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**"There's Nothing Wrong with Doing Something Good":**
**A Phenomenological Study of Early Elementary Black Males'**
**Understanding of Heroes, Role Models and Citizenship**

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# "There's Nothing Wrong with Doing Something Good":
## A Phenomenological Study of Early Elementary Black Males' Understanding of Heroes, Role Models and Citizenship

**by**

**Marcus Wayne Johnson, B.A.; M.Ed.**

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those lost to unjust causes: Emmett Till, Amadou Diallo, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott, Renisha Mcbride, Eric Gardner, Yvette Smith, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, David Joseph, Rekia Boyd…and many other brothers and sisters. You live through my work!

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Houston, we have a problem…solver!

AcademicWave

**"There's Nothing Wrong with Doing Something Good":**
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by

Marcus Wayne Johnson, M.Ed.

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The educational and social condition of many students, in particular that of African American males, continues to be a concern and draws the attention of scholars, teachers, administrators, and parents attempting to understand current challenges and opportunities. Various approaches strive to improve present-day circumstances. In efforts to seemly redress problematic conditions, the concept of role modeling is acknowledged as one of the foremost solutions to addressing the needs of young Black males. As an introduction to role models, the participants' perceptions of heroes were taken into account. Additionally, as a way to extend the discourse on role models, the notion of citizenship was examined. Interestingly, although young Black males remain a focus of role model and mentoring approaches, their voices and perspectives are rarely included, as they are *talked to* and *talked about*, but rarely asked to contribute to this dialogue. Combining a critical childhood studies approach and a phenomenological lens to explore the lived experiences of young Black boys towards prioritizing their understanding of heroes, role models and citizenship, this study sought to gain insight from those most impacted by educational and social policy – young children. The

implications of this research study emerge for the areas of early elementary education, social studies, citizenship, and meaning-making in the new digital age.

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Introduction and Context of Problem**

      The United States government claims to make efforts of providing all citizens the chance of equal opportunity as it relates to schooling and education. Nonetheless, there remain substantial educational inequities experienced by underserved groups such as African Americans (Delpit, 2012; Kopp, 2009; Milner, 2010; 2012; Minor et. al., 2015). The collective performance of African American students especially that of African American males continues to be a concern and draws the attention of scholars and researchers attempting to understand present-day challenges as well as promising opportunities (Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2007/2008). Furthermore, despite some progress, Black male experiences continue to be besieged with numerous social obstacles and barriers (Anderson, 1999/2008; Bimper, 2012; Brown, 2011; Milner & Howard, 2004). Various strategies and approaches have been forwarded in order to improve these educational and social conditions.

      Taking the previously stated conditions into account, the concept of role modeling has been acknowledged, established, and prized as one of the foremost methods and solutions to the so-called "Black male plight" (Brown, 2012; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004; Sternod, 2011). The notion of the "role model" in recent years has transformed into a specific discourse for making sense of the experiences of historically underserved groups such as African Americans, Latinas/os, and women. In its most generic sense, scholars have talked about the idea of a role model as a person that serves as a conceptual and literal model to learn from and work through unfamiliar contexts (Ayalon, 2011;

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Davis, 2012; Merton, 1938/ 1968). When discussions ensue concerning the educational experiences of Black males, the functionality of a "role model" arguably is the most common reform discussed and employed to transform the deleterious outcomes of Black males in schools and society. In education, the recruitment of Black males into the profession has received considerable attention. The Department of Education's *5 by 2015* program called for the hiring of 80,000 Black male teachers, thus increasing the Black male teaching population to 5% (Brown, 2012). The premise behind this program is largely related to the potential of Black men to be role models to Black boys.

These efforts of presenting and providing Black male role models to Black male youth, nevertheless, are still narrow and in many ways thwarts the kinds of questions, possible interventions, and potential ontological thinking that can be pursued to redress the educational and social needs of Black males. In short, far too often, the quest for Black male improvement and change begins and ends with role model discourse. Examination of relational and pedagogical skills required to effectively utilize role models resides in the margins of discourse. Increasing investigations into Black male role modeling reveals additional dilemmas also.

Even when role modeling leads to positive outcomes for young Black males (Hackett, & Byars, 1996; Zirkel, 2002), its' efforts many times are limited to individual and small group progress rather than collective and holistic change. Additionally, Black male role models staged by educational curriculum and mainstream popular culture are appear constrained by their profession, preferred characteristics, and action or non-action (Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Whannel, 2002). Essentially they are regulated – casted as being traditional, employed, family men (Anderson, 1999) who fit and conform to certain

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societal norms.  These role models are reinforced by other authority figures in the lives of youth – parents, teachers, politicians, etc.  As a result, young students' development and socialization is potentially encapsulated and suppressed by what others deem necessary and appropriate (Whannel, 2002).  This governance and control is amplified when pertaining to Black youth educational experiences, as even though the nature and conceptual meaning of agency may be ambiguous to youth sociology (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014), classroom practices for marginalized students maintain a narrow, rigid version of learning (Adair, 2014).

In comparison to falsified notions of what is considered "White" – civilized, educated, moral, successful; Black culture in its' totality is often viewed as deficient and subordinate.  Moreover, dangerous racial schema (Fanon, 1967) can form in the minds of Whites and even Blacks due to media images (Tucker, 2003) reinforcing many negative social constructions and limitations.  This is significant because role models such as "athletes are major characters in popular culture and have a significant influence on how Americans view not only sports, but also ethnicity - specifically, how Americans construct African American men and women" (Caulfield, p.22).

When the indistinguishable, recycled Black male role model images are displayed, a disturbing heritage can be acquired.  This heritage that "exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets and thrives on ignorance and error" (Lowenthal, p.7) perpetuates contrived and often flawed attempts to provide young Black males with authentic role or "real" models.  They can appear as simply glossed-over figures of acceptability and pacify an obsessive need to deify American historic figures (Loewen, 2007).  However, when a role model's identifiable characteristics and

perspectives mirror that of the individual, the individual perceives their experiences will apply to them as well (Bandera, 1977, 1978; Hackett & Byars, 1996). In this way, complexity of character and what "high" culture and media might ignore or portray as the antithesis of what is to be emulated, *may* actually serve as a more genuine type of Black male role model. These palatable images and (counter)narratives then become relatable to the Black community thus having increased potential to unleash strength, power, and consciousness to the youth (Giroux, 1996).

This study's focus on young children seeks to build on and expand the influential work of Anne Dyson's (1997), *Writing Superheroes* and Tyrone Howard's (2002) "Hearing Footsteps in the Dark: African American Students' Descriptions of Effective Teachers." In *Writing Superheroes*, young school children's use of superhero stories and popular culture was examined in their peer social world and school curriculum. Children's ability to *take on* or appropriate powerful cultural storylines illustrated their interest in and conflicts about commercial culture. The attention given to young Black male students in this study attempts to give added perspective to understanding the early learning process, meaning-making, and relationship-building skills related to early childhood education. "Hearing Footsteps in the Dark," was a study interviewing and observing $2^{nd}$ to $8^{th}$ grade African American students to examine their "descriptions and interpretations of teaching practices and learning environments within urban contexts" (Howard, 2002, p.425). The implications of exploring $1^{st}$ and $2^{nd}$ grade Black male youth's conceptions of role models and citizenship can also inform teaching practices aligning with Howard's assertion that "listening to the voices of individuals who have been silenced must become an integral part of discussions and action to reform schools in

a manner that grants all students an equitable opportunity for school success" (Howard, 2002, p.442).

Consequently, this study seeks to add to the Black male, role model, citizenship, early childhood education, curriculum, and social studies literature by exploring how young children, who are impacted the most educational and social policy (Leos-Urbel, et al., 2013; Meisels, 2003) understand issues related to role modeling and citizenship. This research differs from other studies in that it specially focuses on the perspective of Black males in early elementary and in particular citing the role that curriculum, teachers, parents, media and popular culture play out in their lives. The intent is to value and grant voice to those who are *talked about* and *talked to* but rarely asked. This was all in an effort to provide further understanding of how role modeling and citizenship potentially influences youth development and transformative experiences.

The connection of the concepts of role modeling and citizenship are intricately woven together. The way role models are referred to by formal institutions especially in regard to the African American community is someone who conforms faultlessly to the virtues and the demands of a given society. Many of the same characteristics such as responsibility, integrity, courage, etc. are assigned to both concepts. Inherent within both role modeling and citizenship is an aspect of membership and belonging occurring at all levels (local, state, national, and global). The researcher looked to uncover and gain understanding into the formal and hidden curriculum involved in students' attitudes toward role models and citizenship. Discussing role models serves as a fruitful entrance for introducing the concept of citizenship.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to examine the various ways the concept of role modeling and citizenship are understood, ingested, talked about, circulated, and acted upon by males of African descent in early elementary grades. As a result, my research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do 1st and 2nd grade African American males in an urban school talk about, understand, and make sense of heroes?

2. How do 1st and 2nd grade African American males in an urban school talk about, understand, and make sense of role models (e.g. mentors, teachers, popular figures, and historical figures)?

3. In what ways do 1st and 2nd grade African American males talk about and understand citizenship as it relates to civic identity and being members of the community?

**Chapter Overview**

For this chapter, I will begin by providing working definitions for commonly used terms within this study. I sought to provide clarity as these terms can be interpreted in various ways. Next, I will explain the theoretical frameworks that this study draws from, Foucault's notion of *"discourse" (*Foucault, 1972) and *discursive formations* (Foucault, 1972). Additionally, the choice of *critical childhood studies* is explained as the conceptual framework. Then, I will give a brief outline of the methodology utilized for this research. Finally, I will provide an outline for the following two chapters.

**Definitions**

        Although role models have been situated as a norming and socialization agent for Black male youth and its discourse seemingly ubiquitous (Brown, 2012), there remains an arbitrary and confusing notion as to its definition (Bray & Nettleton, 2007; Morle, 1990). For the purposes of this study, a role model is defined as a person whose behavior or example is deemed worthy of admiration provoking imitation and emulation usually by someone who is younger. This allows for *imitation of persons* and *qualities displayed by persons* to pertain to role models. Because of the age demographic of our participants, heroes, superheroes, animation characters, or fictional figures may also fill the position of role model. This study recognized however that these quasi boundaries have the potential to be crossed or made more complex.

        Civic identity is a person's connection to and participation in a civic community (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003). Civic education has tended to center on students' civic knowledge and civic engagement (Rubin, 2007). Nonetheless, civic engagement is usually quantified by survey and other more formal measurements. Civic membership (Brown, 2010) entails three criteria: 1) having a story or narrative that establishes a connection, 2) agreeing to member's key values, and 3) participating in the activities of members. By incorporating interviews, lessons, and activities I sought to gain a deeper understanding of their views.

        This project also acknowledges the potential political implications of using various terms to identify specific racial and ethnic groups. This study utilizes the descriptors of Black, African American, African American, and Melanoid people of African descent to refer to its participants, other studies, and data collected. A recent

study reveals that "Blacks" are viewed more negatively than "African American" because of perceived socioeconomic status (Hall, Phillips & Townsend, 2015). Nonetheless, these identifications were used interchangeably as each person and group identity is given equal value and honor.

## Theoretical Framework

### Foucault's Notions of Discourse

This research draws on Foucault's notions of *discourse* and *discursive formation* as the theoretical lens employed to encapsulate the complexities related to African American male role models and citizenship. In an effort to gain a more complete understanding, discourse analysis in the Foucauldian sense seeks to: a) move beyond analysis of texts and statements to understand their effects on actions, perceptions, and attitudes (Waitt, 2005), b) uncover the "regulatory frameworks within which groups of statements are produced, circulated, and communicated" (Waitt, p.165), c) reveal the support maintaining those regulatory frameworks and presenting groups of statements as 'truth' (Waitt, 2005) and d) highlight the multiple structures working simultaneously (Shurmer-Smith, 2002).

Discourse according to Foucault refers to ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices forms subjectivity and power relations (Arribas-Avllon and Walkerdine, 2008). Discourses are also more than ways of thinking and producing meaning – they ultimately "constitute the nature of the body, unconscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (Weedon, p.108). Simply put, influenced by Foucault, James Gee (1990) uses discourse to refer to language in use or the way language is used in a social context to enact activities and identities. Ultimately,

discourse leads to "a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance" (Diamond & Quinby, p.185).

