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# Beliefs and Practices of Teachers in Two High-Poverty Urban Schools

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# Beliefs and Practices of Teachers in Two High-Poverty Urban Schools

Susan C. Domanico, Ed.D.

University of Connecticut, 2015

This case study examined the beliefs and instructional practices of ten teachers in two high-poverty urban elementary schools. I selected these two schools since the students and staff were racially similar to help isolate the variable of social class. Data were collected on the teachers' beliefs about low-income students and on instructional practices utilized by teachers. I used social reproduction as the theoretical framework for the research. I conducted structured interviews and announced and unannounced non-participant class observations to determine beliefs and practices used. Data were mapped to four broad concepts: beliefs influenced by social class, beliefs influenced by education reform orientation, traditional instructional practices and research-based instructional practices.

Teachers expressed personal beliefs that were influenced by their middle-class status. However, the teachers concurrently held professional beliefs that their students were capable learners. Choice of instructional practice could not be consistently predicted based on beliefs about low-income students. Some teachers with strong stereotypes about low-income learners used traditional practices typical in low-achieving schools; some used research-based practices typical in high-achieving, high-poverty schools. I conclude this study with recommendations for focusing on professional beliefs to encourage the use of research-based instructional practices as a means to close income-based achievement gaps.

Beliefs and Practices of Teachers in Two High-Poverty Urban Schools

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Education Dissertation

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## CHAPTER 1

### Problem Statement

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 focused attention on achievement gaps between students in poverty and their more affluent peers, and the legislation directed educators to implement strategies to close these gaps (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Closing the gap is critical because in 2009, low-income students, as defined by free or reduced lunch eligibility, were about five times more likely to drop out of school than high-income students (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, Kewal, and Ramani, 2011). The Connecticut Council for Education Reform called closing the low-income/non-low-income achievement gap, “an economic and moral imperative” (Connecticut Commission on Educational Attainment, 2010, p. 1). Closing the gap is not easy as students who grow up in poverty must overcome a number of challenges that impact achievement levels.

According to the Connecticut Commission on Educational Attainment, in 2012, Connecticut had the largest and most persistent income-based achievement gaps in the United States (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012). That same year, Connecticut Governor Dannell Molloy signed a sweeping education reform bill designed to improve the performance of low-achieving schools and address the state’s income-based achievement gap (Lawrence, 2012). With the absence of a state accountability assessment, so far the impact of the legislative reforms is still unclear. Past efforts to close the achievement gap have not met with expected success (Connecticut State Department of Education CEDaR, 2014). Two approaches to closing the achievement gap have focused on the impact of teacher beliefs and on changing instructional practice. High-achieving, high-poverty schools show a pattern of

teacher beliefs that includes high expectations for academic achievement and success for all students (Bamburg, 1994; Chenoweth, 2009, 2010; Cotton, 1989; Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Haberman, 1995; Haycock, 1998; Lumsden, 1997; Omotani & Omotani, 1996; Tauber, 1998). Conversely, low-achieving, high-poverty schools are characterized by low expectations and the belief that factors such as poor nutrition, transience, lack of family support and lack of value of education will result insurmountable barriers to success (Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Haberman, 1995; Makedon, 1992, Rist, 1970). In school settings with low expectations and a sense of predetermination of failure, teachers typically resort to instructional practices that are traditional, rote and focus on completion and compliance (Haberman, 1995; Robinson, 2011; Willis, 1977) which plays out in a self-fulfilling prophesy for school failure (Jussim & Harber, 2005). In high-achieving, high-poverty schools, teachers have made changes in instructional practice to move from a traditional, teacher-centered approach to a student-centered and intellectually rigorous set of strategies (Blackburn, 2008; Chenoweth, 2009; Elmore, 1996; Hattie, 2013; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Marzano & Toth, 2014).

The urgency of determining a plan for improving outcomes for low-income students is growing as student need in Connecticut public schools has increased dramatically from 26.4% eligible for free or reduced price lunch in 2004 to 34.4% in 2010 (Connecticut State Department of Education CEDaR, 2014). This issue is not unique to Connecticut schools. According to the Southern Education Foundation and the Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College at Columbia University, in 2012-13, 51% of students in pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade were eligible for free or reduced price lunches (Layton, 2015). Factors associated with poverty such as poor nutrition, transience, lack of access to health care and quality preschool programming pose real barriers to learning readiness before students even set foot in the classroom (Bryd

&Weitzman,1994; Hart & Risely, 1995; Lareau, 1985). Educators need to probe deeply into how they can address the low-income achievement gap if public schools are to succeed in preparing all students to be productive global citizens.

While the public school student population is becoming poorer, the issue of class difference between teachers and students has become more pronounced as the teaching population has remained consistently middle-class (Howard, 2006). The concept of social class has both an economic and sociological component (Gilbert, 2002). The sociological component includes generalizations about culture, beliefs, values and norms that are common for members of the class and differ between classes (Gordon, 1949). This sociological modeling has been a convenient construct for dividing society into upper, middle and lower classes. While class membership is not monolithic, class provides a generalization to help explain the distribution of resources and power in society (Gilbert, 2002).

Class difference may be one of the factors that has contributed to the persistence of achievement gaps (Bomer, Dworin, May & Semington, 2008; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Makedon, 1992). The socio-economic profile of public school teachers is largely unchanged over the past decade (Howard, 2006,2007). As they have been for decades, teachers are solidly middle-class as defined by attributes such as income level, wealth, educational attainment, occupational status, and position security (Beeghley, 2004; Gilbert, 2002; Thompson & Hickey, 2005). As students become poorer, a greater class gap has developed in schools. Since teachers have been identified as a critical factor in improving student achievement in much research (Ferguson, 2002; Marzano, 2003; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996; Wong, 2007), this social class separation is a significant issue. Teachers are expected to reach across socio-economic class with beliefs and practices that will support the

learning of low-income students. Numerous publications claim that it is a teacher's instructional effectiveness and skill to connect with students that has the greatest within-school effect on student achievement (Bundick, Quaglia, Corso, & Haywood, 2014; Elmore, 2000; Ferguson, 2002; Marzano, 2003; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996; Wong, 2007).

Social reproduction theory raises the issue that members of society's dominant classes, the upper- and middle-class, act in ways to preserve their advantages in society. The dominant class organizes institutions such as schools in ways that preserve the status quo and maintain their privilege and power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Willis, 1977). The *No Child Left Behind* paradigm requires teachers, who are predominantly middle-class, to develop a set of beliefs and practices that will support the achievement of all students, including those who are low-income and lower class. Research suggests that in places where the achievement gap is narrowing, teachers have a reform-oriented set of beliefs and use research-based strategies (Barth, Haycock, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, & Wilkins, 1999; Chenoweth, 2009; Reeves, 2003). The reform mindset in high-achieving, low-income schools is that all students, regardless of income level, ethnicity or disability can achieve at high levels. This is a shift from the class-influenced belief that some students are so negatively impacted by socio-economic factors that they will perform poorly and are likely drop out of school. The research-based practices in high-achieving, low-income schools are student-centered, infuse higher order questioning and thinking into classroom discourse and encourage student collaboration and problem-solving around authentic problems (Barth, Haycock, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, & Wilkins, 1999; Chenoweth, 2009; Haberman, 1995, Marzano, 2003;

Reeves, 2003). This instructional approach differs significantly from the teacher-centered, low cognitive demand instructional practices found in traditional, industrial-based models.

Persisting in traditional practices and negative beliefs about low-income students as learners is not likely to result in improved outcomes for disadvantaged students. This study examined teachers' beliefs and instructional practices in two low-income urban elementary schools to examine the relationship between teacher beliefs and their choice of instructional strategies. The goal is to provide a rich description of teacher beliefs and practices and to examine any patterns that may emerge between teacher beliefs about low-income students and their enacted practice.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

The existence of income-based achievement gaps is well-documented by data (NCES, 2014). Researchers have explored many factors that may contribute to the existence of income-based achievement gaps. According to the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, income-based achievement gaps are exacerbated by a lack of accountability in the educational system, not setting high expectations for students and the need for more effective teachers and school leaders in low-income schools (Connecticut Commission on Educational Attainment, 2010, p. 3). Strategies to improve outcomes for low-income and at-risk students have included research and recommendations at the organizational level (Barth, Haycock, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, & Wilkins, 1999; Byrk, 2010; Chenoweth, 2009; Ebrahimi, 1999; Elmore 1996). Other researchers have drilled down more to the impacts of school leaders (Barth, Haycock, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, & Wilkins, 1999; Bryk, 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003). Some researchers have approached the problem by focusing on the role of families and communities in closing the gap (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Edwards & Warin, 1999; Epstein, 1987, 1996; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Lareau, 1987, 1989). Many researchers have concentrated on teacher effects as way to address the achievement gap (Delpit 1995; Elmore, 2000; Ferguson, 1991; Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Haberman, 1995; Haycock, 1998, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Makedon, 1992; Marzano, 2003; Nieto, 1996). This research on the organization or school level, school leadership, parent and community effect, and teacher effect on the achievement gap have frequent points of intersection.



## **Income-based Achievement Gaps**

Poverty introduces challenges for children's success in schooling. Formal education has to compete with meeting immediate physical and emotional needs and often is not able to rise in the "hierarchy of needs" (Maslow, 1998). Research suggests that factors such as poor nutrition, lack of prenatal and continuing medical care, and unstable family units including the absence of a parent or frequent changes in caregivers all have a negative impact on student learning (Hart & Risley, 1995). Bryd and Weitzman (1994) found that inadequate nutrition and medical care rendered low-income students unprepared to learn. Low-income students tend to have fewer options to attend high quality, accredited pre-schools programs due to the cost (Lareau, 2003; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Instability in residence and access to sub-standard housing contribute to a high student mobility rate and poor school attendance (Hart & Risely, 1995). This research suggests that many of the environmental effects of poverty contribute to the persistence of achievement gaps.

## **Social Reproduction and Achievement Gaps**

Other research and theory highlights the socially constructed nature of achievement gaps. Social reproduction provides a framework to understand the process by which the dominant middle and upper classes maintain advantages in power and privilege over the lower class. In this framework, schools are described as institutions created and structured by the middle class to promote their values and norms and to maintain the subjugation of the lower class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1986; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Rist, 1970). Social reproduction theorists claim that a factor that may contribute to the persistence of achievement gaps is the difference of socio-economic class between teachers and students.

Membership in social class is defined by a number of factors including income level, wealth, educational attainment, occupational status, and position security (Beeghley, 2004; Gilbert, 2002; Thompson & Hickey, 2005). Teachers are typically members of the middle class by virtue of these criteria (CSDE, CEDaR, 2014). Students in public schools are increasingly members of the lower class as defined by these criteria.

