A qualitative case study with quantitative data: How a relational pedagogical process promotes engagement and a more inclusive learning experience for students of color (Black & Latino) in grades 6-8

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Literature Review

A Qualitative Case Study W/ Quantitative Data： How a relational pedagogical process promotes engagement and a more inclusive learning experience for students of color (Black & Latino) in grades 6-8

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ABSTRACT

The literature review conducted was to explore the differences between a relational teaching approach and traditional teaching approaches as they affect student experiences and academic outcomes. This researcher hypothesized that relational process teaching increases engagement and inclusivity for black and latino students.The exploration was conducted as a two-fold process.The first was by exploring what defines "engagement" and "inclusivity" in a traditional teaching approach comparative to relational teaching approach for black & latino students in 6th, 7th and 8th grades.The second; was to investigate how relational approach to teaching and

learning increases "engagement" and "inclusivity" for black & latino students in 6th,7th and 8th grades.

The case study explores how black and latino students experience learning in a relational process experience; comparative to learning in traditional experience. The study explores student and teacher perspectives and experiences through interviews, observations, focus groups, and surveys. This case study also synthesizes secondary research statistical data, to contextualize defined student outcomes. This study will reveal how teacher-student relationships impact engagement, inclusivity, and improved teaching & learning. The case study will also lead to further questions on how traditional teaching can implement relational process teaching strategies; in order to improve experiences and academic outcomes for black and latino students in 6th,7th and 8th grades.

The literature was reviewed to explore studies related to "Traditional" teaching and learning practices, concepts, approaches and themes for students and teachers. This review also examines teaching and learning from a "Relational" process. In exploring these two perspectives through a compare and contrast inquiry process; the review supports and frames the major themes related to the focus of the dissertation and research that follows. Those themes are culture, learning, teaching, relationships, engagement, experiences, outcomes, and inclusion. Upon examination, inquiry and exploration of this literature, I identified the leading and most essential themes, behaviors and activity that promoted increased "engagement and inclusivity" for black and latino students in grades 6-8. I found empirical research articles and models that utilize both case study survey and interviews as legitimate qualitative strategies. In addition, I investigated, collected and analysed existing student data measurements and outcomes to improve study validity regarding the value and impact of the defined terms "engagement", "inclusion", "culture", "relationship", "experiences" and "outcomes" in the literature review.

The study creates new knowledge about the value and legitimacy of engagement and inclusion as an essential approach that improves teacher and student relations and how it produces improved experiences for teachers instructionally and directly, as well as it improves experiences and academic outcomes for black & latino students in middle school grades 6th,7th and 8th.

Keywords: *Relational teaching; Relationships; Student engagement, Inclusive, learning, Student outcomes, Pedagogy; Instructional strategies; Culturally responsive teaching, African American students, Latino students*

Purpose of this research and work

I have been a K-12 educator for over 20-years. During this time I have been a classroom teacher, mentor, school administrator and school leader. My educator experiences have been in

schools and districts with very high black and latino student populations. Typically these schools have higher rates of white educators. Research shows where the greatest gaps in academic achievement in urban schools exist, this is often the scenario when observing student and teacher demographic data. My research will focus on the outcomes and experiences of black & latino students. Students in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. I will specifically seek to gain a clearer understanding of the educational outcomes and experiences of this demographic through the lens of engagement and inclusivity.