A distinguishing attribute of this analysis is its focus on power relationships in society as expressed through language and practices. It attempts to understand how individuals view the world and explore categorizations, personal and institutional relationships, ideology, and politics. Texts are not meaningful in and of themselves, they are situated in relation to other texts (Waitt, 2005). Therefore, this study views role models, especially African American male role models not in isolation but in relation to other dynamics such as the educational institutions, related community, and larger society. Black male role models are marked by what philosopher and scholar Mikhail Bakhtin terms *addressivity,* in that the word and concept itself is always addressed to someone and anticipates and can generate a response (Bakhtin, 1990). Accordingly, discourse is dialogic (extending through the past and present and in communication with multiple works) that is positioned within, and inseparable from, a community, history, and place (Bakhtin, 1990).

Foucault views discourse as a constraint in the production of knowledge, dissent and difference, yet it enables 'new' knowledge and difference(s). As a researcher exploring young African Americans' talk and meaning of role models, the questions that are subject to arise are related to: a) how do some discourses on Black male role models maintain their authority? b) how some voices get heard while others are silenced? c) who benefits from this enduring discourse and how so? d) what are the mediums for acquiring role models? and e) what are some pertinent questions pertaining to issues of power, empowerment and disempowerment.

**Foucault's Notion of a Discursive Formation**

The complexities related to African American male role models and citizenship throughout this study are also inspected by drawing on Foucault's notions of discursive formation. Discursive formation is composed of certain kinds of descriptive modes encompassing a myriad of objects, forms of cognitive authority, concepts, and strategies tied to relations of power (Foucault, 1972). Additionally, these intricate rules are "not constituted by the subject but rather provides a place from which subjects speak and know" (Lawlor & Nale, Archaeology section, para. 10). Essentially discursive formation is produced by dominant discourses reinforced by media, education, law and other institutions (Armstrong, 2015). Populations and its residents adhere to and are implicated within the limits of these discourses. Similarly, discourse and rhetoric concerning role models especially when attributed to Black males are enclosed yet dispersed, thus these concepts have become a discursive formation. The understanding and addressing of educational and societal issues connected to Black male role models and citizenship ascribe to a system manufacturing certain truths and identities – therefore following the governing rules of discursive formations:

1) Role models and citizens as objects emerge and appear in certain ways

2) Role models and citizens situate authority and presumption

3) Development and deployment of role models and citizens are constituted

4) The available strategies relating to role models and citizenship are arranged.

Foucault asserts "such rules derive from the social norms whereby objects characterized in a certain way are separated off from a social context and transferred to the domain of

the discursive formation" (p. 234).

Black male role model discourse acts as a persistent and historical force shaping culture. In the Foucauldian sense, because discourse can be understood as a structure in which knowledge produces activity (Foucault, 1972), the kinds of questions and interventions that can be pursued to redress the educational and social needs for Black males are potentially enclosed by enduring or *framing discourses* (Brown, 2012). Simultaneously, Black male role models as a discursive formation can be seen as "full of gaps, intertwined with one another, (with) interplays of difference, distances, substitutions, transformations" (Foucault, p.37). Therefore, for this study it is important for example, who is presented as Black male role models, how they are written and talked about, and the power dynamics located within these various relationships.

Using the conceptual lens of discursive formation provides a suitable context for Black male role models instead of usually reduced perspectives of how it is approached. It focuses not simply on role model utilization but also considers how Black male role models interact with other critical components of family, schooling, community, and culture. By way of analyzing aspects of race, youth, media and power dynamics as they presently exist, this research attempts to make the invisible visible.

**Conceptual Framework**

### Critical Childhood Studies Approach

This study draws on the concepts of critical childhood studies as the central structure and guiding principle for this study. Childhood studies itself discards the essentialism prevalent within traditional theorizing yet favors the various ways childhood is socially constructed and reconstructed as it relates to race, class, gender, age, time and

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place (Woodhead, 2004). The 'critical' applied to childhood studies is a "response to and continuation of the critical thinking in the social sciences of the 1970s" (Alanen, p.149). There is acknowledgment of the term "critical" being more widely used, leading to a sense of its diminished intention. Yet its uptake within this project is not only concerned with acknowledgement and reflective practices, but also with what *can* and *ought* to be.

By utilizing a critical childhood studies approach, this study seeks to "privilege the perspectives of children and places emphasis on children's opportunities to influence the socialization activities directed at them" (Dumas & Nelson, p.32). Similar to the exclusion and marginalization of certain racial, ethnic, and gendered groups, children and childhood has historically been ignored as a basis of producing knowledge. Yet, just as the other groups previously mentioned, children are situated "within the power-knowledge matrix of modern society" (Faulkner & Zolkos, xi). As a result of their socio-political position, much of children's lives are regulated, ordered, and controlled by older individuals especially within a schooling context. Revealing the hidden educational, social, and historical compositions of children's lives thus leads to this being political in nature also.

Nonetheless, even young children "have their own interpretations of what is happening to them in schools and often resist school practices and hidden curricula" (Dumas & Nelson, p.33). Critical childhood studies foregrounds and focuses on the agency of children looking to elicit their voices. Moreover, as Dumas and Nelson (2016) purport, "more than just valuing children's voices, the charge in critical childhood studies is to understand that children's individual and collective perspectives on their lived

experiences can (and should) shape what childhood means and how its meaning transforms over time and in different spaces" (p.33).

Consistent across national and state educational departments is the mission to prepare youth to be responsible citizens. This study's use of critical childhood studies builds off of critical race theory by including and emphasizing age while exploring the connections of race and citizenship. While there is recognition of this study's possible impact and contribution to the future academic and social lives of young Black boys into adolescence and adulthood, it forwards the opportunity, platform, and space for student participants "to just *be* and be in *their* now" (Dumas & Nelson, p.39). In doing so, this project looks to address a scarcity of literature concerning Black boys…which is simply exploring their everyday thoughts and practices in school and community.

**Overview of Methodology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology combined with participatory action research as a methodology will be employed to explore how 1st and 2nd grade African American males understand and talk about role models. Qualitative research is relevant for this study because it seeks to understand the meaning attributed to individuals' experience (Merriam, 2009) in association with the concept of role models. Qualitative data in the form of interviews, observations, field notes, and student-generated work including aesthetic expressions (e.g. art or narratives) will be gathered in order to illuminate participants' "life-worlds" or lived experiences. Using the information collected allows for triangulation of the data, which increases the validity of the findings (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013). I manually coded transcripts of interviews and analyzed them as Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) suggest by noting patterns and themes

arriving at comparisons and contrasts, and determining conceptual and intuitive

explanations.  Information specifying methods will be further explained in Chapter 3.


**Overview of Following Chapters**

 In the chapters that follow, I will conduct a comprehensive literature review and

provide the proposed methodology to be applied by this study.  In Chapter 2, I assemble

educational and social science literature that assists with providing a context of African

American male role models and African American youth experiences.  In Chapter 3, I

discuss the importance of hermeneutic phenomenology and action research to this study

and outline how it is to be applied.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Black males and role models**

Examining the theorizing, rationale, and utilization of the role model applying to Black male students within the educational field warrants investigation into several bodies of scholarship. Therefore, this chapter will pull from existing literature addressing: 1) role models and Black males, 2) Black males and urban schooling, 3) urban elementary schools, citizenship education, social studies and pedagogy, and finally 4) popular culture and school curriculum. This is constructed to illustrate the explicit and implicit discourses that reflect the assumed or validated need of the role model across the educational spectrum. In doing so, what might initially come across as disparate domains due to the lack of attention paid to role models in Black male students early elementary experiences, will connect as an overarching narrative illustrating relevant ideologies, practices, and potential gaps in research.

The metanarrative for Black male social change has essentially produced the *role model as curriculum worker* to facilitate desirable outcomes in school settings. Though studies have considered the framing and positioning of role models and their association with Black males (Brown, 2011; DuBois, et al, 2011; Assibey-Mensah, 1997; Polite & Davis, 1999; Rezai, et al., Spurgin, 2010; 2012; Sternod, 2011) a scarcity exists exploring this phenomenon in relation to early childhood education (Davis, 2003). By way of examining historical and contemporary discourse, attitudes, and practices related to the concept of the role model and African American male educational and social issues, insight will be given into how this suturing of ideas has embedded itself within

educational spaces and mainstream society, while simultaneously ignoring problematic

concerns with its ready uptake and assumed effectiveness (Morle, 1990).

The goal of this study is to gain a more profound comprehension of how early

elementary African American males understand and talk about role models in the context

of popular culture and school curriculum.  For this reason, I examine multiple bodies of

literature related to Black males and role models, urban schooling, citizenship, popular

culture, meaning-making, and school curriculum in both theoretical and conceptual

applications as well in empirical cases.

### Historical and theoretical overview of Black male role models

Exemplar, idol, and hero have all been used and described to project who

and what someone should imitate and emulate in order achieve success. (Merton, 1936;

Wetherell, 2010; Whannel, 2002).  However, no expression has or currently receives the

attention and resounding ovation than the term "role model." Sociologist Robert K.

Merton (1936) coined the term, *role model* as he conducted research on the experiences

of medical students at Columbia University.  Merton (1936) asserted that rather than

assuming one's status, an individual's position is primarily set by social structures bond

by expected behaviors.  Behaving in certain ways garnered social rewards.  Furthermore,

Merton purported that students inevitably compare themselves with reference groups and

individuals who occupy social roles they aspire to obtain in order to reap such rewards.

Psychologist Albert Bandura's social learning theory (1977, 1978) bridging

cognitive and behavioral learning posited that individuals learn by observation.  Shifting

away from B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning (1938), Bandura emphasized the

interpersonal context of one's real world experiences.  This theory has been applied to

various fields such as career choice, organizational behavior and mental / physical health (Bandura, et al., 2001). Those within the educational field concerned with ideas of classroom motivation, attention, and memory have also been influenced by social learning theory (Kemper, 1968; Pajares, 1996). Barbara Rogoff et. al (2003) builds off of this idea in their piece, *Firsthand Learning Through Intent Participation*, whereby youth not only observe but also participate in shared endeavors as an essential part of gaining knowledge especially within some cultural communities. Urrieta (2013) also explores how children and youth learn indigenous heritage through intentional community participation.

Though the term of role model was fashioned in the 20th century amid social and medical science fields, the notion of role models traces back to ancient Greece, Judeo-Christian and traditional African culture (O'Reilly, 2004; Schwartz & Poorthuis, 2004). Nonetheless because of economic, sociopolitical, and educational marginalization of Black males, the concept of role model has been positioned as one of the foremost remedies for alleviating these structural ills. What is unique to the Black male youth experience is that the understandable and pardonable justification of "boys just being boys" afforded to white male youth are withheld when applied to Black male youth (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2008). Studies have shown that Black boys are viewed as older and less innocent than white male youth (Steffensmeier, 1998; Goff, et. al., 2014) leading to dangerous vulnerability. This view is upheld by the long history of constructing Black males as immoral, deviant, inherently criminal, even sub-human (Brown, 2011; Rome, 2004; Ware, 2014). More so, there is increased probability that African American male educational experiences are marred by structural, psychological,

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and emotional obstacles (Howard, 2014; Taylor & Phillips, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Pew Research Center (2015) recently reported that although poverty rates have declined for other groups, the percentage of Black children living in poverty has changed little since 2010 holding steady at 38%.

As a result, when a Black male has traversed such hells to reach any semblance of success and achievement, he is situated as a potential role model. More so, existing literature illustrates that Black males operating in particular social positions, career fields, and professions typically garners the majority of role model attention and assumed responsibility. Potential protégés who possess the same identifiable characteristics of the role model such as race and gender, perceive similar experiences will apply to them as well (Bandera, 1977, 1986; Hackett & Byars, 1996). Researchers have also talked about role models as a conceptual and literal model to navigate the unfamiliar (Ayalon, 2011; Polite & Davis, 1999; Merton, 1938/ 1968). Assibey-Mensah (1997) conducting a study involving 4,500 Black male youth ranging from the ages of 10 to 18, found that role models could dispel the tendency to internalize societal stereotypes and "be capable of buffering stereotyped targets from the adverse effects of stereotype threat" (Marx et al. p. 954).

### From savagery to civilization - the parenthetical "need" of role models for Black male youth

The perpetuation of role models as being one of the foremost responses to ameliorating the challenges of Black male youth is cached in the enduring presumption of Black (specifically Black male) personhood. The ontological thinking about Black males serves as a platform and conduit to essentially fulfill what he is "naturally" missing. This belief is symbolic of a global construct and deep-seated psychology of African American

male inability – inability to reason, inability to problem-solve, inability to provide, and inability to progress. Underneath even well-intentioned subscriptions of guiding youth lie the attitude of "role model knowing best." Rather than allowing time and space for Black youth to develop, foraging and contributing to their social worlds, they are viewed as undertakings in desperate need of correction. Several points of history suggest this is so.