Class difference adds a number of dimensions to the teacher-student dynamic. Teachers and students differ in their ability to meet their basic needs such as adequate nutrition, stable shelter adequate health care and educational and cultural access. According to social reproduction theorists, teachers draw on their own cultural preferences and experiences which results in the perpetuation of practices that maintain the power and advantage of the white and affluent members of society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Willis, 1970). Research on social interaction of teachers and students showed that teachers are less likely to engage with their low-income students if the students do not conform to middle-class expectations for cleanliness, social decorum, manners, and use Standard English with expected tone and volume (Hartigan, 2006, Rist, 1970). Lewis and Gorski use the term “culture of poverty paradigm” to describe the assumptions held by the middle class that low-income students are by nature violent, criminal, unmotivated, and that families lack parenting skills that would support education (Gorski, 2008, Lewis 1961, 1969). Researchers have identified other indicators of the impact of social class on teacher-student interactions. Studies have examined the social construct of “white trash” or “trailer trash” (Gerstl-Pepin, 2003 Hartigan, 2006; Morris, 2005) as a classification to differentiate between middle-class whites and whites of lower social class and social status. Hartigan coined the term “pollution ideology” to describe a coping mechanism for middle-class whites to socially distance themselves from the

sub-group of poor whites who do not honor the cultural norms and expectations of the white middle-class (Hartigan, 2006).

Teachers may attend to cues or identifiers of social class which are not likely to be part of the students' formal academic profile (Rist, 1970). The lack of material goods such as clean, properly fitting clothing and regular access to hygiene products for some students contrasts sharply with middle-class expectations for school preparedness (Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Morris, 2005; Rist, 1970). All of these factors serve as "street markers" to distinguish those students as an underclass, under-privileged, and culturally different from their middle-class teachers (Bourdieu, 1986, Morris, 2005). Middle-class teachers may consciously or unconsciously discriminate against low-income students who use street slang, wear brands of clothing associated with urban fashion such as low-riding pants, and listen to hip-hop style music because of the association of these characteristics with minorities or the poor working class (Morris, 2005) This inability to connect on a cultural or social level contributes to the achievement gap since these students often receive less direct attention and instruction from teachers (Makedon, 1992; Rist, 1970), and teachers may be less invested in their lower class students' success (Gerstl-Pepin, 2003).

### **Industrial Model Schools and Traditional Practice**

The issue of class differences in schools reflected the class differences that emerged in an industrial society. In order for industrial society to function smoothly, a clear hierarchy of roles developed in factory settings that defined specific skills, behaviors and attitudes for each group (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Willis, 1970). These same roles were mirrored in the development of schools structures, processes and procedures. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, schools were

organized according to a factory or industrial model of education that paralleled and complimented the needs of the industrial economy (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Willis, 1970). In this industrial model, a primary mission of public schools was to develop young people to participate in the work force (Callahan, 1962; Makedon, 1992). Consequently, the instructional practices used in schools were based on authority, hierarchy, conformity and standardization (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Rose, 2012). The model was described as far back as 1916 by Ellwood Cubberley as the most efficient organizational structure for schools (Callahan, 1962; Cubberley, 1916).

The term “factory model” is still in wide use today to describe the organization of many public schools (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011). This model effectively maintained the existing class structure while still offering some opportunity for social and class mobility to the lower class who conformed to the middle-class norms of their teachers and schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Willis, 1970).

Public schools of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were not designed to educate all children (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Students were sorted into different groups with varying expectations and anticipated outcomes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Willis, 1970). Schools provided basic instruction in reading, writing, and basic mathematics for the masses, but typically only middle- and upper-class students completed diploma programs while lower-class students typically left school to seek employment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Willis, 1970).

Research suggests that teachers recreate classrooms like the ones in which they were educated (Makedon, 1992). Based on their own experience as students and in teacher

preparation courses, teachers are more likely to organize their classrooms according to the traditional factory model because that is the structure with which they are most familiar and that teachers default to what they are most comfortable doing (Howard, 2006). Traditional schools had clear hierarchical roles for teachers and students, as well as structures and expectations that preserved and supported the status quo (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Willis, 1970). Instruction was teacher-dominated and largely whole group (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Rose, 2012). Students were passive learners in a traditional model with limited ownership of learning and independence, generally receiving information and listening to their teachers (Marzano & Toth, 2014, Shanker, 1990).

Some of these features of traditional class settings included self-contained classrooms, the organization of knowledge into subjects, the division of students by age rather than ability, and strict policies for attendance, discipline, and homework (Makedon, 1992; Robinson, 2011). Tasks assigned to students tended to be of low cognitive demand consisting of rote memorization, recall and simple comprehension (Bloom, 1956, Marzano & Toth, 2014; Webb, 2002). The instructional strategies used in traditional schools were typically teacher lecture and practice and review, often with a heavy reliance on textbooks and worksheets (Marzano & Toth, 2014). Low-income students are not well-served by the traditional, middle-class school model because this model offers few opportunities to engage in the higher-order thinking and problem-solving that is necessary in a post-industrial economy. Students need opportunities to develop creativity and learner independence rather than rote tasks and compliance (Haberman, 1995, Robinson, 2011).

## **Educational Reform: Changing Beliefs and Practices**

The traditional American educational practice of the “factory model” came under scrutiny when the Russian launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 raised concern that American students were falling behind international rivals in math and science education (Neal, 2008). Decades later, the publication of *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) by the National Commission on Excellence in Education further emphasized the importance of examining traditional practices in schools and raising the bar so that American students would be more globally competitive (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* expanded that vision to include all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, income or disability (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

A new set of reform-oriented beliefs emerged from this imperative to improve student achievement: all students, regardless of socio-economic profile, are able to learn. Changes and shifts in instructional practice were necessary in order to make all students more globally competitive and college and career ready (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). These reforms called for both change in the beliefs of educators about the learning potential of low-income students and the need to implement researched-based instructional strategies most that were more likely to result in improved student achievement for all.

Positive teacher beliefs about student learning ability have been shown to be a powerful factor in raising student achievement (Bamburg, 1994; Chenoweth, 2009, 2010; Cotton, 1989; Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Haberman, 1995; Haycock, 1998; Lumsden, 1997; Omotani & Omotani, 1996; Tauber, 1998). These researchers contend that teacher expectations exert a powerful influence on student and teacher behavior (Miller, 2001). These studies associate high

expectations, defined as the belief that all students regardless of their circumstances can learn, with improved student success. Teachers who lack this belief are likely to accept student failure as inevitable and consequently put little effort into connecting with students and delivering challenging instruction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Demie & Lewis, 2010; Gorski, 2008; Haberman, 1995; Makedon, 1992, Rist, 1970). According to Bamberg (1994), Ferguson (2002), Howard (2007), Lumsden (1997), Schilling & Schilling (1999), and Tauber (1998), teachers who convey to students that they believe in them, expect them to be successful, expect them to do rigorous work at a high level, and do not let a student's demographic profile or economic circumstances present an obstacle to success are most likely to maximize student achievement levels. This theme of "high expectations" is reflected in many meta-analyses of success in high-poverty schools (Chenoweth, 2009; Barth, et.al, 1999; Hattie, 2003; Reeves, 2003).

To meet the economic demands of the post-industrial 21<sup>st</sup> century, changes in pedagogy and instructional practice were also necessary. Meta-analyses generated effect sizes of specific instructional strategies to identify "best practices" for improving student achievement for all students (Marzano, 2007; Marzano & Toth, 2014). This research led to the key finding that in order to maximize student achievement, teacher and student roles are different than in a traditional, hierarchical classroom. The teacher is expected to act more as a facilitator and coach than as an expert imparting knowledge and organizing learning experiences on the students (Marzano & Toth, 2014, Shanker, 1990). Research-based classrooms are student-centered rather than teacher-centered in order to actively engage their students in acquiring and applying knowledge. Students in a research-based classroom are expected to work collaboratively rather than being passive learners (Marzano & Toth, 2014, Shanker, 1990).

Unlike traditional classrooms where knowledge is segmented into subjects, research-based classrooms present knowledge in an integrated, interdisciplinary and thematic manner (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Shanker, 1990). Instruction is designed with higher cognitive demands that require students to analyze and synthesize information (Bloom, 1956, Webb, 2002). Research-based classrooms require students to apply knowledge and connect learning to real life rather than learn content in isolation (Reeves, 2003; Barth, et. al, 1999; Chenoweth, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Haberman, 1995, Makedon, 1992; Marzano & Toth, 2014). Research also supports the use of cultural responsive instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2009; Delpit, 1995), multiple learning strategies, styles, and intelligences (Marzano, 2003; Reeves, 2003) and multiple resources and materials to allow students to access learning (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Shanker, 1990). Research indicated that when these research-based practices were in place, low-income students were meeting with more success than in the traditional model (Barth, et. al, 1999; Chenoweth, 2009; Reeves, 2003).

### **The Intersection of Beliefs and Practice**

Research supports the prediction that beliefs influence practice. The term “Pygmalion effect” has been used to describe the relationship between belief and practice where one’s beliefs about the outcome influences actions and consequently results in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978). The concept of “theory of action” (Argyris & Schon, 1974) connects beliefs and action that helps to explain why teachers may persist in traditional instructional practices in spite of research on more effective practice (Moss & Brookhart, 2014; Schreiber & Moss, 2002). Sometimes underlying beliefs are so influential that even when a teacher attempts to implement new research-based strategies that practice is still impacted by traditional beliefs and practices (Cohen, 1990).



Research shows that when teachers express belief in their students' ability to succeed and provide them with challenging tasks and the necessary supports that student achievement improves dramatically (Bamburg, 1994; Ferguson, 2002; Howard, 2007; Lumsden, 1997; Schilling & Schilling, 1999; Tauber, 1998).

Given this body of research, it is reasonable to expect that teachers who hold beliefs about their students that are influenced by a culture of poverty view of the lower class are likely to engage in practices that conform with the traditional model of education, placing few demands on students and providing few opportunities for lower income students to meet with academic success in the middle-class oriented classroom (Rist, 1970, Makedon, 1990). This relationship of beliefs and practice would also predict that teachers with reform-oriented beliefs about their students as learners would engage in research-based practices to maximize their students' chances of success (Bamburg, 1994; Haberman, 1995).

## **Summary**

Students in poverty have many challenges to overcome in order to be academically successful. One barrier may be the socio-economic or class differences between teachers and students which are becoming more prevalent as the student population becomes poorer and the teacher population continues to be solidly middle-class. Research documents that there are patterns of beliefs and of instructional practices that are consistently present in high-achieving, low-income schools, but in spite of research and educational reforms, many public school teachers cling to a traditional model of belief and practice.

## CHAPTER III

### Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

This study examined the beliefs and instructional practices of ten middle-class teachers teaching in two high-poverty, predominantly Caucasian schools. Based on interview data, I classified teachers' beliefs to determine if each teacher was more closely aligned with a class-based, culture of poverty mindset (Gorski, 2008, Lewis, 1971) or with the reform-oriented belief that all students were capable learners regardless of socio-economic profile. Using classroom observations, I examined whether teachers utilized instructional practices more typical of a traditional, industrial model of school or if the teachers used research-based practices associated with improving the achievement of low-income students.

The theoretical framework used for this study was social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1986; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). This framework supports the concept that schools are institutions created by the middle class to preserve the power and privilege structure in society that disadvantages the lower-class poor. Consequently, differences in social class between teacher and student may influence attempts to close income-based achievement gaps depending on teacher beliefs about their low-income students as learners and their choice of instructional strategies designed to raise student achievement.

The study explored the following research questions:

1. What are middle class teachers' reported beliefs about students in poverty?
2. What instructional practices are used by middle-class teachers teaching low-income students?
3. Is there a relationship between a teacher's beliefs about poor students and their choice of instructional strategies?