The inner-city, public school achievement gap Urban public schools in America provide education under the withering spotlight known as the achievement gap. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it appeared that the achievement gap between white and black students and white and Hispanic students was narrowing. However, in the mid-1990s, the white–black achievement gap began, once again, to grow (Grissmer et al., 2000; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009). More recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) indicates that this gap may once again be narrowing a bit. However, the differences between white and minority students in both science and mathematics remain disturbingly large. For white and black students aged nine years, the average difference on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was 23 points in reading and 26 points in maths in 2013. The gap between white and Hispanic students was 21 and 17 points. NAEP results for 13- and 17-year-olds show much the same differences. Some careful analyses of achievement differences by race and socioeconomic class have resulted in three important insights, namely, educational deficits are cumulative, they are accelerated in the summer, and these accumulating deficits are not limited to cognitive skills. Fryer and Levitt (2004), Heckman (2013) and Heckman and Masterov (2008) report that the already substantial achievement gap between disadvantaged and more privileged students at entry to school increases with age. Some of this increase has been linked to school resources. However, a substantial amount of the increase appears to occur within schools, regardless of resources. Because of this accumulating effect, labour economists and child development experts alike have called for 'predistribution' or early intervention strategies in academically adverse environments. Heckman (2013) sums up this growing consensus when he asserts that 'programs targeted toward the adolescent years of disadvantaged youth face an equity–efficiency tradeoff that programs targeted toward the earlier years of the lives of disadvantaged children avoid' (p. 40). CAMBRIDGE JOURNAL OF EDUCATION 265 It has also become quite clear that increases in the white–minority achievement gap are not 'steady-state.' Abrupt increases in the size of the gap occur after each summer recess (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; McCombs et al., 2011). Hanushek and Rivkin (2009) note that a consistent finding in the research literature is the phenomenon of 'summer fall back', which suggests that while learning during the school year might, on average, be the same for whites and minority students, the amount of learning in the summer months heavily favours white students (p. 370). Learning deficits have been shown to occur in a series of socio-emotional regulation skills as well. Carneiro and Heckman (2003) assert that a series of 'soft skills', or civic skills, (e.g. perseverance, attentiveness, motivation, self-confidence, self-discipline, trustworthiness, and dependability) are developed early in a child's life and are as important as cognitive skills for success in school, the labour market, and in life. Ability gaps between white and minority children on 'soft skills,' when combined with low scholastic performance, helps to ensure that

the lives of disadvantaged children devolve into the lives of disadvantaged adults (Heckman, 2013; Heckman & Masterov, 2008). Short of new efforts to address the achievement gap through legislative and/or judicial desegregation (see Chetty & Hendren, 2015; Chetty, Hendren, & Katz, 2015; for example, for the implications of Moving to Opportunity and other residential mobility research) policy and programming initiatives have focused on improving education in poor performing schools. Moreover, innovative programmes that do not explicitly address student deficits in mathematics, science, or language arts have had a rapidly diminishing probability of adoption in these schools as high-stakes testing plays an increasingly prominent role in budgetary decisions (National Education Association, 2014; Nichols, Berliner, & Noddings, 2007).

Given this context, I will investigate and explore outcomes and experiences of two populations that are the most impacted by the "Opportunity & Achievement" gap disparity. Specifically, Black and Latino students in grades 6-8. I will enquire and examine through a compare and contrast perspective. My exploration and investigation will look at the difference between two differing instructional approaches. The first approach is what is considered a "traditional" instructional approach where teaching and learning is designed and implemented in a way that the teacher is the primary holder of the "knowledge" and the student is the learner and receiver of this knowledge. In this design and implementation the relationship between the teacher and the student is pre-defined with the notion and belief that "knowledge" exists inside the teacher. The student has no "knowledge" and their relationship is hierarchical where the teacher is viewed as superior. In this way, instruction is implemented in a very didactic way. In ***Pedagogy of the Oppressed*** **(YEAR)** Paulo Freire refers to this as the "banking" approach to education. In this approach, the learning process is singular in its design and implementation. It is "transactional" as Freire proposes with "deposits and withdrawals" between students and teachers. The second instructional approach is a "Relational" process. In this approach the teacher and student are in a relationship and the teacher plays the role of host and invites the student into a dialogic experience where the learning is co-constructed while both are simultaneously participating in the learning. In ***An invitation to Social Construction*** (2015), Ken Gergen describes knowledge in education as "Socially Constructed" and education as a relational process.

As a teacher, I have engaged directly with learners by developing and implementing lessons, tasks and assessment. As a mentor, I have tutored students in specific content as well as supported students socially and emotionally when social/emotional barriers have adversely impacted student learning, access or engagement. As a school administrator and leader, I have directed academics, implemented school wide academic goals for student outcomes, and evaluated and supervised teacher instructional performance. In this context I have learned a great deal about the value and importance of relationships and dialogue as it relates to teaching and learning in schools. Specifically when there are large differences in ethnicity and culture between the teachers and the students they serve. I have experienced, witnessed, and observed how these elements adversely impact the engagement, growth, feelings of inclusion, and student academic performance outcomes of students of color. And these are just some of the problems with the current "traditional" approach to teaching and learning. In Ken Gergen's; **An Invitation to Social Construction- (3rd Edition 2015),** he frames several additional