First one cannot ignore the role religion, especially Christianity contributes to this mindset. Impression not only upon the mind, but the body and soul of the learner has been the persistent work of schooling. Guided by French and Portuguese pedagogy in the 20th century, education's ultimate goal was to imbue moral and civic values upon the child. This philosophy was largely initiated and sustained by the Christian belief that humans are born into sin as Psalms 51:5 (KJV) reads, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Aligning with the Church, institutions of learning had the responsibility of spiritual transformation – thus becoming the "exclusive mistress of education and instruction" (Compayre, p.63). The religious remedy of providing a "savior" to human beings who were inherently lost, was amplified in relation to converting the African. Though various arguments existed to the conversion or non-conversion of African peoples, eventually "because there existed no clear demarcation between inborn and acquired characteristics, it became easy enough to slip into thinking that the Negro's natural and inveterate stupidity was '"innate"'" (Jordan, p.190).

One justification of slavery rested on the Negro being different, a man set apart, and as Thomas Jefferson (1785) asserted in the *Notes on Virginia*, a distinction which nature created not only physically but temperamentally and mentally as well. Adolf

Bastian's concept of the "psychic unity of mankind" proposed that all humans share a basic mental framework regardless of race and culture, however certain groups' ability to access this potential was still in question. Accordingly, "The White Man's Burden" (Kipling, 1899) also fostered this moral obligation to rule and govern over non-whites.

This argument of Negro inferiority and incapacity continued throughout US history. By way of venomous initiatives such as the Negro Project, seeking to eliminate the unfit, feeble-minded, and undesirable through eugenics, the funding of scientific racism by the Pioneer Fund, or insinuating publications such as the Bell Curve, American society's relationship with Black males ranges from hate to pity. Even contemporary altruistic efforts seeking to "fill-the-gap" have the tendency to "pathologize Black boys and young men as "damaged," "at-risk," "thugged-out," or less capable" (Warren, Douglas & Howard, p.4) are intrinsically connected to the same mindset – viewing young Black males as lacking what is needed at that time.

**Where art thou? – role models as a response to Black male "absence"**

To a large extent the construction and representation of the Black male role model is chained to the physical presence, placement and misplacement of the Black male body. Black male absence literally and figuratively has proven to be a concern for scholars exploring the relationship between Black males and role models. Brown (2011) documenting the historical social science and educational literature about Black males from the 1930s to the present found that "starting in the 1930s, much of the sociological literature positioned African American men as absent fathers" (p.302). This was especially due to Black males traveling North to seek work thereby abandoning their roles as husbands and fathers. Black male youth were then to fend for themselves

making way for misappropriated formations of masculinity.  Brown's analysis shows this narrative persisted until the 1960's affecting various policy matters.

Anderson's (1999) influential work, *Code of the Street*, pointed to economic conditions of the past and present impacting the presence of older Black males in the lives of Black male youth. The emergence of more service-based and administrative industries replacing manufacturing models led to joblessness, poverty and racial isolation for Black men (Staples, 1985; Wilson, 1987).  Additionally, even now with an influx of technical positions, though African Americans continue to earn more computer and information degrees, reports found they are granted less opportunity to compete for STEM jobs (Department of Professional Employees, 2014; Weise and Guynn, 2014).

Interestingly as society begs the question, "Where are the Black men," its members desire, fail to recognize, or are too cowardly to address the structural and institutional measures removing Black men from society's eye.  It's like throwing stones and hiding your hands.  Black Codes such as vagrancy laws of the 19th century were used to arrest, fine, and force into unpaid labor freed Blacks who were unable to secure work. The vagueness and breath of this law granted police unlimited discretion in their zeal to enforce this onto Black men.  Also Jim Crow laws not only enforced racial segregation but also increased the number of laws pertaining to Black people thereby increasing the numbers of Black people jailed or imprisoned.  We continue to see racial disparities in the criminal justice system's sentencing now.  Black males receive nearly 20 percent longer sentences in the federal system that those of White males (ACLU, 2014).  The man-in-the-house rule enforced by administrative agencies further removed Black males from their families.  This "rule" denied poor families welfare payments in the event that

an able-bodied male resided under the same roof.  These are just a few but substantial examples of how Black males were purposely distanced from their families.  Black fatherhood much like Black male childhood incurs damaging narratives when left unexamined.

The following section will review literature and data whereby common representations amongst discourse of Black male role models are most prevalent.

### Mentor as role model

The idea of mentors has come to play substitute and compliment for young Black males as a "solution" to the "problem" of fatherlessness (James, 2011).  There is a common understanding that mentors usually have a more intimate and direct contact with the younger person or protégé.  Research suggests that caring and supportive relationships with adults lead to children experiencing beneficial outcomes (Tran & Weinraub, 2006; Bean, et al., 2003).  In this capacity coaches, family members, men amongst the community, and volunteers surface as role models.  The term "father-figure" is often applied to these men who serve as a surrogate male figure (Brockenbrough, 2012).  Inherent within mentor discourse is the presumption of some type of valuable information held by the most experienced to be passed down the novice (Jenkins, et al., 2009).  Also, mentors and their protégés typically share common interests and background experiences which can act as the starting point or foundation of the relationship.

Mentors emerge from the incessant approach demanding intervention.  The Urban League, 100 Black Men, Big Brothers/ Big Sisters, and other programs such as those supported by the Obama administration's, My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative provide

a more formal and institutional partnering with Black youth. Family members and members of the community find more informal ways of interaction and serving as mentors such as basketball leagues where older Black men, "old heads" play and interact with the young men (Richardson, 2012). Hurd and Sellers (2013) in their study of 259 adolescents asked participants, "Is there an important adult in your life other than your parents or a person who raised you who has taken a special interest in you and who can you go to for support and guidance?" These natural mentoring relationships were separated by *less connected* (characterized by shorter relationship length, lower involvement and closeness, and less frequent contact) and more connected (characterized by longer relationship length, greater involvement and closeness, and more frequent contact). The latter garnered increased academic engagement via psychological well-being and social skills.

Also Richardson (2012) after conducting a longitudinal and ethnographic study of adolescents found that Black male coaches functioned as a vital form of social capital and served a "social father" to many of the young men. Coaches because of their association with discipline, order and reprimand are many times thrusted into mentorship. This interplay of professionally delegated authority and Black male youth within educational settings is much like that of teachers as role models. Yet as Woodland (2008) cautions, "merely pairing adults with young Black males is not an indication of high-quality mentoring…(which should be) based on prior training as a mentor, mentor support for the mentee, cultural respect, and building a trusting relationship" (p. 555).

**Teacher as role model**

The notion that Black students will benefit from having Black teachers has been

the focus of many studies (Carrington, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1990; Ogbu, 1992;

Gordon, 1994; Howard, 2014; Brown, 2011, 2012). This area of concern is intensified

when considering various remedies to the deleterious educational and social ills many

Black males experience. Though widely believed to be a taken for granted advantage for

Black students, especially Black males, scholars have probed the seemingly implicit ties

between Black male teachers, black male students, and role model position.

Brown's (2012) qualitative study involving Black male teachers offered a

"retheorizing discourse" (p.307) surrounding embedded notions of Black male teacher

and Black male student relations. The study emphasizes several overlooked points that

this commonsense assumption possesses as it a) essentializes the experience of both

groups and b) constrains the mental and intellectual capacities of Black male teachers due

to the overwhelming presumption and prescription of their ability to control the unruly

Black male student. This *role entrapment* (Kelly, 2007; Madsen and Mabokela, 2000) of

the Black male teacher as stern disciplinarian has been witnessed by additional scholars

as well. Ladson-Billings (2011) asserted the primary focus of Black male education is

that of maintaining order and discipline rather than academic achievement and learning

success as young Black boys are scripted out of childhood humanity (Dancy, 2014).

Findings from a study performed by Lewis et al. (2010) in a Midwest school inspecting

school district reactions and punishment relating to Black male students illustrated Black

males were disciplined at a rate of 3 to 1 compared to other groups. Ferguson (2003)

submits the expression "*institutional narrative*" as the prevalent ideology positioning

Black males as the worst behaved children in school. As a result, educational institutions

continue to "wait for Black Superman," which Pabon (2014) declares is a problematic assumption.

Black male teachers themselves continued to hit the pause button on unquestioned binds to being a role model in educational spaces. Maylor's (2009) research involving 57 Black primary and secondary teachers (13 males) demonstrated that the teachers didn't automatically accept being role models to their students and maintained that the quality of teachers outweighed racial factors – hinting at a perceived shift from Black teachers needed as role models challenging racism, to the need of Black teachers helping to alleviate Black academic underachievement. Additionally, the Black students held credibility (Maylor, 2009), respect and admiration (Carrington and Skelton, 2003) as important factors for Black teachers even being considered role models. Brockenbrough (2014) found that Black male teachers struggled "to adopt the authoritarian personas that others expected of them…(and expressed) critiques of the disproportionate assignment of disciplinary responsibilities" (p.8).

Of note, the pedagogy of Black male teachers tends to lean towards several priorities. Lynn (2006) found that one focus consisted of the importance of using relevant literature and materials to help students make personal connections to the curriculum. Also "empowering" and "equipping" African American students proved to be a concern of Black male teachers seeking to prepare them for the outside world (Lynn, 2006). This "teaching as an act of freedom" echoes one of the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy. The careful analysis of Black male teacher practices and characteristics should help disrupt static interpretations of their functions as role models. Examination of their experiences and narratives must operate as "a longer-term

commitment to having their presence in urban public school classrooms to reframe pedagogical practices and curriculum and transform communities alongside young people" (Pabon, et al., p.58)

At the center of this discussion lies the formidable questions of not only, "Who should teach Black students especially Black boys and why, but what and how are the power dynamics of educators utilized in order to assist in student growth and transformation?" Stemming from sociological and psychological perspectives, *role theory* "asserts that children develop their sense of self and social being by adopting the roles of the behaviors of those they see modeled" (Maylor, p.7). Therefore, by way of proximity, substantial interaction and observation of a classroom teacher, the child is expected to adopt their own behavior accordingly. As Scott (2002) tells us, "even in Plato's dialogues Socrates is depicted as a moral role model" (p.179). So as researchers such as Naman (2009) concluded that Black teachers serve as important figures in the educational experiences of Black students due to a lack of *cultural synchronization* with White teachers, and other scholars continue to pluck away at the Black male teacher role model provision, this sphere proves to be a highly contested area.

Though these studies point to the connectedness of Black male father, athletes, entertainers, and teachers as role models, the vast majority of those researched were adolescents - leaving space for investigations of young children especially traditionally marginalized groups such as young Black males. There was also a heavy emphasis amongst studies related to correlations of the perceived influence of role models' and youth consumerism.

A more in-depth analysis of the studies relating to Black male representations of role models is the undercurrent messages the phenomenon conveys about the role model, protégés, and the community they represent.  Utilizing Bakhtin's notion of addressivity and Foucault's discursive formations, role models do not exist in isolation.  They can be seen as "a product of a society that views its children as being 'at risk'" (Crosset, p.35).  These Black youths are seen as products and contributors of the criminal, barbaric, unintelligent, hypersexual, lazy and inept stereotypes that have historically come to justify mistreatment and oppression (Brown, 2012; Oliver, 2006; Tucker, 2007).  Black male teacher role models are implicitly tied to these same physiognomies as Melanoid youth are reminded by Ice Cube (1994), that as a Black man, "your skin is your sin."

These role models for some are simply exploited to uphold the status quo. Viewed as deficient rather than different, Black male masculinity before reaching full prowess has to be subdued.  By constant replication of these role model images by popular mediums, Black males have become hitched to immobile identities and static representations.  Applying Ian Hacking's (1995) notion of human kinds, Brown (2012) posits that Black males have been constructed into a human kind, enhancing a *priori* knowledge as a "ready made construct, developed by the enduring discourse of Black male deviance" (Brown & Johnson, p.11).  Scholars (Brown & Johnson, 2014; Tucker, 2007) put forward the view that while hegemonic structures seek to maintain a hierarchy, white audiences are ironically both repelled yet attracted to Black male masculinity and bodies – hence the Black male role model.

**Popular figure as role model**

It has been found that visibility and popularity play an essential part in Black

youth's choice of role models (Assibey-Mensah, 1997; Carrington & Skelton, 2003).

Unlike mentors and teachers whose visibility is in closer proximity and historical figures

whose achievements are casted as faded glory, popular figures capture the "here-and-

now" attitude of youth.  Hence, for many young Black males, athletes and entertainers

are identified as role models.