Teachers were classified into groups based on whether their beliefs were more socio-economic class (Gorski, 2008, Lewis, 1969, Makedon, 1992; Rist, 1970) or reform influenced (Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Haberman, 1995) and whether their choice of instructional practice was more traditional (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011, Rose, 2012) or research-based (Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Toth, 2014; Reeves, 2003).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Methodology**

I used a case study approach to create a rich picture of teachers' reported beliefs and the instructional practices in the two low-income urban elementary schools participating in the study. I combined in-depth interviews with classroom observation of the teachers, interviews of the school principals, and examination of school and community demographic data to create a picture of the educational environment that students of these teachers experienced. These data allowed me to describe teachers' beliefs about their low-income students, the instructional decisions in the classrooms, and whether classrooms could be classified more as traditional or reform oriented.

### **Setting**

I conducted my research in two of the five elementary schools in the district situated in a formerly thriving mill town that is now in economic decline. This district serves a total of 4500+ students, grades Pre-K to 12 in an urban setting. The area in which the schools are located is defined as a city by the U.S. Census Bureau with a population of over 36,000, a median household income of less than \$50,000 and 11.3% of the population below the poverty rate from 2006-2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The school population is much poorer than the overall city, and the school district is classified by the Connecticut State Department of Education as one of the thirty three poorest and least advantaged districts (out of 169 districts) in the state of Connecticut (CSDE, 2006). Both schools are predominately Caucasian, although both have a growing Latino population. This demographic trend is increasing the ethnic diversity and the number of students with Limited English proficiency in both sites. The number of children eligible for free or reduced lunch in each school has been growing steadily over the last few

years. Special education identification is slightly higher than the state average of 12% (CSDE, 2014).

Table 1

*Profiles of Schools*

School A	Enrollment	White	Latino	Black	Asian	Limited English Proficiency	Free/Reduced Lunch	Special Ed
2008-09	459	61.9%	25.9%	9.8%	2.2%	14%	62.5%	15.5%
2009-10	458	57.6%	30.3%	9.8%	2%	20.5%	65.5%	18.6%
2010-11	451	53.2%	32.8%	8.9%	3.1%	22%	74%	20%
School B	Enrollment	White	Latino	Black	Asian	Limited English Proficiency	Free/Reduced Lunch	Special Ed
2008-09	397	68.3%	25.9%	6.5%	3.3%	15.6%	39.8%	17.1%
2009-10	383	65.3%	25.8%	6.8%	3.7%	16.1%	50.9%	18.3%
2010-11	398	60%	29%	3%	3%	13%	55%	19%

The attendance zones of both schools are in the downtown area of the city. Both schools serve areas of the city that include federally subsidized, low-income housing. Most of the dwellings in the attendance zones are multi-family housing and apartments, although the attendance zone of one of the schools extends to the northwestern corner of the city where the neighborhoods are more rural in nature and there are many more single family homes. Because of the availability of school choice through *No Child Left Behind* provisions, appropriately thirty families who reside in the attendance district for these schools, about four percent of the school populations, have opted to send their children to one of the other elementary schools outside the downtown area since neither one of schools in the downtown area have met the established performance targets on the state assessment. Of the five elementary schools in the district, these two are the most closely matched in both student and staff demographics and are unquestionably

the poorest and most ethnically and socio-economically diverse schools in the district. Both schools have met federal criteria for a school-wide Title I designation due to the high number of students eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch program based on family income.

## Participants

All of the classroom teachers in Grades 3, 4, and 5 at the two selected Kindergarten-Grade 5 school sites were invited to participate. These grades were selected based on their participation in the state assessment program. Four of nine teachers at one school and six of eleven teachers at the other school agreed to participate in the study. Both principals agreed to be interviewed about the schools in order to provide a more complete picture of the school culture and practices.

Table 2

### *Study Participants*

Code	Site	Age	Yrs in district	Yrs total	Salary	Grade	Gender	Race
FO2	A	49	6	6	53,404	3	F	White
F03	A	46	7.3	7.3	54,216	3	F	White
F04	A	39	6	12	69,136	4	F	White
F08	A	28	6	6	47,097	5	F	White
V06	B	49	11	11	62,197	4	F	White
V07	B	35	11	11	62,197	4	F	White
V09	B	34	2	7	57,784	5	M	White
V10	B	32	7.5	7.5	54,216	5	F	White
V11	B	49	9.7	9.7	63,708	5	F	White
V12	B	36	13	13	67,618	5	M	White

In these two schools, all of the participating teachers identify themselves as “middle-class.” Each of the teachers in the study has advanced on the district pay scale (income). Each has completed college and advanced degrees (educational attainment), and all are employed in a “white collar” occupation, and have earned tenure (position security) (Beeghley, 2004; Gilbert, 2002; Thompson & Hickey, 2005).

Based on the demographic information, the students and teachers are members of two different socio-economic classes. The students are poorer and more ethnically diverse than the teachers. Teachers need to address learning issues related poverty, cultural differences, language proficiency and learning disabilities as they plan for instruction in their classes.

**Data Collection**

I completed a thorough review of demographic data for students and staff at both schools (see Tables 1 and 2). This information confirmed the socio-economic differences between the teachers and their students.

Table 3 presents a brief summary of the data collection process:

Table 3

*Summary of data collection*

Source of data	Frequency
Structured teacher interviews	10 (one for each participant)
Follow-up interviews	3 (F02, F04, V12)
Announced observations	10
Drop-in observations	27 (2-3 per teacher)
Collection of statistical data	
Teacher demographics	1
School report cards	3
Strategic School Profiles	3
US Census data	1

Teacher interviews and observations spanned a two month period from May-June 2013. I chose to observe at this point in the year because patterns of behavior and teacher-student interactions were well-established by this time. Because the factors that influence student achievement are complex, I used multiple forms of data collection including a structured interview protocol, non-participant scheduled observations, and non-participant unscheduled drop-in observations to collect specific examples of teachers’ comments about students, their

families, and their students' learning potential as well as teachers' instructional practice. These data were analyzed to create a rich picture of teachers' beliefs and instruction.

## **Interviews**

Each teacher participated in an initial interview of 45-60 minutes in length conducted at location of their choice. The interview questions were piloted with non-participant teachers in the same schools. Teachers were asked open-ended questions to describe their students, the students' learning ability, the students' attitude towards school and if their low-income students had any distinguishing characteristics. Teachers were also had the opportunity to share their thoughts about organizational and school level factors, school leadership and the role of parents and families. Each teacher had an additional opportunity at the end of the interview to add any other information they wished to be on the record. This information helped to better understand their philosophy of education and approach to working in a high poverty school.

The interview also included a section on instructional practices and the teacher's general philosophy of education. Teachers were asked to describe specific instructional practices, including choice of strategies, grouping, or resources that they used.

## **Observations**

I observed each teacher during a literacy or numeracy lesson lasting approximately 45 minutes as a non-participant observer, seated in an unobtrusive area of the classroom (Creswell, 2007). This allowed me to gather field notes in order to assess whether teachers' choice of instructional strategies was consistent with the information about instructional practice and student interaction that they had shared in the interviews. I was able to conduct multiple short



unannounced drop-in visits to confirm if the data from the scheduled observations were consistent with daily practice.

### **Data Analysis**

Throughout the study, I wrote analytic memos in a research journal to capture thoughts, impressions, or emerging patterns (Creswell, 2008, p. 250). Data from the interviews were transcribed, using a transcription service. Transcription notes, audio tapes, and personal notes were reviewed and re-read at least three times to get a general sense of the data and form some preliminary impressions (Creswell, 2008, p. 250). Open coding was done to organize data generated in the interviews into four broad categories and themes, two on beliefs and two on practices based on patterns and language used by the participants (in Creswell, 2007, p. 290; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Next, I used selective coding to integrate the interview findings (Creswell, 2007 p. 290). I looked for patterns and themes in the participants' responses and actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 146) across classrooms, grade levels and school sites. I used "clustering" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 249) to help form categories that emerged from the data. Interview questions and specific items in the observation protocol were designed to generate information from the teachers that could be identified as either class-based, culture of poverty beliefs or reform-oriented beliefs. Similarly, the interview and observation protocols for instructional practice were designed to generate data to classify instructional practice as either traditional or research-based.

All field notes from the teacher observations were also coded using the same process and matched to the interview responses on similar topics. Data from the interviews and observations were merged for each teacher and then compiled by theme into a master document.

## **Validity and Limitations**

All of the intermediate level (Grades 3-5) teachers in the two schools were invited to participate in the study, and half of the eligible staff enrolled. Some of the teachers may have declined due to perceived commitment of time necessary for the interviews and observations and the timing of this data collection at the end of the school year, which is a busy time. The teachers who agreed to participate were representative of the full cohort.

Another influencing factor may have been my positional authority in the district. (see Appendix C for Statement of Bias). At the time of data collection, I was employed as a Central Office administrator in the district where the study was being conducted. Although I did not have any supervisory or evaluative authority over any of the teachers or principals, my position was associated with several significant functions that impacted the schools such as curriculum development, professional development, and assessment. This study required participants to state their beliefs, and some may have felt pressure to answer in ways they felt were consistent with my views as an instructional leader. Because of my role, I was a familiar and frequent visitor to both schools, so my presence in classrooms was not obviously disruptive to the data collection process. My three years of employment in the district also allowed me to develop professional relationships with the staff that ultimately contributed to openness and candor in their responses. The participants were aware that I was knowledgeable about the community, many of the school programs and the school profiles. Beliefs about low-income students may have reflected some bias since I shared the same socio-economic profile as a white, middle-class professional.

To maximize the validity and minimize researcher bias, I have utilized direct quotes from participants to capture their beliefs and attitudes as accurately as possible. I have incorporated a

thick description of the setting (Creswell, 2007; Leedy & Ormond, 2010), to allow readers to determine the transferability of the data and findings to other districts. Wherever possible, I have tried to use multiple data sources to triangulate evidence (Creswell, 2007).

## CHAPTER V

### Findings

My research confirmed that all of the teachers in the study held at least some strong class-based stereotypes about the poor. However, each of the teachers also expressed beliefs that could be categorized as reform-oriented when they were describing their own group of students. Beliefs were not either culture of poverty *or* reform-oriented, but in most cases elements of both were apparent. I account for this apparent conflict through distinguishing between teacher personal belief and professional belief. Instructional practices showed a clearer dichotomy. The majority of participants, eight out of ten, implemented practices that most closely fit the definition of traditional practice as described in literature although some research-based strategies were sometimes blended in. Only two of the participants (F08 and V12) had classrooms structured in ways that were consistent with research on strategies that have been successful in closing the achievement gap. The teacher's belief classification did not consistently predict the type of instructional practice. Half of the teachers who used traditional practices held strong culture of poverty beliefs which was consistent with the literature on social reproduction and culture of poverty. Yet the other teachers had some disconnect, with a mismatch between being beliefs and practices. Two participants expressed reform beliefs, yet still used traditional practices; two participants expressed traditional beliefs but used research-based practice.

#### **Beliefs about the poor**

In order to uncover what teachers believed about the poor and about their low-income students as learners, I posed open-ended questions that asked the participants to describe the students that they teach, their students' potential for learning and the impact that poverty has on

learning. Each of the teachers clearly identified themselves as middle-class and identified their students as lower-class, even though the classes contained students with some variation in family income. Teachers were clearly aware of class difference. The teachers expressed a connection between social class and potential for student achievement. Each of the ten teachers used the terms “challenging” or “at-risk” during their open-ended response to the question to describe their students and school setting. The table shows a representative sample of comments made by the teachers about low-income students and community they serve.