problems. Gergen, refers to the student and teacher experiences in "Traditional" education as the following **"filled with fear of failure, anxiety over competition, and excessive boredom"**. In his perspective, there are two major premises that *"pervade most educational systems/"* First, is that it is commonly held that in "Traditional" education, the purpose is to **"move students from a condition of ignorance to one of knowledge"**. The second major premise is that **"education is aimed at improving the minds of individual students".** And in both these conditions the students themselves have no voice or input in the actual acquiring of the "knowledge". Patricia A. Sullivan (YEAR) refers to the "Traditional" educational approach as "**Independent scholarship is essentially a contradiction".** Gergen's perspective backs this assertion as well. Gergen brings this contradiction forward in the following: "**in the practical world of business, government, and research communities there is an ever-increasing dependence on collaboration"** In this context -- that is the "practical world" -- knowledge would need to be fluid, creative and evolving. Given this context, it is curious that pursuit of knowledge can be useful when acquired without relationship, dialogue and co-creation.

Teacher and student relationships are essential to student engagement and ultimately engagement influences student growth and academic learning outcomes. Students must also feel a part of the learning process in the learning environment. In order to build relationships, there must be a sense of belonging. This constructed belonging increases engagement. In order to accomplish this my premise is that dialogue is a must! These elements are even more impactful for black and latino students in grades 6-8.

Introduction
 I believe, and it is my premise, that teaching and learning praxis that is relational, must be co-constructed. During this exploration we will observe and look at Culturally Responsive teaching pedagogy. This approach is one of the more current instructional approaches that consists of co-construction elements and is also inclusive of a relational process. This approach has been highlighted as an approach that has produced better academic outcomes as well as overall improved experiences for black & latino students in grades 6-8. Zaretta Hammond (2015) refers to (3) core elements in her summary of what is considered culturally responsive teaching: 1-Building Awareness and Knowledge; 2-Building Learning Partnership and 3-Building Intellective Capacity.

Culturally Responsive Teaching is built on the premise that culture and background experiences shape the ways in which we make meaning and understanding. Further, because we all experience the world differently, these unique and distinct learning schema must be not only considered, but intentionally planned for with students of color. Students of color make up what is currently referred to as the "*Opportunity & Achievement gap*" . Students who are often marginalized due to under-representation and deficit based thinking and bias, regarding their backgrounds and cultures. Hammond frames her premise on research around the brain and nuero-science concepts that define culturally responsive teaching as an extension of brain-based learning. Hammond's premise is that **"When we are able to recognize and name a student's learning moves and not mistake culturally different ways of learning and making meaning for intellectual deficits, we are better able to match those moves with a**

powerful teaching response" *(Hammond; 2015 CRT & The Brain).* Hammond and other educators like Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay also contend that Culture is a unique and distinct element that can be a substantial asset or deficit in how students of color experience learning. All three of these culturally responsive practitioners' books and research highlight the importance of 3-essential steps. The first is that educators and teachers focus on learning the power in being clear about their own cultures and biases. The second is that educators focus on building student-teacher relationships. Third, teachers augment instructional approaches based on the elements stated.

In order to implement teaching in such a way; teachers and students would need a way to both acquire understanding and synthesize how meaning is made in the learning environments they both share and experience. This process occurs through relationships. My research question proposes that this can be done by implementing a co-constructed, relational teaching approach in classroom learning. By co-constructed I mean that dialogue, communication, and established shared understanding in language and communication is featured. All these elements influence instructional moves and choices by the teacher and are intentionally tied to what they know about the student academically, as well as what they learn about the student personally through dialogue and building relationships. My premise is that if you learn about student interest and experiences beyond the academic levels and didactic student data, there is a new and potentially powerful way to engage students instructionally. However. this part of the process must be done in concert with the student as an equal partner. This is how I am defining co-construction. One of the foundational ways in which this "Relational Process" can be achieved is through communication. In **"Culturally Responsive Teaching- Theory, Research & Practice,"** Geneva Gay (YEAR) highlights this essential component with the following: ***"If students are not very proficient in school communication, and teachers do not understand or accept their cultural communication styles, then their academic performance may be misdiagnosed or trapped in communicative mismatches. Students may know much more than they are able to communicate, or they may be communicating much more than their teachers are able to discern…"*** In Gergen's, "**An Invitation to Social Construction** (2015), culture is described as accepted, shared and agreed upon language and behaviors. If we accept this premise, it would be difficult for teachers and students to successfully communicate if they come from different backgrounds and experiences without a deliberate and intentional focus and commitment to having dialogic communication. Gergen describes dialog as a way of making meaning through co-action. This kind of shared connectivity, would allow the opportunity for both teacher and student to open up options for new meaning and the co-creation of new ways of being in relation. In this process, no longer is the relationship between the teacher and student one of "hierarchy" where the teacher stands at the front of the classroom, where the teacher describes, explains and demonstrates subject matter. No longer is there a teacher/student relationship where the student is a "partial participant". In what Gergen describes as a "Relationally Responsive" classroom, the teacher would take on a new identity and become a "facilitator", "coach" or "friend" in relation to the student in the classroom. In taking this identity, the teacher can invite students to engage in learning in a dialogic way.