**Athlete**

> Without a doubt, we dreamed of becoming professional athletes: as most
> kids (males) do growing up.  For me, I do not recall if it was about making
> a lot of money or becoming famous, but about the opportunity to be in a
> space where I thought I had some control over my life; a place where
> racism would be suspended and I would be valued and accepted as equal.
> Sports held that power over my life and the life of many of my Black male
> peers.  It was a drug for us, we were addicts – athletic junkies needing our
> daily fix of sport; all the while dreaming of making it to the pros;
> dreaming of being free from the burdens of poverty and the limitations this
> town placed on us because of our skin color.
>
> -    Billy Hawkins, *The New Plantation*, p.5

The field of athletics has historically been an avenue African Americans have

used to not only accomplish sporting feats but also to boost the morale of the community.

Due to the prevalent notion that sports are one of few arenas that Black males are granted

a fair playing field, able to exert actions connected to dominant masculinity, and garner

heightened visibility, Black youth look to these men as symbols of possibility,

opportunity, and inspiration (Whannel, 2002).  Yet while Black athletes and entertainers

are celebrated and validated, it is cached in the 'myth of natural ability' and racial

biological difference (Cashmore, 1982; Whannel, 2002).

Gaston (1986) asserts that the propagation of sport role models toward Black

youth come with negative effects.  Cashmore (1982) suggested the visibility of Black

sportsmen came at the expense of educational development.  Dr. Harry Edwards (2000)

emphatically refers to this phenomenon as the *triple tragedy* whereby the single-minded

pursuit of sports and fame incurs the deleterious effects of 1) the tragedy of countless

Black youth failing to reach their sports goal 2) the tragedy of personal and cultural

underdevelopment, and 3) the tragedy of cultural and institutional underdevelopment in

Black society.  Because the probability of college athletes reaching professional status is

so low – 1.2% Men's basketball and 1.6% football (NCAA.org, 2013) "media should not

promote a popular culture ideal that misguides the younger African American population

(or any other population, for that matter) into believing that in order to be successful they

need to achieve athletically. Instead, media and society as a whole should also emphasize

education and academic accomplishments" (Caulfield, p. 21).

Building on the premise that Black youth are extremely influenced by Black

sports heroes (Sailes, 1986),  Agyemang and Singer (2013) explored the individual social

responsibility of professional Black male athletes and elicited their perspectives.  They

found that participants felt it was especially important to be role models for Black youth

especially due to perceptions of absent parents.  Other areas they saw as important were

owing a social responsibility to self, responsibility to the Black community, and engaging

in genuine activity.  This weighted responsibility is unique to the Black athlete and Black

community and prompted Crosset (2000) to ponder, "Do Black athletes make better role

models?  Do Black athletes owe more to the community than white athletes? (p.38).

Shropshire's (1996) investigation of sports, role models and race consciousness

establishes him as one of the first scholars to suggest "role model" to be a racially coded

term.

Yet, given the proliferation of American sports figures, athletic role models and

their impact have been studied internationally also.  Melnick and Jackson (2002) survey

of 510 New Zealand youth whose average age was 14 ½ sought to discover their public

heroes and reference idols.  Results illustrated that 90 percent of males choose heroes and

idols of the same gender – majority being athletes, 75 percent identified people within the

category of "entertainer," and went on to acknowledge how kids potentially can pick up

"specific ways of defining and tackling problems, standards of knowledge, values and

norms, ideals and behavior patterns" (p.429).  In a continuing trend, Buksa and Mitsis

(2010) study of 211 Australian Generation Y'ers, discovered that not only do they

perceive athletes as role models but this perception also impacts behaviors attached to

products, services and brands.  Facebook commissioned IPSOS MediaCT (2014) to

conduct a study that reported that African Americans watch more TV on average than

any other group in the U.S., athletes and entertainers can have a tremendous influence on

young Black youth.

A common rationale for advocating the use of athletes as role models is the ideal

of reciprocity.  Black male athletes are assumed to "know" the struggle and as men who

have escaped and survived numerous socioeconomic traps, and are now thriving

financially, the thought is the least they can do is accept the charge of being a role model.

Also in return for the public adulation showered onto Black male athletes, the quid pro

quo expectation is that it will come back around by the athlete's wholehearted acceptance of a being a role model and giving back to the community (Crosset, 2000).

This real or imaginative intervention on behalf of the Black male athlete as role model falls at the feet of young people as the popularity of sports figures rise due to increased sports-television contracts and the access granted via social media. Just as Dyson (1993) filleted an analysis about Michael Jordan, the African American athlete too blurs "the line between private and public, between personality and celebrity, and between substance and symbol… educat(ing) us about the convergence of productive and disenabling forms of knowledge, desire, interest, consumption and culture" (p. 64). This stanch representation of role model is riddled with complexity as multiple tensions exist just within this the Black athletic role model itself.

**Entertainer as Role Model**

Black male entertainers much like Black sporting athletes are elevated as role models in large part due to the financial rewards, heightened visibility, and publicity they are perceived to garner (Staples, 1985). In his analysis of Black male conditions, Staples (1985) views Black entertainers as "one of the greatest contributors to the black success myth" (p.7). Television role models and "superstars" were also understood to influence the occupational goals (Christiansen, 1979), career aspirations (King and Multon, 1996) and self-views (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997) of adolescents. Martin and Bush (2000) while studying the consumer behavior of 13 to 18 year olds, found *vicarious role models* (television, movie stars, and athletes) to have a significant impact on decision making.

Research examining the relationship between role models and health related behaviors (Yancey, et al., 2011) determined role model presence and type of role model

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was a critical predictor of health-related behaviors. Entertainer role models were associated with health-risk behaviors rather than health-promoting behaviors. In an early study involving rural Texas high school sophomores (Oberle, 1974) it found several distinguishable patterns that still exist within the pages of contemporary findings: a) Black males selecting more glamour figures than White males, b) White males selecting more family relatives than Black males, and c) White males selecting role models who were owners or managers.

The intense focus and platform provided for Black males as athletes and entertainers to be considered role models for many researchers has led to creating educational blinders for Black male youth. These occupations requiring little formal education "sends large numbers of young black males down a career blind alley" (Cross and Slater, 2000) and as Harrison (2000) asserts, "African American males will continue to be channeled in three venues with little resistance from mainstream institutions: athlete, entertainer, and criminal" (p. 38). So while the athlete, entertainer and other popular figures operate mainly in the public realm, the next popular representation is deeply situated within educational settings as historical figures portrayed as role models emerge through textbooks, teacher pedagogy, and school hallways.

**Historical figure as role model**

A historical figure refers to a famous individual from the past. Philosophers such as Hegel (1899) and Carlyle (1888) suggest historical figures are vital to human progress and understanding history. Carlyle (1888) in *On heroes, hero-worship, & the heroic in history*, stated that, "No great man lives in vain. The history of the world is but the biography of great men" (p.2). Thinking of Black male historical figures within school

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curriculum evokes the names of Martin Luther King Jr., George Washington Carver, W.E.B. DuBois, Thurgood Marshall, Benjamin Banneker, and the Tuskegee Airmen (all included in Social Studies TEKS grades 1-5). Differing from legends in that these people actually existed, legendary attributes can eventually be connected to them. Other than used as pedagogical agents to teach about history (i.e. acting it out in a play/ skit) which students found engaging (Veletsianos, 2010), these individuals are also symbols of how to act, behave, and perform as ideal citizens of the nation-state. As a way to stimulate students interest in the past, leaners have been asked to put themselves in that historical figures place and situation (i.e. historical thinking). Fittingly, when handed the choice to role play or demonstrate historical figures, boys regularly chose male characters (Fournier and Wineburg, 1997).

Simultaneously, other scholars have come to see both the potential dangers and critical engaging opportunities of historical figures use within social and educational discourse (Nietzsche, 2003; Loewen, 1995; Lowenthal, 1998; Brophy and VanSledright, 1997; Salinas, Franquiz, and Guberman, 2006). Because "heritage mandates misreadings of the past" (Lowenthal, p.9) certain aspects of historical figures presented as role models are hidden – fearing complexity will undermine civic allegiance. Dominant narratives espousing what citizenship means, how it is to be enacted, and exemplars worthy of emulation are now met with forms of critical thinking and philosophies. The following section will review how the contested idea of citizenship and civic agency is has traditionally taken on the binary of positive and negative role models.

**"Positive" vs. "Negative" Black male role models**

The issue of whether Black role models create advantageous outcomes is clouded by the comparative characteristics identifying what constitutes a role model as "positive" or "negative" (Whannel, 2002). Good people or as Anderson (1999) refers to them, "decent dads" are seen to occupy a section potential role models. This traditional view of role models – typically educated, employed, older, family men, devoid of human frailties or contradictions produces an increasingly rigid image. In this sense, Loewen's (2007) conceptualization of *heroification* can be applied to the banner images of Black male emulation whereby *certain* Black males are staged as "pious, perfect, creatures without conflicts," (Loewen, p.463) towing acceptable company and societal lines and therefore should be modeled. This produces a schism, as young Black male selection of role models can differ enormously from the ones presented by institutions of education, business, government, and parents (Maylor, 2009; Whannel, 2002).

In most cases, "positive" is not qualified nor quantified - simply assumed based on what a person does, *not* who he is (Spurgin, 2012). Yet, positive role models when described are chiefly characterized by one's *pursuit* while negative role model's actions and attitudes are described in terms of what needs to be avoided (Lockwood, et al., 2005). This could be problematic given how young Black male thoughts, negotiations, and enactments can be easily misread. Thus "because researchers tend to focus on the self-defeating resistance of the working-class student without acknowledging and studying the more positive forms of school resistance" (Solórzano & Bernal, p.320) acts of human agency can be mistakenly viewed as detrimental.

Renowned scholar, Homi Bhabha (1994) warned that mimicry or in essence role modeling of the colonizer produces *inter dicta* – discourse crossing what is known and permissible nevertheless concealed. Sternod (2011) cautioned that role models or potential "normalizing agents" could serve to maintain unjust systems. Those promoting role modeling as antidote should take into consideration whether they are advocating conformist practices or transformational and liberatory processes (Fanon, 2008; Freire, 1970; Oglensky, 2008).

Yet, this binary of good or bad role model tends to be promoted by the Western ideology's tendency to organize subjects into linear or hierarchal structures whereby terms and concepts such as positive or negative leave no apparent leeway for variation. During the past twenty years theories constructing identities as fixed, unchanging and "real," have met stanch arguments from those theories suggesting identities are ever-changing and fluid (Omi-Winant, 1998). The political critique of the binary is an important part of third wave feminism, post-colonialism, critical race theory, and GLBT movements – arguing that the perceived binary dichotomy between man/woman, civilized/ savage, Black/white, and heterosexual/ homosexual have perpetuated and legitimized Western power structures favoring "well-to-do" white men (hooks, 1994).

Recent literature aspires to show that role models themselves are living, evolving, and complex subjects influenced by a variety of entrenched sociocultural factors. Despite our best wishes role models like students don't fit neatly into spatial models of affinity or strict forms of curriculum (Mitchell & Parker). Conflicting concepts of positive and negative role models is an on-going dialogue (Spurgin, 2012). Many Black males venerated present-day, were considered social pariahs back in the day. How else do you

explain Martin L. King Jr. going from being a constant target of the FBI to having his own US holiday? How many more pre-1983 MLK Jr.s' (year the holiday was signed into law) have we misjudged and neglected as outcasts? Historically Black males forms of agency, resistance, and creativity have been vetted by White mainstream acceptance in order to be deemed appropriate. However those marginalized by society such as young Black males seem to possess the potential to provide constructive insight into deeply-rooted and longstanding discourses about role models and thus should be researched.

**Extending role models in literature**

A review of educational and social science literature illustrates that though Black male role model discourse is ubiquitous there still exists constrains and limits as to the those selected as role models and the individuals and groups performing the selection. Black men espoused as role models by the general public (ex: school boards) have traditionally been syphoned, filtered, reshaped, and approved by the time they reach the eyes, ears, and classroom desks of Black boys. Nonetheless, this study understands children as valuable, contributing social actors and their ability to construct meaning should prompt us to rethink our approaches and conceptualizations of Black male childhood. All too often similar to Brown's (2011) piece, "Same Old Stories," young African American males constantly receive the "same old role models." By eliciting their ideas on role models, this untapped resource and unexamined world is sure to provide insight that is usually silenced. It's time as Glynda Hull et al. (2006) puts forth to provide much needed educational spaces for Black boys to self-explore and express themselves. This study seeks to provide a platform and opportunity to move beyond,

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extend, and even re-think and re-imagine discourse surrounding Black males and role models.