Table 4

*Teacher Beliefs About the Poor*

Teacher code	Belief expressed
F02	[Students] come to school with a high level of dysfunction in their home life. They don't value education as much and because of their backgrounds, for them it's not as important.
F03	I have kids who are emotionally affected [by poverty] and they can't shake it off and leave it at home. You know it's a transient population.
F04	Kids are coming to school with not as many experiences and enrichment opportunities. These kids who grow up here have no idea what we are talking about with books and art and cultural things. Students lack cultural capital and cultural enrichment.
F08	There is some learned helplessness. Students are emotionally distracted.
V06	Parental support is limited, parents lack parenting skills and often contradict the positive influences of the school. Parents don't know what to do. Parents are not as concerned about their kid's academic achievement.
V07	Working in a high poverty school, the expectation is that if I don't have something, you will give it to me. I don't have to work for it.
V09	I think poverty affects the perspective on education and its importance. Poverty affects student achievement because that support factor is missing. They don't get any motivation from home.
V10	Students come to school with emotional baggage.
V11	The parental support isn't always there. Some just lack the ability to help their kids or are intimidated coming into school.
V12	These kids show up in my class with very low motivation and discipline.

Each of these expressed beliefs show a high degree of orientation towards a culture of poverty mindset and the class-based beliefs predicted by social reproduction. Teachers equate poverty with dysfunction, identify that students and families differ in values, and cite numerous characteristics mentioned by Lewis (1969) and Gorski (2008) that are consistent with a stereotype of social class included helplessness, entitlement, lack of motivation and discipline and poor parenting skills.

At the same time, the same teachers articulated beliefs that were in line with a mindset that is considered an essential precondition for reform. The reform orientation (RO) downplays the barriers and obstacles presented by class and poverty. These sentiments were also shared by the very same teachers:

Table 5

*Teacher Beliefs About Their Students*

Teacher Code	Beliefs Expressed
F02	They are good learners. They are all hard workers and they are like sponges.
F03	My expectations are very high. I really know where my kids are at any given time and I push them to the next level; I'm a big pusher, I expect a lot.
F04	My take on it is that I like to prove everyone else wrong, whether its special ed or low-income...poverty is not a defining factor.
F08	I have some kids who surprised me changed my understanding, they are actually stronger thinkers.
V06	They are very capable. They are attentive learners.
V07	I feel like their options are wide open and it really just depends on them.
V09	They feel good about themselves when they're here. We celebrate their achievements and they make great progress.
V10	I don't have low expectations of anything. I try to push them even harder. It's just in my nature to push them hard and have high expectations and want more for them.
V11	All these students have the essentials to do well...The potential is there.
V12	All students have the ability to learn. They are all intelligent and have so much to offer.

These are the types of beliefs that are evident in studies about high-achieving, low-income schools.

Initially, the comments from the teachers seem to be addressing two different groups of students: students with insurmountable barriers to learning caused by social class and poverty and students with unlimited potential independent of social class and poverty. Instead, what it illustrated was that the teachers held complex views on their students. As a result, what emerged was the need to utilize two concurrent scales about beliefs: the degree to which each teacher held reform-oriented (RO) beliefs about student potential for learning and the degree to which the teacher emphasized a class-based, “culture of poverty” (COP) set of beliefs about the prospects for their low-income students. This became necessary because beliefs were not either-or but some combination of beliefs from both orientations.

A participant was assigned a “High” rating if he or she provided three or more pieces of evidence consistent with RO characteristics or with COP characteristics. Participants earned “Low” rating on each scale if they expressed one or no comments characteristic of each mindset. In order to be rated on as high on the RO scale, I listened for the teacher to articulate the following beliefs:

Table 6

*Reform-Oriented Beliefs*

---

All students can learn, regardless of their demographic profile (Barth, Haycock, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, Wilkins, 1999; Chenoweth, 2009; Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2010, Haycock, 1998).

Teachers have high expectations for both the quality and quantity of student work (Bamburg, 1994; Chenoweth, 2009, 2010; Cotton, 1989; Dweck, 2006; Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Haberman, 1995; Haycock, 1998; Lumsden, 1997; Omotani & Omotani, 1996; Tauber, 1998)

Students bring assets to learning, including experience, resilience and family support (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 1996)

Relationships and community in the classroom are important aspects of the learning process (Delpit 1995; Gerstl-Pepin, 2003; Haberman, 1995; Haycock, 1998, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Makedon, 1992; Nieto, 1996).

In order to be rated high on the COP scale, I listened for the teacher to articulate the following beliefs:

Table 7

*Culture of Poverty Beliefs*

---

Students seen as helpless, dependent or entitled (Gorski, 2008; Lewis, 1961, Rist, 1970)

Students are passive learners, need to be pushed and lack motivation and discipline (Gorski, 2008; NCES, 1992)

Students were from single-parent homes or homes that were chaotic and provided little support and reinforcement for the goals of the school (Demie & Lewis, 2011; Gorski, 2008; NCES, 1992)

Students have difficulty learning since basic physical and emotional needs are not being met outside of the school environment (Bryd and Weitzman, 1994; Hart & Risley, 1995; Lareau, 2003)

This matrix shows the distribution of ratings for the participants:



Table 8

<i>Teacher Beliefs Matrix</i>			
	Low COP	Moderate COP	High COP
High RO	F03, F04		V12
Moderate RO		F02	F08, V10, V11
Low RO		V07	V06, V09

Teacher beliefs were mapped to both the RO and the COP scale because most participants shared both professional beliefs and personal beliefs about the poor. Professional beliefs were aligned with the RO matrix and were consistent with research on school improvement that has identified the RO belief system as a common characteristic of schools where low-income students achieve at high levels. Personal beliefs were aligned with the COP matrix and are the values, norms and expectations that the teachers bring to the classroom based on their own socio-economic background and personal experiences beyond the teaching profession.

The chart shows significant variation on beliefs. These data indicated that it was possible for an individual to hold some degree of beliefs characteristic of both COP and of RO mindsets; these beliefs could be held concurrently without cancelling each other out. This participant illustrates the complexity of classifying the belief systems:

They are good learners and hard workers, like sponges. But it's a population you have to really push. They really have to buy in to what you're doing and it's hard to get some of the kids and the parents to buy into that, but eventually, they do it. You know the fact that they come in, and they are hungry. Sometimes they don't have parents who are able to help. (F02)

The COP factors alluded to in this statement include the lack of motivation, assumption of poor nutrition and lack of parental support and involvement. However, at the same time the teacher articulates a RO belief through expressing that the students still can be successful.

None of the teachers were classified as low RO. Each teacher expressed some optimism about their students' potential for learning during the interviews. The majority commented on their belief that students were "hard workers" or "good learners." Half of the teachers explicitly dismissed the link between poverty and their students' low-income status and learning potential in some way. Two of the ten teachers (F03 & F04) expressed a strongly positive and consistent view of their students as learners with limited references to class-based stereotypes about the poor by saying, "Some of my best students are from low-income families," (F03) and "Poverty is not the defining factor." (F04)

The majority of the teachers expressed beliefs that were strongly aligned to COP. In the personal beliefs expressed, the number of comments that reflected COP characteristics outnumbered the reform-oriented comments by a two to one ratio. Three of the teachers (F04, F08, V12) with high COP ratings explicitly discussed the role of school in teaching low-income students to act "more middle-class." F04 commented, "I think the kids here have learned middle-class values through school." One of the teachers (V12) implicitly referred to a difference in class values and norms between the expected behaviors at home and those taught in the home. "There's not a lot of emphasis on education at home and when they go home a lot of things that I have taught them are being reversed. They are not seeing hard work, they're not seeing someone who wants to sit down and look at their homework or read with them or talk about their day."

Another teacher (F08) demonstrated a mindset characteristic of the culture of poverty when alluding to the perception that the poor lack discipline and lead chaotic lives: “I always give a lesson on industrious work and how to function socially in normal classroom situations.” Teachers with high COP ratings made numerous references, more than four separate comments, about student helplessness and lack of motivation, poor parenting and physical or emotional trauma experienced by their students. This quote from F08 illustrates the depth of concern about the impact of poverty on learning:

There is some learned helplessness...They are so distracted by what they are bringing from their home life that they can't even begin to enter into the deep thinking that I'm trying to help them get to. It's a very distracted, emotionally distracted class.

The teacher was responding to an interview question about the impact of poverty on students as learners. The response referenced beliefs typical of a culture of poverty mindset that sees home conditions related to poverty as a significant barrier to student achievement. If this teacher sees students as unavailable for learning then it is likely that even the most innovative instructional practices are unlikely to help close the achievement gap. Another teacher expressed the same concern about the factors outside the school that influence availability to learn for the low-income students in the class:

It's not easy for them. I just feel like the connection isn't being made by a lot of the kids, and there are so many things pulling them in so many directions. Definitely a lot of kids are bringing their issues into school, home issues into school is definitely a factor. They have outside influences, like dad in jail or a foster family...They [parents] really don't value education, they don't see the light. They [parents] don't know how to get them to break the cycle. Kids are coming to school with not as many experiences and enrichment opportunities; children are not born into the same opportunities. (F02)

The teacher expressed a strong sense of economic determinism that identifies several elements of culture of poverty mindset including the negative role of parents, lack of cultural enrichment and cultural capital and the inability to meet basic needs.

In summary, the participants held a wide variety of beliefs about the learning potential of their students. Some were influenced by class and the culture of poverty mindset which were expressed as strong personal beliefs. At the same time, the teachers also expressed the belief that their own students were capable and eager learners and that school could offset the impact of poverty and class. While the teachers struggle with issues related to perceived class-based barriers to learning, other comments retain a degree of hopefulness about outcomes for the students. V12 comments, “It’s getting them [the students] to see that education is hugely important-a life changer.” In spite of influences outside the school environment, teachers can be purposeful in matching their instruction practices to the needs of the students in order to close the achievement gap.

### **Instructional Practices**

Instructional practices described by teachers in the interviews and observed varied from classroom to classroom, even within the same grade and the same school. The teachers chose a wide variety of strategies ranging from lecturing to deliver information and assigning problems on a worksheet, which would be considered traditional, to collaborative work by students on a task to solve an authentic problem, which would be more research-based. The results were complicated by two factors: teachers used some traditional and some researched-based practices, even within the same lesson, and the teachers’ espoused instructional practice were sometimes different than their actual practice.

My definition of “traditional practice” was compiled from factors associated with the “industrial or factory model” of education implemented for decades in many public schools (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Rose, 2012; Shanker, 1990). “Research-based” instructional practice involved alternate strategies and a different teacher-student dynamic in the classroom.

The research-based practices are strategies that are commonly seen in schools where low-income students are achieving at high levels (Barth, et al, 1999; Chenoweth, 2009; Haycock, 1998).

Table 8 shows the research base for the preliminary definitions of traditional and research-based practice.