When I began my first teaching job, I taught 6th grade math. In the first 2-weeks of school I wanted to get to know my students. What I did was break my class of 24 students down into smaller groups of 6-students and we began what I called "getting to know you" activities. My class was 80% black & latino students at the time. We focused on learning about one another's backgrounds, lived experiences, families and cultures. This was in week #1. In week #2, my class began answering specific questions about the value of math in the world and in their personal lives. We engaged in these activities in conversations and by responding to questionnaires and written or verbal prompts. After these conversations, I asked students what they observed from hearing and talking with me and one another. They found a baseline of what I now refer to as "deficit" based beliefs and feelings about the impact and value math held in their experiences. My next step was to reflect on what I could do to counteract this before diving into curricular instruction. I decided to collaborate with students on interests they had and see if there was a way I could synthesize and facilitate curricular instruction around those interests. I proposed an idea to students about building their own businesses and they were interested and engaged. We built a math-project based on students building and designing their own businesses. The project required that I, as the teacher, adjust my curricular structures such as my plans, lessons and assessment activities, to match the project activity. This did NOT include lowering rigor or exempting required skill development or common core standards. What it did, in fact, was allow me to co-construct with students the cognitive demand and depth knowledge without losing participation and engagement. This was all a byproduct of building relationships, through dialogue and collaboration on the experience with students.

Teaching should intentionally utilize a relational strategy like dialogue with students; teachers can build lessons, tasks and assessments in a more effective way that will directly promote greater student engagement, participation and ultimately a learning experience that is more inclusive for black and latino students. In chapter 6 of **"An Invitation to Social Construction"** Gergen, frames education as a relational process. Gergen's work highlights some very untraditional themes and perspectives. Gergen's work asks a fundamental question about the premise of knowledge. In his perspective knowledge is co-constructed through relationship and can not exist without relationship. It is my premise that, in this approach to teaching, teachers can use dialogue to build relationships that consistently, more effectively, resource and include existing pools of student creativity and knowledge.   In this approach, instruction, planning and lesson implementation assist the teacher in devising lessons that promote higher levels of engagement.

Methodology

The literature review was conducted focusing on distinct experiences and outcomes of Black and Latino students in grades 6-8 in public schools. The literary criterion required included topics relevant to the essential question posed for this research. It also required data that was inclusive of interviews and surveys, identifying outcomes relevant to students, teacher pedagogical approach, teacher and student demographics relative to outcomes, and incorporation of hypotheses that validated or contradicted known information or contributed new information.

To effectively evaluate the existing literature through a critical, conceptual lens related to engagement & inclusivity for black and latino students in grades 6-8 two approaches were used. The first involved identifying and categorising the existing literature, identifying and distinguishing literature that represents "Traditional" teaching & learning vs literature focused on "Relational" process teaching. Mapping literature distinctions enables a broad description of the landscape that encompasses "Traditional" teaching and learning and "Relational" teaching and learning, as well as the two other essential research components: engagement and inclusivity. The second approach involved a critical review, which was used to evaluate through a compare & contrast approach, identify, and review the conceptual contribution of each study.

The literature search was conducted between Aug 2020 and March 2021. The first step involved the identification of literature themes and topics related to what Is Defined as "Traditional" and "Relational" teaching practices, followed by key words, and used nesting techniques to research keywords and phrases. The table below details the words and phrases that were searched, as well as the process that was followed. Information was grouped under the main headings of Teaching & Learning for Black & Latino students grades 6-8 in public schools.