**Defining tropes of Black males, urban schooling & elementary education**

**"To believe or not to believe" - education as the great equalizer**

Despite the challenges posed by an inequitable schooling system relating to Black males in urban areas, there resides a persuasive belief of education being the great equalizer (Gorski & Landsman, 2014; Johnson, 2006). For African Americans this notion dates back to the seeming power freed African slaves gained as a result of becoming literate in English because "for blacks, the association between education and freedom was so powerful that teachers at once became inspirers, preachers, community builders and political leaders" (Fairclough, p.28). Moving forward, the decision of the landmark Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education Topeka to overturn the "separate but equal" policies upheld by the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896, illustrated the priority and burden placed on education to right sociopolitical wrongs (Milner & Howard, 2004).

Liberating and emancipatory philosophies espouse that the burgeoning of consciousness creates a possibility of new realities (Freire, 1970). This thinking is "reinforced by their families, despite whatever contradictory evidence they (Black male students) witnessed in school, compelled participants to believe that education was the best route to individual opportunity and collective uplift (Harper & Davis III, p.114). Thus faith in education being a defining element of liberal doctrine purports: 1) education provides more occupational upward mobility 2) education benefits society as a whole 3)

education makes one's life richer and more fulfilling and 4) education allows youth to understand oppression and enable them to resist inequalities (Delgado, 2015).

Complications arise as to the power of education's transformative power due to those who influence and construct it (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Freire, 1970; Williams, 1977). Scholars have come to push back on the idea of education being the great equalizer because even though a small number of African Americans have reached high-level institutional positions, collective progress and transformation has yet to be achieved to mitigate economic inequality (Delgado, 2015). Peter Westen's 1982 article, *The Empty Idea of Equality*, alleged, "equality is a principle without content, and thus acquires meaning only through the extrinsic substantive values that inform its application in a given context" (Scutari, p. 918). As a result, he believed this led to considerable conceptual confusion and should be removed form moral and legal discourse. This echoed Pan-Africanist and separatist suggestions that African Americans would never truly gain freedom in the land of the United States and the White man's concept of equality was simply a continuance of hegemonic practice (Chemerinsky, 1983; Karst, 1983; Greenwalt, 1983) and tricknology (Muhammad, 1965).

Ironically as education is still bolstered as the great equalizer, many urban elementary educational settings practice and are influenced by deficit thinking and social reproduction habits (Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2014; McLaren, 2002). Tsui found that access to quality education relies on variables such as affordability, geography, student preparedness, standardized testing, and ability to thrive. Hence, by using a dialectical understanding of schooling, researchers have come to see these inherent contradictions of educational spaces as a "means of potentially empowering students around issues of

social justice and as a means of sustaining, legitimizing, and reproducing dominant class interests" (McLaren p.194).

### Addressing the achievement/ opportunity gap

The achievement gap refers to the persistent and observed disparity in academic performance and educational measures between groups of student particularly delineated by socioeconomic status, race, and gender (Noguera, 2007). Measures to determine this gap consists of standardized test scores, grade point averages, course selection, dropout rates, and college enrollment and completion rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Studies researching the causes of this achievement gap were conducted as far back as 1966 with the Equality of Education Opportunity Report also known as the Coleman Report, suggesting that both in-school and home/ communal factors contributed to this gap. This focus on closing the achievement gap was brought back to the forefront of many scholars' works when Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 proposed by President George W. Bush. Research indicates those primarily affected by this gap, initially measured in elementary school are Black males (Rowley & Wright, 2011). "School readiness" and "opportunity gap" have been precursors and extensions of the notion of achievement gap (Boivin & Bierman, 2013). Shifts in scholar's attention from deficit paradigms comparing Black students to other races towards within group investigation is emerging (Graham & Anderson, 2008). Nevertheless, intervention programs and initiatives seeking to narrow the achievement gap have stretched from multicultural education, school testing and accountability measures, affirmative action, improving teacher quality, and role modeling and mentoring programs (Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Graves, 2011).

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While there has been a considerable amount of research investigating the complexities involving the achievement gap, there remains "sparse data available on the experiences and outcomes of African American males in the early grades (Davis, 2003) even with evidence of Black male students being treated differently than other males and female students as early as kindergarten (Davis, 2003; Slaughter-Defoe & Richards, 1994; Rong, 1996). Even when studies are done concerning this group, they typically involve test scores and large national data sets such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey of Kindergarten children (ECLS-K), which go under-utilized (Davis, 2003). When research is piloted on Black boys early elementary experiences, achievement outcomes should be into account even if focusing on issues of socialization. My interest in studying how 1st and 2nd grade African American males understand role models is substantiated because "the most influential theories currently proposed to account for the relatively low academic performance of African American boys center on three areas: (a) student attitudes, (b) social organization of schools, and (c) masculine identity" (Davis, 2003) all of which are connotations of role model's positioning.

**"Are you ready?" – teaching, teacher preparation and professional development for Black male students in urban settings**

For clarity, the term "urban" is most typically defined as a concentration of Black, Brown or poor students in large districts near city centers branded with low academic performance, teacher and parental apathy, and limiting administrative oversight (Milner & Howard, 2013). Racial and ethnic demographics have changed the landscape of urban education carrying with it different challenges and opportunities (Howard & Milner, 2013). Researchers have come to acknowledge there are no simplistic approaches as to

the social, political, legal and economic realities affecting urban education (Adams & Adams, 2003; Khalifa, et al., 2015; Kincheloe, et al., 2006; Pink & Noblit, 2008).

Those concerned with improving urban education settings have also studied its impact on teacher pedagogy and teacher quality especially via teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Milner, 2010). This attention given to teacher education and professional development is due to the looming influx of teachers retiring (Buckley, et al., 2004; Vasquez, et al., 2010) significant rise of teacher turnover during the past three decades (Haberman, 2005; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2013) and is more pronounced in urban and underserved communities (Hemphill & Nauer, 2009; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Ronfeldt, et al., 2013). As a result, these schools find it difficult to recruit the most qualified candidates, maintain its limited effective teachers or "Irreplaceables" (Jacob, Vidyarthi & Carroll, 2012) and its students are continually taught by the less experienced and effective teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Scaling the literary content leads one to surmise that teaching Black males in urban settings is akin to preparing for battle.

Still, there reside calls to reconceptualize how teachers are prepared to work in urban settings. Having a deep understanding of subject matter knowledge proved to have positive outcomes pertaining to student success (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000) especially with most empirical evidence stemming in mathematics (Wenglinksy, 2000; Wilson & Floden, 2001). Others assert that simply having knowledge of subject matter is insufficient and that a teacher's ability to translate information or pedagogy is equally important (Ball & Bass, 2000, Howard & Milner, 2013, Ma, 1999; Salinas & Blevins, 2013) which was initiated by Shulman's (1986) view

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of shifting from looking at knowledge and pedagogy as separate to its amalgamation.

Finally, an understanding of racial and cultural knowledge is an explored aspect of teacher preparation and development for Black males and urban settings. Building on the well-regarded work of W.E.B. Dubois (1903) and Carter G. Woodson (1933), teacher's ties to the sociocultural knowledge of students and their communities have continued to be investigated (Brown, 2013; Brown & Brown, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2013) report that more than 80 percent of public school teachers are White females. So because White female teachers and Black male students "possess different racialized and cultural experiences and repertoires of knowledge and knowing, both inside and outside the classroom, racial and cultural incongruence may serve as a roadblock for academic and social success in the classroom" (Howard & Milner, 2013). Caution however is encouraged when pointing to the guarantee of effectiveness and success applying to racial matching of teacher and student (Bonnett & Carrington, 2000; Brown, 2012; Gay, 2000).

**Urban elementary schools, citizenship education, social studies & pedagogy**
        **How is citizenship framed and described within urban schools**

Citizenship education is concerned with enabling and educating children to become enlightened and responsible citizens who constructively participate in the activities of society. The hope is to enrich the foundations of democracy. Citizenship involves contested entanglements of power, culture, and politics (Clarke, et al., 2014). Nonetheless, notions of liberty, freedom, justice, advocacy, equality, fairness, and identity have been shown to take on differing views when incorporating race and

geography.  There rests an absence of narratives and limited social, cultural context to speak of these spaces (VanSledright, 2004).  Students don't see themselves as civic agents.

Pykett (2009) in an ethnographic study involving two schools found several interesting patterns, a) that school geography played an important role in how students and teachers defined citizenship, b) students learned through informal interactions and in relation to the 'other'; teacher personal backgrounds informed the way they taught about citizenship, and c) even though powerful discursive frameworks were at play, agency was witnessed on behalf of both pupil and teacher.  This project grants optimism to critical researchers in their quest to elicit and empower voices of opposition and resistance.

Chiodo and Martin's (2005) analysis of the concept of citizenship among 8th and 11th grade students in urban, suburban, and rural areas indicated that these students' views were about the concept revolved around the social and communal aspects of citizenship versus the political as voting was seen to be a distant practice.  Chiodo and Martin (2008) resumed investigation into views around citizenship, this time concentrating American Indian students' perception of citizenship.  Again political activity was trumped by engagement in community and tribal activities.    Another study (Geboers, et al., 2014) added to the discourse about differing student views of citizenship, as the team recognized four types of citizenship reflected in Dutch 5th – 8th grade student responses.  They were clustered into: *committed citizenship* (dedicated to deal with daily tasks), *indifferent citizenship* (showing little concern), *ordinary citizenship* (little affinity with public stances), and *self-assured citizenship* (high in knowledge and assertiveness).

Stoked by the events of 9/11, war on terror, and the Donald Trump presidential campaign, citizenship reemerges as a disputed area within social studies. Oboler (2006) referred to the positioning of Latinas/os and citizenship as the "dilemma of belonging" as she explored the various meanings and political status unique to this demographic. Rosaldo's notion of *cultural citizenship* poignantly addresses the concept of citizenship "not as an either/ or matter, but along a continuum from full to second-class citizenship" (p.402). This view of cultural citizenship seeks belonging in the capacity of full-membership (decision-making) even as differences related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation and age has the potential for lessening of one's membership. According to Smith (2005) the negative effects tied to race and class operate within spatial geography too. In other words questions as to, "Where do children in particular, early elementary African American males get to be citizens?" is important to address.

Troubling even in its consideration, is ongoing discourse whether African Americans are truly citizens of the United States. The Dred Scott ruling, for social critic, author, and documentary film maker, Tariq Nasheed (2014) and others still needs revisiting. In their piece, *Dissin' Democracy?*, Cooks and Epstein (2000) investigate 14 middle school African American students in the inner city about their perceptions concerning citizenship. Findings resulted in these students having high levels of political cynicism and low levels of political participation though they still believe they could positively contribute to their community. Vickery (2014) in her qualitative study of African American female teachers exhibited existing patterns of alternative ideas on citizenship as they strayed from traditional views of patriotism to impart agency and connection to community. While Vickery's (2014) study focused on teachers' notions

and understandings of citizenship, this study sought to understand the students'

conceptions.

Though multiple studies serve to interrogate views of citizenship within urban

education settings, there resides a dearth of research examining early elementary Black

male students' negotiation of this arrangement. Questions as to "the obligation and

appearance of citizenship…without the privileges of citizenship" (Rolland, p. 28) if

presented correctly (i.e. in terms of fairness, etc.) seems like an inquiry my student

participants could astutely traverse. Without doing so leaves the possibility of educators

to "socialize their students to accept the uneven power relationships of our society along

lines of race, class, gender, and ability" (Boutte, 533). The promotion of citizenship

education as a perceived *public policy placebo* (London, 2006) could receive even greater

scrutiny and critique if the voices of the youngest are brought into our discourse. By

doing so, it offers a provocative challenge to the ways citizenship is normally conceived

of and analyzed by the social science and develops an innovative view of citizenship as

something always emerging from struggle (Coll, 2014).

**New forms of citizenship and its potential for young Black males**
**D-I-Y Citizenship**

The intersection of race and age play significant factors as to considerations of

citizenship. The racism faced by African Americans coupled with children being seen as

autonomous individuals but objects of protection (Jans, 2004) – *not yet but becoming*

*citizens*, affect their perceived status as citizens. Nonetheless African American male

children's participation in society grants them the ability to give active meaning to their

environment. Taking the fluidity of citizenship into account, burgeoning forms of

citizenship and how it is played out can unearth previously unchartered territory for young Black males in urban settings. DIY (Do-It-Yourself) citizenship appears to substantiate various forms of civic action found in studies about Black males, urban settings, and citizenship. The two have yet to be conceptualized as a unit yet.