Table 9

*Traditional and Research-Based Instructional Practice*

Element	Traditional characteristics	Research-based characteristics
Role of teacher	Teacher-centered strategies, teacher as expert, delivers content (Toth, 2014; Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Rose, 2012)	Student-centered strategies, teacher as facilitator, coach (Cuban, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Shanker, 1990)
Role of student	Passive learning, limited student independence, ownership, receiving information, listening to teacher (Marzano & Toth, 2014; Shanker, 1990)	Active engagement, creating and testing hypotheses, reading, writing, interacting with peers around content (Barth, et. al, 1999; Chenoweth, 2009, Haberman, 1995; Makedon, 1992; Marzano & Toth, 2014; Reeves, 2003)
Cognitive rigor	Knowledge and recall level, practicing and reviewing content (Bloom, 1956; Webb, 2002)	Application and synthesis level (Bloom, 1956; Webb, 2002)
Tasks	Same task for all using lecture, worksheets, textbooks and whole group instruction (Marzano, 2014, Beck, 2009; Goodlad, 1984)	Choices for processing and presenting learning, multiple resources, flexible grouping (Hattie, 2003, Marzano & Toth, 2014)

As with beliefs, the findings on choice of practice could not be neatly classified into one category or the other. To get a more accurate picture of the practices used by each teacher, I created intermediate categories that differentiated levels of practice and blended the elements of traditional and research-based across a continuum to better describe what was observed in the enacted practice. Table 9 shows the blending of instructional characteristics to form more precise categories:

Table 10

*Instructional Practice Matrix*

<u>Category</u>	<u>Cognitive Level</u> (Bloom, 1956; Webb, 2002)	<u>Teacher/Student role</u> (Marzano & Toth, 2014)	<u>Nature of tasks</u> (Marzano & Toth, 2014)
Traditional	Recall, DOK 1 Define, describe Identify, recite	Teacher directed, teacher delivers content, limited student particip- ation or interaction	Whole group, same assignment, reliance on textbook or worksheets
Progressive Traditional	Recall or explain DOK 1 or 2 Explain, apply Summarize	Mostly teacher directed, patterned teacher-student interaction, structured interaction among students, teacher helps process new information, students engage in guided practice	Mostly whole group, modeling or mini-lesson some small group work, same assignment, student collaboration is structured
Moderate Research	Apply and analyze DOK 3 or 4 Collect, construct Create, design, predict	Collaboration on learning goals, students have some choice from teacher selected learning goals & strategies, some options for choice of learning materials and styles, teacher helps examine errors in reasoning and provides resources as needed	Students work in self- determined groups or independently, actively collaborate with each other, authentic task or performance tasks, students reasoning, planning, using evidence to complete learning task
Strong research	Strategic and extended thinking DOK 3 or 4 analyze, synthesize, create, design, extrapolate	Student centered, student determined learning goals & tasks, teacher facilitates & coaches, wide variety of styles and instructional materials	Students self-directed, working independently, teacher confers and coaches, authentic tasks problems with multiple solutions or outcomes

Data about instructional practice were collected through both interview and observation process. Overall, teachers described their practice as more research-based in the interview than what was observed during the classrooms. See Table 10:

Table 11

*Espoused Versus Enacted Practice Rating*

<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Espoused practice rating</u>	<u>Enacted practice rating</u>
F02	Moderate research	Progressive traditional
F03	Moderate research	Progressive traditional
F04	Moderate research	Progressive traditional
F08	Moderate research	Moderate research
V06	Progressive traditional	Traditional
V07	Progressive traditional	Progressive traditional
V09	Progressive traditional	Progressive traditional
V10	Progressive traditional	Progressive traditional
V11	Traditional	Traditional
V12	Moderate research	Moderate research

Most teachers were consistent in the way that they presented their philosophy of instruction in the interview compared to what they actually did in their classrooms. One participant was consistently traditional: students completed math problems independently on a worksheet the entire class. Two teachers consistently progressive traditional: students were assigned to work in collaborative groups after the task was modeled by the teacher. Two teachers were consistently moderate research in instructional style: students were assigned a project to complete with multiple available resources, and the teacher coached students who needed assistance in selecting strategies and problem-solving.

While some of the teachers have embraced more research-oriented instructional practices, most are using the same strategies that they experienced as students. Few have not made the instructional shifts recommended by research as necessary to close the achievement gap.

**The Intersection of Belief and Practice**

I was interested in exploring if there was a relationship between the teacher beliefs and the instructional practices utilized in their classes. Based on the strong overall orientation to COP beliefs, I predicted that most of the teachers would use traditional instructional practices.

Conversely, for those teachers who held a strong RO belief mindset, I expected that they would engage in instructional practices that were more research-oriented.

The cross-referencing was complicated by the fact that each teacher had a COP rating for personal beliefs, a RO rating for professional beliefs, an espoused practice rating (how they described their practice), and an enacted practice rating (what they did in the classroom).

Table 12

*Comparison of Teacher Beliefs and Instructional Practice*

Teacher	COP Belief	RO Belief	Espoused Practice	Enacted Practice
F03	low	high	Moderate research	Progressive Traditional
F04	low	high	Moderate research	Progressive Traditional
F02	moderate	moderate	Moderate research	Progressive Traditional
V07	moderate	low	Progressive traditional	Progressive Traditional
V06	high	low	Progressive traditional	Traditional
V09	high	low	Progressive traditional	Traditional
V11	high	moderate	Traditional	Traditional
V10	high	moderate	Progressive Traditional	Progressive Traditional
F08	high	moderate	Moderate research	Moderate Research
V12	high	high	Moderate research	Moderate Research

A clear, consistent pattern between teacher beliefs and choice of instructional practice did not emerge from the findings. Rather, three different groups emerged: teachers with strong COP beliefs and traditional practice, teachers low or moderate COP beliefs and progressive traditional practice, and teachers with high COP beliefs and moderate research practice.

**Discussion**

The pattern of teachers with a high COP rating and traditional instructional practice is consistent with social reproduction theory. These teachers (V06, V11) held strong stereotypes about low-income students and had expressed concerns about the ability of their students to overcome the many obstacles to learning caused by their social class and influences outside of



school. This group was strongly driven by personal over professional beliefs. One of the high COP/high traditional practice teachers admitted to setting the bar for instructional rigor low, “I’m working with drill and practice materials. I am a fan of those old school techniques. I’m a fan because they work. I tried the new math program but it spirals, and kids don’t have the background knowledge.” (V11) This comment was confirmed during the classroom observation. The teacher modeled one strategy to solve a math problem on the projector and then assigned a set of problems from the textbook for students to complete. The students were directed to look back at the teacher model if they were having problems and to plug in the numbers from the problem in the book to get the correct answer. This instructional choice put a very low cognitive demand on the students and required little effort or comprehension of the mathematical concept for students to complete the task. Expectations for student engagement were at the compliance level. The teacher circulated through the room keeping students on task but did not engage in any discussions about the concepts or strategies that students were using to arrive at an answer. The teacher appeared to lack confidence in the students’ ability to take on a challenging task and consequently provided activities on which the students would like meet with success, albeit at a very low level of learning.

In this case, the relationship of beliefs and instructional practices for these teachers was consistent with Jussim & Harber’s research (2005) on self-fulfilling prophecy. Since teacher expectations were not high, teachers in this group choose familiar, traditional practices that maintained their own comfort and authority in the classroom. If their students did not perform well, poverty was as much of an explanation for failure as the choice of traditional practices. This combination of class bias and persistence in traditional practice can help to explain why the income-based achievement gap is persistent.

Teachers (F03, F04, F02, V07) with a less dominant COP belief mindset (low or moderate rating) incorporated more research-based strategies into their instructional practice. They allowed students to problem-solve or complete a task in small, more student-centered groups. Half of the teachers (F03, F04, F02, V06, V07) believed that their practice was more research-based than it really was based on their enacted practice. In the interviews, these teachers explicitly mentioned that they used strategies that were student-centered, inquiry-based, focused on problem-solving (F02) were hands-on and encouraged cooperative work (V07), but these strategies were not actually observed in the live instruction.

This group of teachers balanced conflicts between their personal and professional beliefs. While they expressed optimism during the interview that their students had “ability” (F04) and “potential” (V07) to be successful, they refrained from providing them with research-based practices that are more challenging for students and less well known to the teachers. This finding was consistent with prior research by Cohen (1990) that concluded that even teachers who may believe that they are implementing instructional reforms filter these practices through their own traditional approach to instruction.

The third group consisted of only two teachers (F08, V12), but the relationship between their expressed beliefs and choice of instructional strategies was the least predictable. These teachers had strong COP personal beliefs. These teachers described their students as “unmotivated,” “lacking discipline,” and demonstrating “learned helplessness.” They commented on the lack of parental support and parenting skills. As one shared, “It’s a battle between home and school, it’s a daily struggle. And to overcome home, that’s the tough part” (V12). This mindset would normally be expected to translate to low expectations for student success, yet these teachers chose to use a range of instructional practices in their classes that

were primarily research-based. In the classrooms of F08 and V12, the teachers provided students with tasks that required problem-solving to apply skills to an authentic task. After providing a context and framing a problem, these teachers encouraged students to work collaboratively and circulated through the room coaching students. Students were given access to a variety of resources to use to make meaning, and students were given considerable autonomy to explore multiple solutions to the problems presented by the teachers. In spite of personal beliefs, these two teachers appeared to be guided by an independent set professional beliefs that supported the use of different strategies than those commonly used by their colleagues. Student performance data on the Connecticut Mastery Test indicated that students in these two classes posted the largest gains in student achievement of any of the class sections participating in the study. One of the two teachers commented,

I've seen my students go off the charts on the standardized tests. If they have a teacher who motivates them and makes a difference in their life, I have found that you can take that poverty factor out of it and get that kid to do really well in a particular year. (V12)

Both of the teachers also expressed their belief in the ability of low-income students to achieve at a high level. The teachers acknowledged that their students would likely remain in a cycle of poverty unless provided with a good education. Both were reflective about their practice and efficacy. V12 shared this powerful statement, “We have to focus on the reading, the writing, the problem solving every moment of the day with the kids we have because they’re coming in at such a disadvantage. There can be no waste of time.” F08 mentioned the importance of utilizing technology in instruction during the interview and when observed, technology-enhanced instruction was clearly part of the daily routine. Students were working independently on online writing collaboration, writing journals, conducting research to complete an assignment and listening to an audio recording of a book. Technology was used during the lesson observed, and

F08 checked in with students who did not have access to computers or the Internet at home to make arrangements for those students to use devices at school at various times during the day so that they would be able to complete assignments. Awareness of the students' economic limitations at home did not prevent the teacher from exposing students to a strategy likely to support learning for the students.

## CHAPTER VI

### Significance of Study

A large body of research exists on the impact of teacher beliefs on student achievement and on instructional practices that are associated with gains in achievement for students in poverty. Although there is no set combination of beliefs and practices that result in success in high-poverty schools (Chenoweth, 2009), there are some common factors that are present in successful settings. This study is significant because it documented the complexity of teacher beliefs and the ability of teachers to make instructional choices based on professional as well as personal beliefs. All the teachers who participated in the study identified themselves as middle-class, but class membership was not the only defining factor in their beliefs about the poor or in their choice of instructional practices.

The study uncovered considerable variation in beliefs and instructional practices among the teachers in the same grades in the same two low-income schools. It confirmed that teachers still have much autonomy in how instruction is delivered in their classes in spite of common standards, instructional programs and school-wide professional development. Teachers also bring their own personal experiences, including values and perceptions related to social class into their classrooms. This study further calls into question the link between belief and choice of instructional practice. Some of participants conformed to the pattern of traditional class-based beliefs about the learning ability of the poor and the choice of traditional instructional practices that perpetuate the achievement gap, but the findings revealed that beliefs are complex. Several of these middle-class teachers concurrently held strong stereotypes about low-income students (personal beliefs) and still held strong beliefs that their students could be successful learners (professional beliefs). These teachers actualized their professional beliefs by providing

instruction that involved student independence and higher order thinking. Eight of the ten teachers expressed that their students could be successful learners, but three teachers (V06, V09, V11) did not alter their instructional practice to give students more challenging work; tasks remained very teacher-centered and involved low order thinking.