Key Terms & Phrases Researched:

- Relational Teaching
- Teaching Pedagogy
- Teacher & Student relationship
- Teaching Behaviors
- Student Learning Behaviors
- Engagement
- Engaging student behaviors
- Engaging teaching behaviors
- Inclusion
- Inclusive learning behaviors
- Inclusive teaching behaviors
- Black students learning experiences
- Black student learning outcomes
- Latino student learning experiences
- Latino student learning outcomes
- School & Culture
- Student & teacher communication
- Instructional Strategies

Themes	Databases Searched	Screening	Eligibility	Included
☑ ~~Relational Teaching~~ ☐ Teaching Pedagogy ☑ ~~Student & teacher Relationship~~ ☑ ~~Teaching Behaviors~~ ☑ ~~Student Learning Behaviors~~ ☑ ~~Engagement~~ ☑ ~~Engaging Student Behaviors~~ ☑ ~~Engaging teacher Behaviors~~ ☑ ~~Inclusion~~ ☑ ~~Inclusive student learning Behaviors~~ ☑ ~~Inclusive teaching Behaviors~~ ☑ ~~Black student Learning Experiences~~ ☑ ~~Latino Student learning Experiences~~ ☑ ~~Black Student Learning Outcomes~~ ☑ ~~Latino Student Learning Outcomes~~ ☐ School Culture ☑ ~~Student & Teacher Communication~~ ☐ Instructional Strategies	**Electronic Databases** ☑ ~~JSTOR,~~ ☑ ~~Sage,~~ ☑ ~~Research Gate~~ ☑ ~~Wiley Online Library~~ ☑ ~~Google Scholar~~ **Institutional Libraries** ☑ ~~Canterbury (CCC)University~~ ☐	**Titles:** Relevant titles were screened? ☑ ~~Yes~~ ☐ **No** **Abstracts:** Abstracts were read to screen for inclusion or exclusion? ☑ ~~Yes~~ ☐ No Articles were excluded following the screening of abstracts based on relevance to the topic ☑ ~~Yes~~ ☐ No	**Articles Selected:** #12 Articles selected were read in its entirety **Articles Excluded:** #18 Articles were excluded based on relevance to the topic or If no new information surfaced as compared with other articles	**Articles included in the Review:** #28

Discussion

What is discovered in this researcher's literary review is the following: the existing research literature and study clearly show that the current education construct, what I refer to as "Traditional" teaching and learning, promotes individuality, competition and "knowledge" as a specific thing to be acquired. The systems used to "teach" students are often decided before interacting with students. The use of "Assessments", "Grades","Tests" are all built in order to measure a student's proficiency to re-state the information given by the teacher. The literature reviewed here also makes clear that the existing and prescribed achievement measures are tied to these current systems and structures and there is an existing gap of achievement between "Black & Latino" students as compared to "White" students. This researcher's literature review also highlights that these "achievement gaps" are well known within the current educational

community. This literature also highlights that ways to minimize these "achievement gaps" require a teaching and learning approach that prioritizes understanding the impact of culture and relationship. These current structures and methods in "traditional" teaching do NOT prioritize relationships as an essential element in teaching.

What is also discovered in this researcher's literary review is that there is connectivity between what is referred to as "Culturally Responsive" teaching and "Relational Process" teaching or, as Gergen defines, "Relationally Responsive" teaching. The connections exist in the dialog and inquiry regarding the value of language, behaviors, and traditions as they relate to "Culture". Gergen's work defines culture as inclusive of language, behaviors, and traditions. Geneva Gay and Zaretta Hammond (YEAR) express that teaching and learning become more relational when there is an awareness of the "Cultural" element. In both the "Relational Process" and "Culturally Responsive" teaching process' the value of the relationship is highlighted as essential. When examining and exploring the literature through the explicit context of the research question; it is clearly evidenced that some "Traditional" teaching and learning practices do include a distinct focus on elevating the importance of relations between teacher and student. The challenge here however is that this is not a generally accepted, approved or expected approach.

These primary discoveries bring this researcher back to wondering how current "Traditional" teaching and learning impacts "Black & Latino" students given what we know about the importance of "Culture", "Dialogue" and "Relationship"? It makes me wonder about how current "Culturally Responsive" teaching practices are thought about, discussed, communicated and valued in the current educational context given the clear evidence of success, specifically with "Black & Latino" students? In examining this literature through the lens of my essential question, literature and existing practices in "Relational" process teaching, I also see opportunities and new ways teaching and learning can occur.