DIY citizenship as fashioned by Hartley (1999) expands traditional standards of citizenship along the lines of civil, social and political rights to add, "the right to self-determine one's own identity through engagements with the concepts and ideas on offer within the media" (Jenkins, 2014). This ability to organize and protest in new ways originally witnessed in Egypt's "Twitter revolution" of 2011, cited as mediated citizenship within communities following Bill O'Reilly, The Daily Show, and Colbert Report, and now researchers developing the idea to apply to those whose activities range from activist fan blogging and video production to knitting and the creation of community gardens can have potential entrance into the discourse involving young Black males, citizenship and civic agency.

One example investigating DIY citizenship among marginalized populations included a qualitative study on 17-25 year-old Muslims from immigrant backgrounds living in Australia (and Roose, 2014). Along with other findings, there was evidence that civic activities "especially performances of conventional community engagement, were driven not only by being Muslim, but by being a Muslim in a hostile environment" (p.808). The case study of Time's Up! (Shepard, 2014), a New York environmental group promoting nonpolluting transportation and sustainable solutions to urban problems, suggested direct action, play-based strategy as influential on urban space, success, and

mobilization. Another DIY study (Douglas, 2014) explored the unsanctioned yet civic-minded and functional alterations to urban landscapes.

It can be argued that Black citizenship and civic action within the confines the United States has always been DIY! The coalescing of young Black males urban education and social experiences and practices could be conceived as DIY citizenship. Advancing branches DIY citizenship include DIT (Do-It-Together) and DIO (Do-It-Ourselves) citizenship, attempting to capture collective and connective action.

### Participatory Culture

The phrase, "Go and stay in your room," as a reprimand to children at one point in time use to beget thoughts of isolation and punishment. Now children hearing that same statement might not bat an eye, as interaction and communication is still able to take place via social media. In a larger sense, this development and evolution of connectivity serves to examine social media's encounter with heritage and on the socially produced meanings and values that individuals and communities ascribe to it (Giaccardi, 2012).

Henry Jenkins and his research team (2009) explained participatory culture as having "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and as previously mentioned some type of information mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (p.7). Stressing social and cultural contexts of participation, "members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another" (p.7). Using the lens of participatory culture therefore allows us to recalibrate how children create, talk about, organize, and engage with particular people (i.e. role models, heroes, historical figures) and represent civic agency. Being that our

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understanding of childhood and children lags behind their crucial and changing roles in society and culture (Jenkins, 1998) insight into their perspective can only aid in vetting age-old paradigms.

The disrupting of mainstream, White, middle-class notions of civic engagement and who constitutes membership into the domains of 'model citizen' is warranted. The most salient elements pertaining to role models and citizenship of marginalized youth may come by way of informal everyday arrangements of dialogue and practice (Vromen and Collin, 2010; Smith, et al., 2005) not institutionalized or teacher perceptions as Giugni (2006) noted that young kids may become secretive about activities influenced by popular culture. Therefore, examination of literature in the following section will cover issues of popular culture and school curriculum.

**Matching pedagogy with the current times**

With the multitude of recently racially charged events taking place including but not limited to: Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, McKinney pool harassment, University of Missouri football team, and the unrest in Chicago and other cities, it is now vital as critical theorists urge to impart the burgeoning of critical consciousness and action and praxis to challenge and counter ideological hegemony (Anyon, 1988; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2002). Black males and their experiences are uniquely situated within the larger context of American society to be the barometer of just how "democratic" and just our nation purports to be. And while approaches of engendering empathy and tolerance into teacher education programs (Boyer; 2010; Leonard & Leonard, 2006; Cruz & Patterson, 2005) have pacified some, researchers have recognized the conflicts, contradictions, and limits

inherit with this thinking (Delgado, 1996; Irvine, 2002; Warren, 2015; Warren & Hotchkins, 2014). Therefore it is imperative of our current and future Black male educators in this era of full teacher accountability to present and represent models of empowerment (Sleeter, 2007/ 2012) and emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 1998) in order to properly serve our Black male students in urban areas academically and socially.

**The role of social studies in doing culturally relevant / responsive / sustaining pedagogy**

Elementary social studies is a vastly contested area seeking to reestablish its significance as English language arts and mathematics have permeated the attention of educators due to No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top agendas (Libresco, 2014). Defined by the National Council for the Social Studies it is, "the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence" with the primary purpose of social studies being "to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (NCSS, 1994, p.3). Among the three strands of elementary social studies focus are: 1) propositional knowledge – facts, concepts generalizations, 2) map and globe knowledge, and 3) socialization of students concerning pro-social behavior (Brophy & Alleman, 2006). The latter being one of this study's emphasis.

The task of cultivating citizens with the values, knowledge, skills, and beliefs in order to fulfill a democratic society is uniquely granted to the field of social studies. In doing so, social studies assists in helping young students identify their roles in a larger community and try to make sense of the organization of society (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Embedded within social studies are the historical symbols, myths, traditions,

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historical figures, rituals, and morals espoused by those in power. Hegemonic attitudes and practices related to transmitting these ideals many times go unchecked resulting in notions of social reproduction and other problematic outcomes linked to deficit thinking for Black students (McLaren, 2002).

Added up these challenges called for new approaches to pedagogy as a continuing and growing awareness of the link between culture, teaching, and learning took shape (Lee, Spencer, Harpalani, 2003). There exists a substantial probability that many African American students will complete K-12 without a Black teacher (Hawkins, 2013) whereas the need for support and understanding of a Black teacher to fortify their knowledge base and integrate it with the prevalent White culture based discourses is immensely merited. Consequently, theoretical stances such as culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy have made efforts to increase equitable opportunities of African American students.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) constructed *culturally relevant pedagogy* which strives to empower "students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p.17-18). Ladson-Billings insists that culturally relevant pedagogy has three criteria: a) students must experience academic success b) students must develop / maintain cultural competence and c) students must acquire a critical consciousness through challenging the status quo of the social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Similarly, *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Gay, 2000) is a concept that relies on the teacher understanding the background and language of the student and carefully integrating it with the academic discourse to make it digestible for learners. It has been clarified that "the critical aspect of culturally

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responsive teaching is the ability for teachers to support the emotional and cognitive development of the students" (Howard & Terry, p.355). A recent contribution to these conceptual approaches is *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, which seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling (Paris, 2012). This extends culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy by incorporating both dominant and marginalized ways of being and knowing to encompass a more humanizing method.

These new and reformed directions seek to alleviate the disparity experienced by underserved students. Current pedagogy and learning are heavily Eurocentric and largely ignore the equally rich culture of other communities in their worldview of knowledge and information and thus it tends to "omit the experiences, history, contributions, and culture of people of color, the poor, and women" (Howard & Terry, p. 348). The way to achieve this is by special engagements beyond the normal class through which a teacher of similar cultural and ethnic background can relate with the students using examples in context of their understanding. Nonetheless, it understood that efforts to amend attitudes and practices do not become essentialized and "are not overdeterministic in our linkages of language and other cultural practices to certain racial and ethnic groups in approaching what it is we are seeking to sustain" (Paris, p.95). Additionally it has been found that simply having access to cultural information is not enough to properly apply culturally relevant/ responsive/ or sustaining pedagogies (Salinas & Blevins, 2014).

**"To know is not enough" – Effective uses of culturally relevant/ responsive / sustaining pedagogy**

The utilization of counter-narratives and critical cultural memory applied to historical figures within a social studies context serves as an important function of teaching underserved students. (Castro, 2014; King, 2012; Salinas & Blevins, 2014). Professional development and pre-service teaching programs have begun to increase in awareness and inclusion of sociocultural resources as teaching tools. Yet it is debated whether *to know is not enough* (Ball, 2012) when it comes to researchers and teacher's knowledge especially concerning African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other marginalized students' histories. This brings to mind Cesar Chavez sentiments that "the end of all knowledge should surely be service to others" (The WRITE Institute, 2001) and Jeff Donaldson prominent artist of the Black Arts Movement believing that artistic knowledge that didn't serve the cause of the Black struggle was a waste and Black artists couldn't afford the luxury of art for art's sake (Neal, 1968). King (2014) adds to the dialogue by asserting that "cultivation of knowledge does matter; particularly as a starting point in helping pre-service teachers develop an inclusive, multicultural, and equitable history curriculum" (p. 450).

In efforts to advance pre-service teacher critical lens, scholars discovered that one's source of knowledge, official disciplinary knowledge, and knowledge of counter perspectives affected their pedagogical decisions (Castro, 2014; Salinas & Blevins, 2013). Salinas & Blevins (2013) also recognized the significance of obtaining bodies of knowledge but encouraged teacher educators to "actively seek to promote coursework and field experiences that make explicit a pre-service teachers' sociopolitical understanding of their content, characterize the disempowering and reproductive nature

of curriculum, and insert a broader and more inclusive content knowledge" (Salinas &

Blevins, p.20).

Many times a pre-service or professional development program is the first time

teachers reflect on their cultural dissonance and its implications (Durden, et. al., 2014).

So while potential practices can be informed by cultural knowledge (Castro, 2014;

Hawkins, et al., 2015, King, 2012), a teacher's attitude and beliefs are also looked at as

the ultimate determinant of effectively employing critical pedagogies (Noguera, 2007) as

numerous teachers simply rely on teaching the way they were taught (Kennedy, 1999;

Halpern & Hazkel, 2003; Mazur, 2009).  This can be seen to influence who is presented

as a role model in classroom settings and schools along with what qualities and

characteristics are extolled about that role model.


**Popular culture & school curriculum**

Popular culture can be viewed as the ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images and

other phenomena preferred by an informal consensus within the mainstream of a given

culture (Fiske, 2010).  Popular culture provides messages reinforcing the recognition of

certain norms and values allowing individuals and groups to align or adapt with existing

social order or status quo (Lee, 2009).  The social values widely produced and circulated

by popular culture is the precursor and supporter of sociocultural determinants (Apple,

2004).  Popular culture in its many forms educates "children about social roles, values,

and ideals in a way that proves even more influential than traditional sites of learning,

such as the family, church, and public schools" (Lee, p.87).

Yet even as popular culture has firmly imbued itself within certain groups such as

American youth, especially that of poor students of color (Goodman, 2003; IPSOS Meida

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CT, 2014; Nielson Media Research, 1998) it has consistently faced resistance into educational classrooms and school curriculum. An explanation of this schism is likely the result of distinctions between what is considered "high" and "low" culture. *High* culture viewed as an important component of national identity (Gellner, 1983; Renan, 1882) or in Bourdieu's (1984) class-based view, a marker of the refined enjoyed by those such as the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia sits in direct contrast to *low* or popular culture – which is seen to contain mass-produced, trivial information and items for the general public of limited education in order to find consensual acceptance. This leaves popular culture susceptible to being viewed as having little-to-no value.

Those rejecting this view of popular culture began to theorize ways to situate it within curriculum (Michael Apple, Henry Giroux and Jean Anyon), offering a foundation for critical pedagogy (Robert, 2010). Popular culture in the form of television, music, fashion, literature, video games, comic books, and social media can actually intervene in the reproduction of hegemonic discourse and practices. As popular culture's power to connect with the lived experiences of students, especially those individuals whose perspectives are largely marginalized and omitted, its inclusion into educational spaces is filled with conflict and tension. Essential to insights into children's interplay amongst popular culture and school curriculum, is a grasp of how they make meaning and sense of the world and its various sources.

### Meaning-making in elementary education

Meaning-making for students can be referred to in the educational psychological sense as "retaining, reaffirming, revisiting, or replacing elements of their orienting system to develop more nuanced, complex and useful systems" (Gillies, Neimeyer, and Milman,

p.208).  Taking on the socio-cultural lens, "children learn to make meanings in communities of practice through interaction with more experience others and… young children's strategies for and attitudes to learning are determined by the context in which they practice those strategies" (Anning and Ring, 1999).  Put in simpler terms, Poplin (1991) purports meaning is constructed in two ways: 1) by means of new experiences or 2) contemplation and recalled experiences or reference points.

Mirroring the principals undergirding DIY citizenship and participatory culture, for Wiske (1994) "understanding is not a private possession to be protected from theft, but rather a capacity to be developed through the free exchange of ideas (p.19).  In addition, "learning by doing" (Bruner, 1990; Rogoff, 2003; Urrieta, 2013) posits that student learning is not a spectator sport, which flies in the face of traditional education methods.  Specific cases of how meaning-making was enacted within classrooms are to follow.

In an urban, Title I school, Rosborough (2014) investigated the role of gesture, body movement and positioning between teacher and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade English language learners.  Findings demonstrated that gestures and positions in combination with utilization of resources (whiteboard, math graph, etc.) successfully influenced dyadic meaning-making.  In other words, it helped that students didn't just sit on their butts all day!  Narey (2008) blending research, practice, and theory, advocates for multimodal views of meaning-making for arts-based learning in early elementary education.  Franco, Ward, and Unrath (2015) saw art making to be so dynamic that redesigned their college course so that preservice elementary generalist amend their presumptions and competency surrounding art making as meaning-making.