Based on this study, the beliefs that teachers articulated about low-income students are less important than what they actually choose to do in their classrooms to help students learn. Previous studies by many of the social reproduction theorists (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Makedon, 1992) by Cohen (1990) and by Moss & Brookhart (2014) implied that teachers' practices are defined by their beliefs, and teachers are typically limited to act within parameters defined by what they believe about their students. This assumption does not distinguish between personal and professional beliefs. The study did not reveal a predictable pattern of when teachers make choices more strongly influenced by personal beliefs or by professional beliefs. The findings also indicated that personal and professional beliefs overlap by varying degrees. Two of the teachers were able to hold complex and seemingly contradictory personal and professional beliefs about the challenges and barriers faced by their low-income students while still holding strong expectations for student achievement and providing rigorous instruction.

## **Recommendations**

These recommendations put consciousness about social class differences between teachers and students at the center of educational reform efforts. Reform efforts may not alter middle-class beliefs but rather supplement these personal beliefs with a complimentary set of professional beliefs to guide teacher-student interactions in the school setting. Beliefs are not easy to change, but practice can precede belief (Guskey, 1986). The recommendations provide

an explicit and purposeful approach to addressing the issues caused by a growing demographic gap between middle-class teachers and the growing number of low-income students served in public schools. A group of teachers in the study were able to enact progressive, research-based instructional practices in spite of the fact that they held strong personal stereotypes about the poor. Choice of instructional practice can exist independent of personal beliefs. School leaders can also utilize a well-defined set of expected instructional practices to assure that what teachers do is consistent with professional rather than personal beliefs. If this pattern can be expanded in low-income schools, then students are likely to experience better outcomes.

The teacher evaluation, supervision and support process can focus in on enacted practice to assure that teachers are employing the instructional strategies suggested by research that are likely to result in student-centered, higher-order thinking and challenging and engaging environments that will support student learning for all. A clear definition of expectations for classroom environment, planning, instruction, assessment and professional behavior can be articulated in observable, quantifiable behaviors to promote desired practice. Since the strategies shown to be effective in improving learning for low-income students are different from traditional, teacher-centered instruction, teachers will require modeling and coaching in order to implement new practices.

The hiring, induction and in-service training process can be used to reinforce the school's collective professional beliefs. Schools that serve students in poverty need to pay particular attention to the personal beliefs and prior training experiences that teacher candidates bring to the classroom. School leaders must establish an expectation for a set of professional beliefs to inform practice. Since most teacher candidates are statistically likely to be middle-class, teacher interviews should contain questions to ascertain the teacher's beliefs about working with low-

income students. Candidates with student teaching experiences in low-income schools are likely to have a better idea of strategies that are more (or less) effective in engaging students in content. The principal should also communicate information about the school's demographic profile, challenges faced by students and the resources and supports that are in place to offset the effects of poverty on student learning. The principals of both schools confirmed that these questions were part of their interview process.

Part of the new teacher induction process should include a thorough understanding of the school's mission, vision and belief statements to set a tone for high expectations and non-negotiables around student growth and achievement, regardless of socio-economic profile. New teachers could be partnered with successful veteran teachers to mentor, encourage and problem-solve in situations that are novel to the new teacher, especially in terms of issues related to negotiating class differences in expectations for parent involvement, home support, home resources, and maintaining basic needs.

In-service training could periodically revisit issues of class bias and prejudice, similar to the *Courageous Conversations About Race* model (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Teachers could be provided with opportunities to collaborate around instructional strategies that teachers in low-income school settings have found to be effective. Book groups on understanding the physical and psychological impact of poverty on learning could help to strengthen the professional beliefs of teachers. On the organizational level, educators may need to seek out advice on ways to minimize the impact of poverty on learning such as school-based health care and nutrition programs.



Change in practice involves considerable risk-taking for teachers (Zimmerman, 2006). New strategies may be at odds with their own experiences as students, a middle-class definition of what it takes to be successful in school, and a mental model (Argyris & Schon, 1974) of how school is done. Many researched-based practices change in the balance of power and authority in the class (Demie & Lewis, 2010). These factors are issues that social reproduction theorists have identified as road blocks to education reform since a change in the teacher-student dynamic threatens the ability of the middle class to use schools as institutions to maintain their privilege and status (Makedon, 1992). Without clear expectations regarding the use of research-based instructional practice and an aligned accountability system, teachers are likely to revert to the familiar practices which have failed to close achievement gaps and which have served the middle-class well in maintaining the status quo in schools.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown the tendency of middle-class teachers to hold strong stereotypical beliefs about low-income students but also hold competing beliefs about the potential of all students to learn regardless of socio-economic status. Teachers' personal beliefs are not always the only factor in determining what the learning dynamic will be in the classroom. While the findings show that many middle-class teachers with culture of poverty beliefs about the poor choose to use traditional practices in their classrooms, there is variation in the relationship between beliefs and selection of instructional practices. Teachers may hold personal beliefs about the poor that are contradictory to their professional beliefs about the learning potential of poor students. One group of teachers with strong culture of poverty beliefs offered students traditional, low-level tasks. One group with strong expressed beliefs about student potential persisted with mostly traditional instructional strategies. A third group emerged whose personal

belief system about the poor aligned strongly with their colleagues, yet they choose to implement a very different set of instructional practices; strategies shown to be effective in improving achievement for all students. Since teachers' personal beliefs about the learning potential of poor students are complex, educators should focus on promoting a strong professional belief system and holding teachers accountable for using research-based instruction if they hope to close achievement gaps.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Interview Protocol for Teachers*

#### About you

1. What is your assignment in the school and how many years have you been a faculty member in this school and in education overall?
2. Your current level of income as a teacher places you in the middle class. Would you describe yourself as “middle-class”? Have you always been middle-class?

#### About your students

3. Tell me about the students who are served by this school? How would you describe the socio-economic class of the students, the school overall, the community?
4. Do you know if students in your class receive free or reduced lunch?
5. How would you describe their learning ability?
6. How would you describe students in terms of discipline matters?
7. What value do you think the students hold for an education?

#### About your teaching

8. Do you have any specific instructional practices that your school or grade level uses to improve the achievement of low-income students?
  - a. If yes, what kind of training (professional development) or support (staff, funding, resources) have you received in those practices?
  - b. How do you measure the effectiveness of those practices?
  - c. Have these practices been successful in closing the gaps between your low-income and non-low-income students?
9. Do you group students for instruction? If so, what criteria do you use? What sources of information?

#### About the school

10. Do you have any programs in your school or grade level that are designed to improve the achievement of low-income students? Do you know of any special services students might receive?
  - a. If yes, what do these programs aim to do?
  - b. How do you measure its success?
  - c. Do you believe it has been effective in helping to close the gap between low-income and non-low-income students?
11. Does the school leadership support your efforts in the programs and practices used to raise the achievement of students? If so, in what ways?

12. What are the challenges of working in a school where so many children come from low-income homes?

#### About parents and families

13. Describe the role of parents at your school.

- a. Rate parent involvement on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 not involved at all and 5 very involved.
  - b. Why are some parents not involved?
  - c. In what ways are parents involved?
  - d. Do you think this impacts student achievement?
  - e. How do you think parents see their role in their child's education?
14. Do you think that family poverty impacts school performance? Can you explain why or why not.

#### About the community

15. Do you know of any community organizations and resources who provide services to students in your school? Do you think this impacts student achievement?

16. Does poverty in the school and community impact the ability of the school to educate the children? If so, in what ways?

#### Summary

17. Is there anything else you want me to know about you, your students, or the school?

## APPENDIX B

### Teacher observation protocol

Date of observation:

Time & Date:

Location & Setting:

Length of observation:

Code for teacher observed:

Role of observer:

	Evidence, frequency	Notes, comments
Makes a personal connection to students, as evidenced by greeting students, calling by name, inquiring about/including individual or personal information or references to students' interests, activities		
Holds high expectations for students as evidenced by presenting challenging tasks, asking higher order questions, encouraging and supporting student to take risks even if answers are wrong		
Interactional style of teacher, i.e. supportive, controlling (directive), neutral		
How are students grouped: Individual or small groups of students have opportunities for individual attention, assignment of adults to group		
Provides frequent feedback, encouragement, praise		
Use of interactive (rather than didactic) methods, i.e. conversations, discussions, projects, reciprocal teaching		
Connects content to prior knowledge and existing schemas		
Lesson is developmentally appropriate grade level curriculum		

Monitors student understanding as evidenced by questioning, conferencing with students, looking at student work, adjusting instruction		
Maintains an orderly classroom governed by clear rules and expectations for student behavior		
Other data observed		
Questions or observations		

## APPENDIX C

### Statement of Bias

This statement provides information about any potential issues that may have impacted this case study. This information may have some bearing on the validity of the data collection and seeks to create transparency in the presentation of the findings and conclusions.

I was raised in a middle class family of modest means where my parents stressed the importance of reading, schooling, and held high expectations for college attendance. I have a thirty year history in the field of education in roles as a classroom teacher, department chair, teacher mentor-trainer/instructional specialist, building level administrator, and central office administrator. Over twenty years of experience were gained in school settings that served low-income students.

At the start of the study I was employed as the Assistant Superintendent in the district. My areas of responsibility included strategic planning, secondary school reform, curriculum and instruction, professional development, student assessment and other related educational services. I had access to school budget and grant information which enabled me to verify student and staff demographic information and school performance data. As a member of the Senior Leadership staff I had access to the schools, professional relationships with the school leaders, and recognition by the staff. Because of my position I had knowledge of many of the school-community partnerships in place to respond to the impact of poverty on the students. My position allowed me to visit the schools frequently, observe classroom instruction, and interact with students, teachers, and support staff. I was a familiar figure in the schools and my presence in the building was not unusual. This familiarity with the teachers allowed them to speak very candidly about their beliefs and perspectives since they knew that I was already familiar with the

context of the school. In this regard, I could be described as a participant observer (Creswell, 2007) since I have existing knowledge of the characteristics and culture of the schools, and basic knowledge of norms, procedures, and routines at each site. Participants in the study are likely to identify me as a member of the school community with a legitimate interest in having a deep understanding of their instructional practices, organizational features, and supports for the school programming.

All of the teachers were interviewed and observed during the time that I was employed in the district. The principals involved in the study were interviewed after I had left employment in the district. I had maintained a professional relationship with them for three years. I was not at any time involved in the direct supervision or evaluation of any of the participants for purpose of evaluating their performance or employment status.

In order to establish as much researcher objectivity as possible, I utilized my personal email and phone for contact and communication with all of the participants invited to be part of the study. All interviews and observations were held either in my office located in the district's Central Office, in teacher classrooms, or within the school building.

As an instructional leader in the district, I am highly motivated to explore ways in which teachers and schools can improve student achievement. My role allows me to consult with the school principals to plan for professional learning experiences. The findings of the study are likely to inform areas where teachers are in need of professional learning or support in order to improve their effectiveness in working with this population of students.