Critical Content

A plethora of research on pre-service teachers discloses a general lack of preparedness to teach urban students. In a 1999 report by the National Center for Education Statistics, only 20% of teachers who reported teaching culturally diverse students stated that they felt prepared to meet the needs of these students. They frequently reported that building understanding of these students' backgrounds and experiences would have allowed them more of an ability to build beneficial relationships. Urban students bring specific cultural orientations and practices in the classroom including diverse patterns of language and socialization. Their experiences frequently include patterns of restriction such as racism and classism that limit their educational opportunities and life chances. When these occurrences are ignored, students are placed at a distinct disadvantage. Due to a lack of knowledge about urban students—in particular African American and Latino/a students—many teachers position learners at risk of academic failure, misidentification of special needs (including giftedness), and unnecessarily harsh disciplinary action.

In contrast, effective teachers share a set of common practices and knowledge about urban students that minimize negative outcomes (**Delpit, 1995** Foster, 1997; **Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings**, **1994; McDermott et al., 1999)**. A variety of interventions at the preservice level have been implemented in the US and other countries to increase the efficacy and effectiveness of urban teachers. Many teacher education programs have included self-reflection practices, field experiences, and multicultural education courses as part of teacher preparation with the idea that these program elements will increase the effectiveness of teachers in urban schools. However, the patterned disproportionate underachievement of African American and Latino students and high attrition of their teachers within the first few years indicate that more needs to be done. The purpose of this study is to design and use an instrument to measure what pre-service teachers know about effective teaching in urban schools so that its findings can guide the professional development of school of education faculty. Once we gain a clear picture of the areas of strength and weakness in our students' knowledge base—and with the assumption that their weaknesses reflect what we are not teaching or not teaching well—we can determine the types of professional development that can expand our knowledge, and, in turn, the knowledge of our students. Effective urban teachers and effective education is holistic and places students at the center of learning. By doing so, cognitive, meta-cognitive, and motivational factors—all related to achievement—contribute to optimistic life chances **(Lambert & Combs, 1998)**. Research on effective urban education examines factors such as retention, grade point average, parent participation, frequency of disciplinary action, attendance, and performance indicators such as standardized test scores and other measures of achievement that demonstrate positive educational outcomes. Research results, using the above criteria, suggest that when cultural experience is a meaningful consideration in the education of urban students, educational experiences improve (***Adams& Singh, 1998; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 1997; Sizemore, 1990*** Development of the teaching in urban schools scale). Thus, effective urban teachers utilize students' cultural experience to influence positive educational outcomes. Effective teachers of urban students are those who cultivate educational practices that can transform dominant and inequitable patterns of schooling that limit the life chances of some students while privileging the life chances of others. They are professionals/intellectuals who search for ways to connect theory, practice, and reflection; they examine, critique, and select curricula and pedagogies that are relevant to and effective with culturally diverse groups of students; they create connections between students' families and their instructional program; they act as change agents who resist standardization and seek policy and practice changes in the interest of urban children's learning; and they engage in the mindful practice of paying attention (e.g., reflecting, studying, writing) to their own teaching ***(Ballenger, 1999; Boykin, 1994; Gay, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Goodwin, 1998; Lampert, 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Murrell, 2001)***. Such teachers are conscious and continuous learners with openness to new ideas and experiences that can expand the core foundational and methodological knowledge of the profession. When teachers consider how culture—made visible through their daily practices—affects every curricular and pedagogical decision they make, they are better able to center themselves and their students in the learning process.

Effective urban teachers understand that, in schools, the saturating cultural character of traditional approaches to teaching and learning is an ineffective way to connect and engage

students at high levels. The solution to this problem is researched, proven and clear. It is required and essential for students and teachers to build strong understanding of one another's cultures, experiences and backgrounds through relational dialog in order for the teacher to, as Gergen states in _**"An Invitation to Social Construction,"**_ "_facilitate_" or "_coach_" in the learning environment. While students in American urban schools represent all US and world cultural groups, this study focuses primarily on African American and Latino cultures. These cultural groups are the predominant groups that are consistently represented as under achieving, yet they are consistently underrepresented and misrepresented in school curriculum. In addition, these groups' cultures in the US have a particularly intractable historical experience of marginalization and oppression—one that has been maintained and reproduced through educational systems—research that contributes to understanding and changing this phenomenon is essential.

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