Meaning-making was utilized in science classes too.  Bridging science learning, primary grade students of color and meaning-making, Varelas, Pappas, and Arsenault's (2013) undertaking not only facilitating science learning but students also developed positive images of themselves as scientists.  Varelas, et al. (2014) working with 3rd grade Latin@ students in an urban school witnessed how shared read-alouds with peers, hands-on experiments, and utilization of home assets resulted in co-constructed and individual meaning-making. The use of analogies as tools for meaning-making was explored too with students ranging from the ages of 8 – 11 (Guerra-Ramos, 2011).  She strongly advances the use of analogies within science classrooms by both teacher and student for meaningful discourse but does so with prescribes it with caution.

One of the most salient instances of both formal and informal processes of meaning-making occurs in Amanda Lewis' (2003), *Race in the Schoolyard*, as she illustrates how teachers, parents, school personnel, and students came to understand race in both formal and informal expressions.  By proxy, school campuses as an institution situates themselves as producers of racial meanings and practices.

The following section will explore ways popular culture has been used as an artifact, an apparatus for increasing student engagement in official school curriculum, a critical enactment and performance addressing issues of power and oppression and the tensions that surrounding its general inclusion.

**Teachers' outlook on popular culture**

Classroom teachers are interestingly positioned as it relates to youth popular culture.  Not only are they adults, but they are also the frontline operators of the educational system.  This casts them into the role of "outsider" as it applies to youth

popular culture and has impeded the potential entrance of popular culture within curriculum to benefit student achievement. Furthermore, greater distance is created between student and teacher when the teacher is not familiar with the student's background as in many public urban schools teacher workforce is made up of over 80 percent White female (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Sandberg and Samuelsson (2003) in a study examining preschool teachers' conceptions of play when they were kids versus now with their students found that some teachers viewed their own childhood experiences as ideal while they viewed their students' play as "dangerous" because of the influence of television and computers. This perceived media effect on the children as well as time constraints limited teachers' willingness to include popular culture within the classroom. Sandberg and Vourinen (2008) witnessed similar teacher beliefs as they interviewed 111 participants that believed popular culture limited children's play and learning.

Zevenbergen (2007) exploration of childhood technology–related experiences was found to vary dramatically from those of the teacher, prompting him to recommend reconceptualizations of early childhood pedagogical practices. Based on a yearlong micro-ethnography, Corsaro (1985) focused on the social, interactive and communicative processes of young children. He found that adults too often reject as unimportant what they do not agree with or understand about children's behavior or interest – thus early childhood education misses the mark on capitalizing with the combination of popular culture and curriculum.

**The struggle is real – incorporating popular culture within curriculum**

Although the struggle to incorporate popular culture within early childhood classrooms and curriculum are evident because of power being applied "in the form of edicts from state and local education agencies and whose legitimacy rests on the status of scientific research" (Howley & Spatig, p.139 ), educators and scholars are searching for multiple approaches of effectively including popular culture not only as a motivating tool but as a form of resistance and agency. In *Schooling the rustbelt kids*, Thomson (2002) offers scrutiny of government policy applying to disadvantaged schools. His investigation of primary and secondary schools led to the assertion that inequitable outcomes were in part due to the lack of valuing the culture kids already bring into classrooms. Thomson pointed out that students start school with a "virtual school bag" full of various cultural and linguistic resources that remain invisible and unused at school. Access to that bag depended on the school's culture. This is reflective of *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), *funds of knowledge* (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2001), *cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005), and *additive schooling* (Valenzuela, 2010) – all of which espouse the valuing and embracing of children's culture into educational spaces.

Hedges (2011) goes on to argue that interpreting popular culture as "funds of knowledge" can help teachers view popular culture's potential inclusion into curriculum as advantageous. Her study highlighted the "unique way for children to transform participation in activities" (Hedges, p.27) due to the utilization of popular culture as seen with boys' enactments as superheroes. Wohlwend (2013) contends that not only were children's literacy skills were enhanced by combining play, filmmaking, and digital media, but that this "collaborative literacy" provided more equitable access to diverse

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literacy resources.  Irby and Hall (2011) after conducting four workshops preparing teachers on Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE) discovered many educators were coming to view Hip Hop legitimate teaching framework but still had questions of just how to properly apply it to classroom settings.  These scholars assert that due to a generational shift in the US teaching force, HHBE as a framework is shifting from skepticism to inherit merit.  Nonetheless, Love (2015) in her article, *What is Hip-Hop Based Education Doing in Nice Fields Such as Early Childhood and Elementary Education*, concluded children's social skills and cognitive skills from Hip Hop are not acknowledged by early childhood and elementary programs but must be expanded to these areas to have a proper impact.

Anne Haas Dyson's (1997) *Writing Superheroes* is perhaps one of the most seminal works intertwining aspects of popular culture, school curriculum, early childhood education, and heroic figures.  Dyson's ethnographic study of an urban classroom of 7 to 9 year olds explored how school children's interest, uses, and conflicts about commercial culture affected social learning and literacy.  Classroom activities provided the platform for Dyson to observe interactions, negotiations, and dialogue such as a subsequent class rule allowing any part of a story to be played by any student regardless of gender or other characteristics.  This study demonstrated children's lived experience positively contributing to creation and uses of texts.    These transactions between teacher – student, and culture – curriculum is reminiscent of *permeable curriculum*.  Permeable curriculum refers to the interplay between teachers' and kids' language and experiences that the social and cultural challenges of official curriculum afford (Dyson, 1993).  As students' cultures are seen as valuable, they act as scaffolds into officially sanctioned

literacies resulting in "safe havens where students identities (racial, gender, world views) are intentionally interwoven with classroom text forming community" (Gritter, p.232).

**A certain type of Black male within popular culture and educational settings**

Researchers found functionalism and accommodationism or docility and conformity as some of the main attributes propped up within discourse and curriculum as qualities to be emulated and modeled (Bimper, 2012; Dickerson & Agosto, 2015). The binary of heroic "do-gooders" or non-threats vs. menacing "trouble-makers" or threats, highlights Black males who are venerated and those who are marginalized through popular culture and curriculum. The narrative therefore stands that social rewards, recognition, and change comes by solely imitating the "do-gooders." There continues to be a deliberate media, corporate, and institutional push of socialization through interactive processes (Carrington & Skelton, 2003) in which Black male role models are situated to deliberately inculcate in Black youth a set of beliefs, values, and norms that will allow them to functionally adapt as members of society (Oliver, 2006).

Nonetheless, Black males have resisted, challenged, and countered the onslaught on constricting and limited representations in ways that emphasized culture, agency, and understanding of the boarder sociopolitical context (Dickerson & Agosto, 2015). Several prominent scholars have revealed that critical approaches to exploring culture could oppose deterministic attitudes towards the Black male plight (Hall, 1973; Howard, 2014; Milner & Howard, 2013). As we locate agency in the midst of hegemonic moves of culture (Giroux, 1988.), researchers are encouraged to "act as secretaries" and bear witness to those enacting counter-hegemonic and resistant measures (Weis, McCarthy,

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Dimitriadis, 2006). The destabilization about race, ethnicity, and national identity is terrifying for some while liberating for others (McCarthy, 1993). Still, Hall (1997) advocates for a proliferation of alternative images and their exhaustive exploration rather than censorship or control of images. We can see attempts of shifting representations left in the margins more towards the center of popular culture and discourse (Castenell Jr. & Pinar, 1993; McCarthy, 1993; Williams, 2001).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This examination of literature concerning role models and Black males students in early elementary exemplifies the tension and rugged terrain that exist between the complexity of Black male identity, representation, age, popular culture, forms of citizenship, and meaning-making within a social and educational context. Black male youth continue to face various obstacles impeding their likelihood of learning marketable skills, academic achievement, mental health and physical wellness, positive social networks, and accessing employment opportunities (Oliver, 2006). At the same time, young Black males have exhibited incredible achievements of resolve, resilience, resistance, and creativity. Studies illustrate the influence and impact of role models, mentors, and public figures on youth (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; DuBois, et al., 2011; Wheeler, et al., 2010). However, drawing upon the various theories presented, it is formulated and demonstrated that Black male lives and role models experiences are much more intricate than any one theory or approach can convey and these potential spaces should be researched.

In an era defined by radically changing shifts in identity (racial, gender, sexual, ability) popular culture has prescribed to an easily identifiable image or human kind

(Hacking, 1995) of how young Black boys and Black role models are read and subsequently misread (Neal, 2013). The role model "is so circularly defined, intertwined, and indistinguishable from the power apparatuses that create such identities that most authors who discuss role models treated the idea as it were a definite, timeless fact rather than a social and political construction" (Sternod, p.278). The sheer size of role model and mentoring programs (5,000), the dissemination of images and figures within school curriculum and popular culture and the educational and social condition of Black males warrants investigation as to how to create increasingly transformative experiences.

Although studies have been conducted concerning Black males and role models, "little is known about the processes and experiences of early schooling, particularly issues of masculinity and how it influences schooling" (Davis, p. 518). As suspensions, expulsions, over-representation in special education, violence and school failure continue to plague Black males in schools, especially in urban settings (Howard & Milner, 2013; Ferguson, 2000; Johnson, 2013; Noguera, 2008; Polite & Davis, 1999;) inquiry into early childhood experiences could benefit educational outcomes. As popular culture continues to permeate the lives of children both in school and out of school, understanding of how identities are formed, values learned and relationships developed, an infused imagination for political citizenship and social engagement could be enacted (Frymer, Carlin, & Broughton, 2011; Giroux, 1998; Hall, 1997). As we look for these avenues, McCarthy (1998) warns that educational fields move too slowly to adapt to changes and even resent giving expression to new dynamics and situations.

But by 'giving voice to children's voices' (Schnoor, 2012) and utilizing the Foucauldian sense of power as a framework – whereby power is not viewed as the plain

oppression of the powerless, but rather its persuasive and diffused acting more like a strategy than a possession and even producing positive effects such as individual's self-making (Balan, 2010), I seek to add to the knowledge of the young Black male educational and social experience.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

**Introduction**

This chapter discusses in detail the research methodology that has been adopted in this study of how 1$^{st}$ and 2$^{nd}$ grade African American males in urban areas understand and talk about "role models." As such the aim of the study is to: a) increase understanding of what the experience of role modeling and citizenship means to these young Black males; b) show how the personal, social, and cultural meanings of school, households, and other settings shape their interpretations of role models and citizenship; c) illustrate how central, for early elementary Black males, in their everyday concerns and practices, is the experience of having role models and being citizens is; d) identify patterns about role models and citizenship that are shared; e) elicit how participants make meaning as it applies to role models and citizenship. Qualitative research is relevant for this study because it seeks to understand the meaning attributed to individuals' experience in association with the concept of role models as it is stressed "that the goal of research with children should be to understand meaning" (Graue & Walsh, p.34). Providing this methodological map is important because it will help to illustrate how my strategies facilitated the collection and analysis of data used to explore the concept of role models with this particular group of early elementary students. Also, by reviewing my methodological approach to this dissertation, it will be possible to demonstrate that an appropriate link exists between qualitative methodology and the utilization of role models as a redress of potential obstacles and barriers for young Black males (DuBois, 2011; Polite & Davis, 1999; Spurgin, 2010). Given that my research questions are exploratory, it is critical to deconstruct the qualitative methods applied in this project.

Specifying the methodological approaches will consist of discussing the research

of this investigation.  The research design is phenomenological – examining the "role

model" phenomena and citizenship through the subjective eyes of the participants. The

section following includes details of the participants, role of the researcher, and settings.

Next, data collection techniques are explored. Then explication of the data or

phenomenological analysis is covered.  Finally, a section covering standards of

evaluation is described.