APPENDIX D

Teacher	<b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b>	<b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with social reproduction theory</b>
F02	<p><u>Interview</u>            I think school is a place where they [students] feel safe and cared for            They are good learners            They are all hard workers and they are like sponges            I spend the first couple weeks really trying to build the community in the classroom            They are typically able to be engaged and ready            I want to make a difference for at-risk youth. My passion is working with the at-risk child            These poor kids, some of them just need a chance, really.</p> <p><u>Observation</u>            Calls students by name            Makes eye contact            Sits on the floor with student            Shares a personal anecdote</p>	<p><u>Interview</u>            It's not easy for them            I just feel like the connection isn't being made by a lot of the kids and there are so many things pulling them in so many directions            Definitely a lot of kids are bringing their issues into school, home issues into school is definitely a factor            They have outside influences, like dad in jail or a foster family            They [parents] really don't value education, they don't see the light            They [parents] don't know how to get them to break the cycle            Kids are coming to school with not as many experiences and enrichment opportunities, children are not born into the same opportunities            They are being watched by television, computers, and video games            My passion is working with the at-risk child and setting them on the right path</p>
F03	<p>My expectations are very high            I really know where my kids are at any given time and I push them to the next level; I'm a big pusher            I expect a lot            We talk about education and why its important. We value education-we see the doors open when you have it and close when you don't            I feel like we are in constant communication with our parents            Some of my best students are from low-income families            I feel very supported professionally.            I'm not the kind of teacher that just wants to come in and do my job and</p>	<p>I would guesstimate that half of my class is free and reduced lunch based on the amount of snacks I provide, their physical appearance, and what experiences they have had.            They don't like to be pushed and I get looks, but they know I'm not going to stop            The principal told me this is not a position for everyone, but accept it if you are going to be here that this is the way it is and work with it            It's not necessarily tied to income, but it seems we have our fair share of kids that have emotional issues            I feel like we are in constant communication with our parents, whether they like it or not            Parents aren't available to come in because</p>



	<p>leave</p> <p><u>Observation</u></p> <p>Calls students by name</p> <p>Crouches to get to eye level before speaking to students</p> <p>Gives students high-fives</p>	<p>they couldn't get out of work</p> <p>There's research out there that says severe poverty actually causes developmental changes to the brain</p> <p>I have kids who are emotionally affected [by poverty] and they can't shake it off and leave it at home</p> <p>You know it's a transient population</p>
Teacher	<p><b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b></p>	<p><b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with social reproduction theory</b></p>
F04	<p>This group is wonderful. They are active learners.</p> <p>Other teachers will say 'how did you get them to write so much' and I say that is what I expect them to do</p> <p>Once in a while I will spontaneously do something like we had a sushi making party</p> <p>We went out and bought pizza for the entire grade level</p> <p>I eat lunch with my kids once or twice a week, we put music on, we joke around</p> <p>Really a lot of them like to write</p> <p>My take on it is that I like to prove everyone else wrong whether its special education or low income</p> <p>I think poverty impacts performance but it's not a defining factor</p> <p>The human element is not something we really talk about, but I think that to me it's the biggest part of my success</p> <p>I think a lot of it is the relationship factor because then the motivation falls into place</p> <p><u>Observation</u></p> <p>Makes eye contact</p> <p>Calls students by name</p> <p>Shares a personal experience</p>	<p>Other teachers will say 'how did you get them to write so much'</p> <p>I think people have lowered expectations at times.</p> <p>If there's an area of challenge, it's background knowledge.</p> <p>I think if you were in a higher socioeconomic background area, you learn from your peers.</p> <p>I think the kids here have learned middle class values through school.</p> <p>We did an afterschool Arts Program which was great for these kids because they are experiences they might not have otherwise.</p> <p>These kids who grew up here have no idea what we are talking about with books and art and cultural things. You need to have access to the cultural capital.</p>
F08	<p>I actually had the opportunity to go to a different school in the district. But I really enjoyed working with a team of people who seem so dedicated.</p> <p>We are all here to support each other</p>	<p>This is a challenging group this year.</p> <p>We don't hold the same cohort group all the way through so it kind of throws off our data</p> <p>We were in survival mode right from the beginning of the year. We had to create a</p>

	<p><u>Observation</u> Calls students by name</p>	<p>sort of boot camp atmosphere. We actually have one paraprofessional who was a former prison manager and she has had to utilize those skills a lot.</p> <p>I don't want to call it a march but we're walking from this floor down to the first floor, three flights to get some movement and some clear cut distinction between classes</p> <p>There is some learned helplessness.</p> <p>They are so distracted by what they are bringing from their home life that they can't even begin to enter into the deep thinking that I'm trying to help them get to. It's a very distracted, emotionally distracted class</p> <p>I always give a lesson on industrious work and how to function socially in normal classroom situations</p> <p>I have some kids who surprised me changed my understanding about the reasons why kids receive Special Education, they are actually stronger thinkers than some of my students who don't have disabilities</p> <p>You are trying to imagine what is going on in these kids' heads and then an issue explodes, emotional arguments are a big factor</p> <p>I don't know how many of them actually exist with serious, scary things going on at home</p> <p>And I thought, no I want to stay here because I thought that other school is often thought of as the kids who have the highest socioeconomic background in town-they have the advantage</p> <p>We have families that are part of the clash that is taking place between the low socio-economic white families and the low socio-economic families coming from a Hispanic or other background</p>
Teacher	<p><b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b></p>	<p><b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with social reproduction theory</b></p>
V06	<p>They are a wonderful group Now they are a classroom community. We have our expectations. We have a tradition for our classroom. Basically</p>	<p>They did not come that way, I must say. These kids know poverty. We were writing letters and they were talking about they wished they could have if they could have</p>

	<p>we work together as a family at this point.  They are very capable.  I show them respect and they have to respect one another.  They are attentive learners.  Homework is expected every night and reading on weekends  Keep going, stick with me, come on, you can do it. I'm constantly pushing  It's a misunderstood school. They think there is no good in this school.  <u>Observation</u>  Calls students by name  Visits each student to check on homework and ask about them personally</p>	<p>anything. One student wished he could have money because he was living in a shelter.  They have to be shown that they can take it on.  We have an economy system. They can earn up to \$14 a week. They have different jobs and get paychecks. The money is to teach them to save and how bank accounts work.  We also have a little store where they can buy things.  They have to learn to work for something, not just be given. Now if they have to buy their rulers if they break them.  So putting their name on the board, it's to shame them in a way  This is a challenging school  I think that it more work than they [parents] are willing to put in. they are second or third generation poor and don't know how to be parents</p>
V07	<p>These are great, perfect kids. I like them.  My expectations are that students are respectful and attentive in class  To give parents the benefit of the doubt, we don't always work the same shifts as their children go to school and they are working two jobs or the late shift, it's easy to overlook things.  I feel like their options are wide open and it really just depends on them.  <u>Observation</u>  Calls students by name</p>	<p>I do notice that certain kids always ask for things, but I'm not sure if that is poverty or just that particular child's upbringing.  They have a hard time working independently. If they are guided they perform much better  I don't do a prize box or monetary system for behavior because that's expected of them, but I give stickers for homework  I have kids who are compulsive and they lose everything, they lose recess.  As long as he is quiet  One girl complains about everything and we constantly have to talk to her about adjusting her attitude  Working in a high poverty school, the expectation is that if I don't have something you will give it to me. I don't have to work for it.  Healthy food is not something they would get on their own.</p>
Teacher	<p><b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b></p>	<p><b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with social reproduction theory</b></p>

<p>V09</p>	<p>Being able to make a connection with them [students] has been fun. I think I have made them feel welcome within the classroom  Students respond very well to the concept of being respected. It's a comfortable and safe environment  Students for the most part love to come to school. They feel good about themselves when they're here. We celebrate their achievements and they make great progress  Observation  Calls students by name, greets them  Inquires about personal interests</p>	<p>I can compare it to other places where I have taught and I can say that the dress is different and the number of students doing the breakfast program is larger here.  I'm surprised by how few discipline problems I have had this year  I have a few that have issues beyond me and the classroom dynamic  In a city and school like this, I wonder if a lot of parents dropped out of school themselves  Well, just look at the hygiene and I'll tell you the parents who are involved  I think poverty affects the perspective on education and its importance. Poverty affects student achievement because that support factor is missing. They don't get any motivation from home</p>
<p>V10</p>	<p>I have an extremely hardworking group of kids, it's not even just the scores, it's the amount of effort they put into what they do.  We're very much a family in here; it sounds corny but I think its true.  You find out that dad's in jail and mom doesn't want to take care of them so they are living with an aunt, but you'd never notice it in the classroom  They [students] just see everybody for who they are inside, and I think honestly that is because of their background, because of where they come from  I don't have low expectations of anything. I try to push them even harder. It's just in my nature to push them hard and have high expectations and want more for them.  I could look around my class and tell you a handful of kids who have home lives that are a mess, but you wouldn't know because they come in and do their best everyday.  Observation  Teacher speaks to every student  Makes eye contact</p>	<p>So they come with a lot of emotional baggage.  There are kids coming in with baggage and there are issues out there  It doesn't feel like when I was younger. My mom knew everything that was happening in school and it just doesn't feel like that anymore. I got grilled in a nice way, "what happened at school today."  I heard that parents haven't had good experiences around school and they don't want to be around school.  With poverty, these families move a lot</p>

	Smiles and nods while students speak	
Teacher	<b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b>	<b><u>Beliefs and attitudes</u> observed associated with social reproduction theory</b>
V11	<p>So I feel I really have to advocate for these kids.</p> <p>They rise in a challenge. It's a population you really have to push to get them to really buy into what you are doing.</p> <p>Sometimes I purchase supplies with my own money because they just don't have parents.</p> <p>All students have the essentials to do well. I tell them every year, I'm setting the bar here. My expectations are here, okay. If you come in here, okay. If you are coming in here, no, no, no, you have to do more work."</p> <p>I say they can achieve. You have to build that confidence and really convince them they can do it.</p> <p>The potential is there, you have to dig deep.</p> <p>I say we have some of the best students and it's a rewarding place to work. I work with a great team.</p> <p>By the end of the, see what growth these kids have made.</p> <p>Observation Calls students by name Interacts with every student, moves through the room</p>	<p>So, on top of all the socio-economic issues that these children have, I also have special education students.</p> <p>Every year here is challenging because of the population; in this downtown area the population is transient.</p> <p>The parental support isn't always there. Some just lack the ability to help their kids or are intimidated coming into school.</p> <p>I know these kids come in hungry.</p> <p>I know from working at this school that people say, "oh, that's a downtown inner city school, those kids will never achieve."</p> <p>I hate throwing parents under the bus, but it seems like they don't want to help. I get calls from them [parents] saying they [students] can't do it, it's too hard</p> <p>I meet people in the community who asked me where I teach and their immediate reaction is "you teach there?"</p> <p>We do a lot for our kids. I think we give these kids experiences they would not get at home.</p> <p>These parents just don't value education that much.</p> <p>They just can't find any way to break that cycle</p>
V12	<p>By the end of the year, I feel great about these students. I feel they have made the change to being literate, good problem solvers and writers, feeling good about themselves and having a positive outlook on education.</p> <p>All students have the ability to learn. They are all intelligent and have so much to offer. It's getting them to see that education is hugely important-a life changer.</p>	<p>I'm mostly dealing with single moms raising their children, these kids are coming from broken homes.</p> <p>These kids show up in my class low motivation, poor discipline</p> <p>There's not a lot of emphasis on education at home and when they go home a lot of things that I have taught them are being reversed.</p> <p>They are not seeing hard work, they're not seeing someone who wants to sit down and look at their homework or read with them or talk about their day. It's a battle between</p>

