbschoolsga.org/documents/strategic-plan/goals/vision-mission-beliefs.pdf>

## APPENDIX E

What do you like about Montclair	What can Montclair do to help students	What can Montclair do to Help Parents	What are topics for future meetings
Meetings, Reminders	nothing	More meeting times to fit parent schedules	food, fieldtrips
teachers, education	patience	teach children well,	n/a
English, Education	worksheets	Translators for parents during meetings,	n/a
nice, helpful	more teaching	more communication	n/a
Security	more courses	ELL for parents	behavior, education
education, homework, prep	longer lunch	orderly parent meetings	n/a
nice, route, patient	N/A	more communication, student safety when waiting for busses	how parents can continue educating at home
patient, dedicated	lunch supervision	communicate changes	more classrooms, more academics
organized	more education	more communication	n/a
flexible	after school program	more parent teacher meetings	teach parents to silence their children
teachers	more education	n/a	"more frequent participation"
school, teachers,	progress reports/communicate about grades	more parent teacher meetings	nothing
education, teachers	nothing	more parent teacher meetings, opportunities for parents to eat lunch with students	n/a
communication	English	more parent teacher meetings	everyone should work together to clean the school
security	nothing	more communication	n/a
teachers	n/a	more parent involvement	sanction parents for not attending meetings
mean	more activites, potential finding	translators for parents during meetings,	n/a
Teachers	motivate teachers, improve teacher behavior	more parent teacher meetings, more parent participation in meetings	n/a
communication	nothing	nothing	timing of lunch
communication	English (teach a variety of settings)	behavioral reports-communication	motivating parents

teachers, patient	communicate with students	more communication	motivating parents
education	dedicate more time for those that need it	progress reports - communication	n/a
teachers, principal	fix issues	progress reports, more parent teacher meetings	n/a
communication, principal	nothing (principal doing well)	n/a	nothing (principal is doing very well)
education	English	nothing	nothing
teachers	opportunities to practice learned objectives	progress reports-communication	more pparental involvement
layout, communication	nothing	nothing	nothing
education	communicate with parents	more parental involvement with activities, don't call parents on their lunch break	n/a
nice, technology	fun	more teacher accesibility, progress reports	n/a
teachers, principal	communicate with parents	fully detailed reports at all times of students	n/a
securty	communicate with parents	maintain the status quo	nothing
bilingual principal	communicate with parents	nothing (we have what we need, a bilingual principal)	nothing (principal is doing very well)
teachers	communicate with parents	let students speak to teachers in spanish	nothing
teachers, ferguson	follow up	be nicer when asking quesitons	n/a
sexually segregated	communicate with students	n/a	n/a
communication	communicate with parents	behavioral reports	make meetings 7pm-745pm
focus	communicate with parents, more teamwork	want to know everything about child	nothing
nice, communication	morning study session while waiting in gym	more parental involvement	n/a
school	more homework, communicate if hw not turned in	nothing	nothing
education	nothing	teach parents to teach kids	nothing (principal is doing well)
organized, securty	more personal preparation	translators or more direction in spanish	nothing

principal, communication, meetings	communicate with parents	patience	nothing
education	homework	fully detailed reports at all times of students	nothing
education	more teacher support of students	more communication, ask parental opinions	nothing
teachers, responsive	nothing	nothing	nothing
communication	more courses, Saturday school	teach parents how to monitor student's progress	nothing
education	school progress report	collaborate and communicate more with parents	nothing
lingual support	progress reports	more communication and meeting times	nothing
teachers, focus	more educational activities	more meeting times	nothing
discipline	more education	fully detailed reports at all times of students, more meetings	nothing
improvements,communication	keep motivating like you're doing	nothing	nothing
communication	nothing (parents should do more)	fully detailed reports at all times of students	n/a
teachers	homework	fully detailed reports at all times of students	n/a
education	homework	fully detailed reports at all times of students, more responsibilities for students, more help for students	n/a
organized	don't change teachers	translators and parental assistance	n/a
homework	n/a	more frequent meetings	na
education, english	English	give hw in english and spanish, more parental involvement	n/a
teachers	homework, behavioral reports	have meetings	n/a
communication	teachers should work with students, educational activities	more parent teacher meetings	nothing
communication	motivate students to read and study more	more frequent meetings	n/a
teachers	homework	fully detailed reports at all times of students	n/a

educaiton	nothing (parents should do more)	more security	n/a
communication	Clear homework objectives	help parents to help students	nothing
communication	homework	more parental involvement, improve academics, clean bathrooms better	nothing
improvements	progress reports	progress reports, longer notice before meetings	na
location	progress reports for students	na	na
na	teach students well	na	na
communication	na	na	na
communication	na	na	na
na	English	translator to help parents help children, different meeting times	na
communication	na	involve parents more	na
improvements	discipline	na	na
na	na	involve parents more	na

## APPENDIX F

### **Teacher Semi Structured Interview Questions**

1. Describe your teaching style
2. Describe your lowest performing students
3. What contributes to student performance?
4. How do parents play a role in student achievement?
5. What role do teachers have in student achievement?

These questions will be given to teachers at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year.