	<p>Motivation, that's the key.</p> <p>We have clubs that run at our school which gets kids staying at school as much as possible, which is important for them to keep them in a safe and structured environment.</p> <p>You've got to be vigilant, you've got to keep doing it, you've got to be persistent. Then they [parents] say, wow this person is really caring about my child and they start to see that education is important to this person and I'm going to start thinking about it too.</p> <p>I've seen my students go off the charts on the standardized tests. If they have a teacher who motivates them and makes a difference in their life I have found that you can take that poverty factor out of it and get that kid to do really well in a particular year.</p> <p>How are we going to get the most out of them this year and change their life for the better.</p> <p>I tell them. I believe in you. How about you believe in yourself for a change. You can do this. Prove them wrong.</p> <p>We can't have a pity party over it [lack of parent involvement] and try get them in here. So, let's focus on the kids while we have them here.</p> <p>Observation Sign in the room, "Are you giving 100%?"</p>	<p>home and school, it's a daily struggle. And to overcome home, that's the tough part</p> <p>We have a class pledge and we recite it every day to try and instill values and know how to treat others.</p> <p>There's very little parent support. There's not a whole lot of someone at home making sure that homework comes back looking good. It kills me because I know that homework is huge in middle and high school.</p> <p>The school is taking on more and more of the parental responsibilities. They [parents] see school as the teachers' job-you teach them to read, write and problem solve. I really feel the parents I have dealt with through the years have put most of it on me and my counterparts.</p>
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Teacher	<b><u>Instructional practices</u> observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b>	<b><u>Instructional practices</u> observed associated with social reproduction theory</b>
F02	<p><u>Interview</u></p> <p>It's our job to make sure they are engaged</p> <p>I'm trying to make that connection to the real world</p>	<p><u>Interview</u></p> <p>This year in particular, I'm having a hard time getting them to understand the relevance of why they are learning what they are learning</p>

	<p>Addressing each child differently is important          We're trying to do inquiry-based problem-solving activities, more student centered          We're definitely looking more at the Common Core now          They love anything hands-on          We are reaching out to kids to do summer learning  <u>Observation</u>          Uses Tier 2 vocabulary (catastrophe, extraordinary, treacherous)          Asks students to explain their thinking          Students have some opportunities to work independently in pairs</p>	<p>Just trying to transition has been difficult because they lack the foundations to get there          The problem solving, I think they like it but it becomes painful          I group by academic level  <u>Observation</u>          Whole group lesson          All students working on same assignment          Students raise hands to speak one at a time          Teacher directed, teacher modeling, teacher determined groups and activities          Choral reading by students          Generic, non-specific feedback and praise</p>
F03	<p><u>Interview</u>          I'm big into the problem-solving and using what you know          I'm a very task-analysis teacher          I am very research-based. I'm big on multiple intelligences, I'm into brain research by David Souza and Marzano          My room is very buzzy, busy, and loud-it seems chaotic but its not          I love to put the learning in their hands, I'm very much a facilitator          I feel like the Common Core is going to help me  <u>Observation</u>          Calls on students randomly          Reviews directions for small group orally and visually using Smartboard          Students asked to explain their answers</p>	<p><u>Interview</u>          You have to be research-based when you work in a school like this          I'm teaching them how to engage in conversation and be politically correct          I've looked at the performance tasks on the new tests and I'm afraid our kids are going to come in well below grade level          They [students] just don't have the necessary skills, but once you get some skills in place you can move along  <u>Observation</u>          Whole group lesson          All students working on same assignment          Students raise hands to speak one at a time          Teacher directed, teacher modeling, teacher determined groups and activities          Generic, non-specific feedback and praise          Does not re-direct students who are off task</p>
Teacher	<b><u>Instructional practices</u> observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b>	<b><u>Instructional practices</u> observed associated with social reproduction theory</b>
F04	<p>I'm a Daniel Pink person in terms of motivational theory          I tell them, use every opportunity to show how much you've learned and take pride in your work          Modeling is huge</p>	<p>They were grouped by reading ability, and even the top group-they were talkative          I find the evil eye works wonders and my sarcastic sense of humor makes the point          In the beginning I would model for them and say you can use some of my ideas until we</p>

	<p>The Common Core might help because they need to learn how to dissect a text. Thinking ahead with the Common Core and using a lot more non-fiction you are really able to teach a stronger lesson to greater quality</p> <p>I don't like the fill-in-the-blanks because I'm trying to teach somebody to think, not just plug the right answers into the right spots.</p> <p>I was teaching writing to a really high level</p> <p>Technology is a god-send this you can share really good examples of student work</p>	<p>have done this enough and then you're on your own</p> <p>Instructional time was in blocks</p> <p><u>Observation</u></p> <p>Asks primarily recall and comprehension level questions during a whole group review of content</p> <p>Assignment based on a textbook passage</p> <p>Feedback is mostly on process and routines</p> <p>Whole class sings a song</p>
F08	<p>We use computers to allow everybody to read the text and get to that level of thinking which is perfectly aligned with the Common Core without letting their reading level get in the way</p> <p>They love the computer work on Edmodo, it has a sort of Facebook-like feel to it, they are so motivated by that</p> <p>They do much more writing online than they ever do when they have to pick up the pencil and write</p> <p><u>Observation</u></p> <p>Sets/reviews expectations for short and long term reading assignment completion</p> <p>Using Edmodo for assignments while meeting with students for individual conferencing</p> <p>Students working on a variety of assignments ranging from literacy assessments, online collaboration, writing in journals</p>	<p>We organize our reading groups by three color groups, we call them blue, green and red</p>
Teacher	<p><b>Instructional practices observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b></p>	<p><b>Instructional practices observed associated with social reproduction theory</b></p>
V06	<p>Homework is a crucial part of our learning</p>	<p>We have to provide the experiences, they don't come to us with them.</p> <p>I firmly believe we need to start out with a</p>



		<p>common understanding.  There's a lot of modeling for the kids.  The kids like the structured things that you think would be silly like the vocabulary program.  When it's done for them, they're attracted to knowing what's expected.  They want a structured package, I made them a grammar book. They live by that single book—every week they ask for it.  They crave for the test every week.</p> <p><u>Observation</u>  Teacher centered, whole group instruction  Students complete problems on the board and told if they are right or wrong, no metacognition  Completion, not quality standard on assignments  Emphasis on cleaning room and work area</p>
V07	<p>I would rather move towards more cooperative things, more small group things but I have to get a handle on the curriculum first.  We have been doing more hands-on things in math such as building multiplication arrays on the floor</p>	<p>Teacher modeling followed by independent work with teacher checking student progress in completing assignment  Worksheets  Generic feedback, mostly on process  Students sitting quietly and working independently, verbal prompts to be quiet and work</p>
Teacher	<b>Instructional practices observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b>	<b>Instructional practices observed associated with social reproduction theory</b>
V09	<p>There's a very intense focus on reading and language arts  I'm building independence and releasing control to kids  I let them work together and interact</p>	<p>It has a downside-I constantly have to monitor them and make sure they are on task  Observation  Models a strategy for word attack skills but vocabulary work is mostly rote memorization  Teacher directed, teacher dominated interactions, calls only on students with raised hands, repeats an answer if it is the desired answer  Students reading word definitions from a dictionary  Feedback limited to behavior issues and re-direction</p>
V10	<p>We do a lot of reading, we do 20 pages in a book a day. We do a lot of</p>	<p>Even those little math packs, it's a whole period lost to check math packs</p>

	<p>shared reading and read silently but we stop frequently and talk about different questions.          We'll probably finish 14 chapter books by the end of the year          We change text into theatre so kids can read in groups and that helps with their fluency and expression          We also do math for an hour and writing for an hour each day          I try to coordinate the literature to Social Studies.          I do a lot of small group; a 15-minute mini-lesson then small groups. That way every student is seen.          Observation          Students respond to each other and interact, facilitated by the teacher          Students offer opinions and volunteer ideas          Students work collaboratively in small groups reading aloud from scripts          Teacher encourages making connections to prior learning</p>	<p>Observation          Comprehension level questions          Teacher does the reading and takes notes on the board while students sit and listen          Generic praise and feedback, mostly focused on process not content</p>
Teacher	<b>Instructional practices observed associated with educational reforms and closing the achievement gap</b>	<b>Instructional practices observed associated with social reproduction theory</b>
V11	<p>We said we need to do something different, so we're going to create our own program.          They [students] do like Social Studies because there is more of an opportunity to participate and share their knowledge.          I tell them you have to be able to explain it to me, otherwise you don't know what you have done.          They like Science because they do hands-on activities.          They like to share their work and read what they have written.          Observation          Students provided with manipulatives to help visualize the problem (but students mostly play with blocks)</p>	<p>I'm working with drill and practice materials. I am a fan of those old school techniques. I'm a fan because they work. I tried the new math program but it spirals and kids don't have the background knowledge. Math, you just have to learn.          I group by ability. I do a whole group lesson, but I have to tell you, kids are all over the place          Observation          Student assignment is to complete a worksheet from a math program that is no longer in use in the district          Students plug numbers into a pattern, little discussion of the reasoning involved          Students told to write the "rules" (algorithms) into their math notebooks to memorize          Teacher checks to see if students have the</p>

		<p>right answer on their worksheet</p> <p>Teacher explains the task and goes to work with one student, there is some uncertainty about what needs to be done</p> <p>Teacher tells student who is reading a novel and tells I want you doing what I'm doing</p> <p>Activity requires simple computation</p> <p>Students are seated in rows</p> <p>Teacher only calls on students who raise their hands</p>
<p>V12</p>	<p>We know what works and what the data supports.</p> <p>We take science and social studies and turn them into theatre. It's not me standing in front and lecturing, maybe a bit but not much</p> <p>They get into partner groups. They read into a tape player. It builds fluency and it builds confidence</p> <p>I'm the spotter that is going to help you lift that real heavy weight. We're building their reading muscle up.</p> <p>We've totally gone away from SSR [silent sustained reading]. It was a waste of time. Kids were drifting off, not actually reading.</p> <p>Let's do guided reading, but not the way it was taught in college. You have them read silently and then hold up a question then they have to read silently again and go back in the text to find the answer.</p> <p>First it's a page, then two pages, then by Christmas three pages and by the end of the year, about an hour.</p> <p>I group differently depending on the subject and the task.</p> <p>We handpick kids who are struggling with literacy and numeracy to come for extra time after school.</p> <p>We have to focus on the reading, the writing, the problem solving every moment of the day with the kids we have because they're coming in at such a disadvantage. There can be no waste of time.</p>	

	<p>Observation</p> <p>Frames a math activity as an authentic task to produce packing for an item</p> <p>Encourages students to use multiple strategies and indicates there are multiple ways to solve the problem</p> <p>Asks students for explanations and specifics</p> <p>Addresses a misconception</p> <p>Asks students about their thinking, metacognition</p> <p>Praises effort and perseverance on a task</p>	
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