**Research Design**

### Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach was utilized for the purposes of this research in

order to go beyond reporting events and elements of experience but also to specifically

attempt to expound how these represent the cultural constructions in which we live or

"webs of meaning" (Geertz, 1973).  This helps to illuminate and identify specific

phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors and the context of the situation

– in particular, 1st and 2nd grade Black males' identification and comprehension of role

models and citizenship.  Efforts to uncover and interpret the meaning of role models and

citizenship or its essence to young kids especially young Black males who receive a

significant distribution of this discourse is why hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen

as this study's method.  Hermeneutics originally referred to the methodology or

philosophy of text interpretation especially pertaining to biblical texts and other sacred

wisdom and philosophical literature (Bleicher & Bleicher, 1980).  However, modern-day

hermeneutics consists of verbal and nonverbal communication including presuppositions,

semiotics, and preunderstandings (Laverty, 2003). Hermeneutics seeks to determine the intention and meaning of experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Initiated by Husserl (1970) phenomenology is a descriptive approach to inquiry that studies the lived experience and how the phenomenon appears to the consciousness of the person (Laverty, 2003). Believing that subjective information is important to understanding human motivation and human action, Husserl asserted that essential components of lived experiences specific to certain groups of people need to be elicited through this scientific approach. Fundamental to Husserlian phenomenology are two assumptions: 1) there is one correct interpretation of experiences – providing universal essences or eidetic structures and 2) radical autonomy – the influence of culture, society, and politics on the individual's freedom to choose are not central (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Heidegger, a student of Husserl eventually extended phenomenology's focus to go beyond simply people or phenomena but include the exploration of the lived experience or "dasein" – a coherence of being-in-the-world (Thompson, 1990). Unlike Husserl, Heidegger (1962) suggests that individuals are unvaryingly tied to the world in which they live and their subjective experiences are sutured with social, cultural, and political contexts (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) that cannot be ignored. Their daily conditions are part and parcel of constructing meaning. So rather than simply explicating descriptive categories of participants' perceived or real world experiences, hermeneutic phenomenologist focus on describing the meaning of an individual's dasein and how these meanings influence choices.

Two essential assumptions according to Heideggarian or hermeneutic phenomenology are that: 1) researcher knowledge or presuppositions are valuable guides

to a project. Viewing the notion of comprehensive "bracketing" or suspension of background understanding as virtually impossible, researcher knowledge is seen as valuable and vital to phenomenological research (Geanellos, 2000). Also, 2) co-constitutionality is necessary when arriving at meanings for interpretive purposes. Importance is place on the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants in fully capturing the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1976). Operating from the perspective that individuals come from various backgrounds including but not limited to race, class, gender, culture, language, education, age and ideologies, the art of interpretation is comprised of the separate yet intersecting and overlapping horizons of participant and researcher. In this way it connects to the conceptual framework used for this study, Foucault's discursive formations.

Therefore hermeneutic phenomenology is both an art and science as a methodology – investigating and describing a phenomenon experienced through writing and reflection, ultimately developing a description of the phenomenon leading to understanding of the meaning of the experience. A growing body of hermeneutic interpretive analysis has increased the voices of often unresearched groups such as children to be heard (Petalas et al, 2009). This approach seeks to not to answer or solve questions about role models, but to gain a deeper understanding of the concept. By gaining greater understanding about role models and African American males students in 1st and 2nd grade, ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and practices associated with role model discourse, initiatives and programs the empowerment of Black youth can be more empowered (power to and power over).

**Participants**

   **Students**

   Hycner (1999) asserted, "the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants" (p.156). Because a scarcity exists examining the role model phenomenon in early childhood education and social science (Davis, 2003), this study consists of ten (10) participants in accordance with phenomenology guidelines for sample sizes – as Creswell (1998) suggests five to twenty-five sources and Morse (1994) proposes at least six sources.

   Purposeful sampling was used to sample the participants in this study (Creswell, 1998; Etikan, 2016; Merriam, 2009). The criteria for participation in this study was the following:

- Participants identified as being African American/ Black

- Participants identified as a male

- Participants were enrolled in 1st and 2nd grade class

   Participants were similar in terms of race, gender, age, and geographic location. Nonetheless participants varied in terms scholastic achievement, conduct, and personal interests. All participants attended the same elementary school. This cross-selection of students were identified and selected primarily by the school counselor (because of an increased knowledge of students' background). Each expressed a desire to participate in this research project once it was communicated to them via their parents, school counselor and myself as the researcher.

   Prior to participation in the study, the parents of the participants were required to sign a permission form for their participation (Appendix A). The parental permission

forms were given to the students and were returned by the students to their teachers.  The

school counselor collected them and delivered them to me.  Parents were contacted via

phone by the school counselor to discuss the research study.  I also contacted parents as

the primary researcher to further explain the research study and answer any questions

related to the project.  Once the parental forms were signed, the students were required to

sign an assent form also (Appendix B).  I read the form to each student individually and

was purposefully worded in language appropriate for their understanding. The University

of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board granted permission to conduct the study.

This study was also approved by the Research Initiative Committee of South ISD prior to

begin the study.

The participant's identities are protected by the use of pseudonyms in all reporting

of data, analysis, or electronic/ recorded communication (Creswell, 1998). The following

describes the student participants using pseudonyms and numbers for identification:

| Participant Pseudonyms | Grade Level |
| --- | --- |
| Newton | 1st Grade |
| Foxx | 1st Grade |
| Hopkins | 1st Grade |
| Steve | 1st Grade |
| Smith | 1st Grade |
| Duncan | 2nd Grade |
| Jennings | 2nd Grade |
| Mike | 2nd Grade |

| Chris | 2nd Grade |
|-------|-----------|
| Miami | 2nd Grade |

**Principal, School Counselor, & Teachers**

The principal, school counselor and teachers were instrumental in helping to carrying out this research study. The principal, school counselor, and two of the teachers were contacted by email first during the summer and at the beginning of the school year. My initial meeting at the campus included a meeting with the school principal. The principal deemed the counselor's participation to be beneficial and in deed it was. The school counselor helped select the potential participants and was influential in the eventual selection and recruitment of the student participants. This study included students from 4 different classrooms then in Week 6 of study an additional 1st grade teacher was added and one of the participants transferred to her classroom. The teachers were instrumental in granting access to the students.

**Role of the Researcher**

During the entirety of this research study, I was the primary researcher. I had significant previous professional experience in the SISD. I believed this provided a basis of trust from the proposal stage of getting SISD's approval. I sent completed and signed forms to SISD and conducted a meeting via Skype to gain official approval. I was the only instructor for the study's lessons and activities.

I was a doctoral candidate, teaching assistant (TA), graduate research assistant (GRA), and a tutor for a campus center and an external agency. As one can gather, much

of life is includes education both in theory and practice. This study deliberately looked to serve just as much in human capital as it obtained in data collection. The role of researcher remained priority yet morphed into listener, collaborator, student, story-teller, and older patna. This study acted like a journey whereby the participants and myself traveled together toward understanding.

The ability to partner and work closely with participants lured me to the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology. Co-constitutionality was necessary when arriving at meanings for interpretive purposes. Importance was place on the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants in fully capturing the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1976). This fusion of horizons operates from the perspective that individuals come from various backgrounds including but not limited to race, class, gender, culture, language, education, age and ideologies. The art of interpretation is comprised of the separate yet intersecting and overlapping horizons of participant and researcher. Hence hermeneutic phenomenology is both an art and science as a methodology – investigating and describing a phenomenon experienced through writing and reflection, ultimately developing a description of the phenomenon leading to understanding of the meaning of the experience.

I recognized role model discourse and programs to be prevalent yet at a standstill or lag as far as nuanced thinking and application goes. The philosophy of presenting young Black males with that of an untethered image of an older Black male considered successful by mainstream society to magically transform the individual is an idea which should be tested. As younger Black males exert their voice, there exist alignment and misalignment of what is considered the proper way to exercise one's right to fairness,

justice, equality, freedom, and liberation. Many of our social movements are not told

from the perspective of younger Black males and Black females which many times have

fueled and made up the majority of certain movements and organizations (Civil Rights

Movement, Black Panthers, Nation of Islam, Nation of Gods & Earths, Pan-Africanist

movements). This is why popular culture such as hip-hop has made such an imprint on

our lives.  It involves more authentic narratives from young people.  I believed the time

was ripe to reconsider our orientation with the role model phenomenon.  In doing so, I

assert that the elicited understandings of role models and citizenship from these Black

males yielded findings and a constructive narrative to move towards a deeper

understanding.


**Setting**

The school, Imagine Elementary (pseudonym) where this research took place is

located in the southern region of the United States.  Of note is the school district's racial

character, with students from African American (16%), Hispanic (77%), and White (5%)

backgrounds (HAR, 2015).  The school site represents the characteristics described

within my research question, existing literature and prevailing discourse.  Hence, the

school campus is located in what is considered an "urban" area.  The "urban-centric"

classification system used by the National Center for Educational Statistics distinguishes

"urban" into four categories – city, suburb, town, and rural.  This study's school site is

located in a "large city" defined as being a "territory inside an urbanized area and inside a

principal city with population of 250,000 or more" (NCES, 2006).  Transferability of

information and findings was taken into consideration when choosing an urban area for

this study, as "cities are disproportionately non-white, with over 52 percent of Blacks and

21 percent of whites residing in central-city neighborhoods" (Squires & Kubrin, 2006).

The city where the school is located has a Black population of over 20 percent. Of note, the neighborhood where the school is located has a higher percentage of Blacks in the immediate residential area. This has been found in studies also as the typical Black person lives in a neighborhood that is 51% Black (Squires & Kubrin, 2006).

Additionally, for the purposes of this study, "urban" serves to be understood as having a high concentration of Black and Latino students as disentangling the influence of race and place proves to be a significant challenge.

## Data Collection Techniques

### Interviews

Studies have shown that children interviews can result in producing distinctive, specific, and intimate accounts of knowledge producing an increased understanding of their process of learning and positionality within the world (Adair, 2013; Mayall, 2000; Doucherty & Sandelowski, 1999). Children's perspective in many ways has been traditionally excluded from research citing concerns of them being too immature to generate useful data (Deatrick & Faux, 1991) and "concerns about whether children possess the appropriate cognitive, linguistic and social skills to provide adult interviewers with reliable and valid interview data" (Gill, et. al, 2008). Historically, much of the data collected about children quite simply has not been collected directly from the children themselves. Yet, after the United Nations' "Convention on the Rights of the Child" in 1989 – which asserted that children should be consulted and included about activities that affect their lives including research, an increased focus shifted to children being a valuable source of information. As a researcher looking to empower the voices of

children, this method of interviewing for collecting data was imperative to eliciting children's meanings of role models and citizenship.

Before conducting initial interviews, I understood it was important to establish a rapport with those involved in assisting with the fluidity of the research study and the student participants.  This process of "warming the site" took place for four weeks. Fostering a connection prior to engaging in formal interviews helped "put children at ease, improve trust and honesty, and…(led) to more constructive dialogue" (Gill, et. al, 2008).  This was done by spending time in their natural educational settings (classroom, lunchroom, playground, hallway, etc.) and interacting with them in an informal manner – engaging in conversations becoming more familiar with their language, personal characteristics, and interpersonal interactions.  For example, I acted as teacher assistant helping students with activities and lesson in the classrooms.  I also sat with students and talked to them during their lunchtime in the cafeteria. This led to conversations that involved a variety of topics even with those who weren't potential student participants. When introduced to the students as Mr. Johnson, I encouraged them to call me "MJ" if they so desired.  I also looked to build trust with the teachers, principal and school counselor – seeking to create an understanding that all attempts to collect data and produce information derived from good faith.  By becoming immersed in the setting, I learned about aspects that assisted with the process of the study such as the optimal times to conduct interviews and finding a space of physical and mental comfort.  This increased methodological efficiency.

The primary data collection technique employed in this phenomenological study was the long interview (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2002).   Semi-

structured interviews were conducted in order for student participants to have liberal time and scope to freely express their ideas and communicate narratives about their personal experiences (Nohl, 2009).  These open-ended questions granted space for me as the researcher to respond and follow up on developing viewpoints and events mentioned. Semi-structured interviews also provided the necessary guidance of what to talk about.

    Questions were "directed to the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question" (Welman & Kruger, p.196).  Also because this study searched for the historical, social, and cultural child living under particular conditions (Minick, 1989), I at times asked the child to pretend he is in various times and locations to see if his responses changes accordingly.  The thinking into this procedure was to consider the variance in responses.  For example, the way a participant responds to a question in a school might be vastly different than if he were in a church, and the way he would answer a question at home would possibly be different than the way he would respond on the playground with his friends.

    The duration of these semi-structured interviews for each student did not    exceed 20 minutes. The interviews and activities and lessons were all conducted in a classroom specifically designated for auxiliary activities.  I refer to interviews as interactions taking place between the researcher and participant on an individual, one-to-one basis. The classroom was used because it permitted privacy for the student participants.  It was in a quiet location with minimum interruption.  Regardless, the door of the classroom was never completely closed and many times rested wide-open to reassure child safety and compliance.  The participants were given two interviews.  The first interviews (pre-activity) took place at the beginning of the study prior to any lessons or activities

(Appendix C). The subsequent interviews were conducted at the end of the research study after participating in the lessons and activities (Appendix D).

Seidman (1991) suggest researchers conduct at least three interviews to a) capture the informant's life history b) elaborate on specific and important topics or events and c) acquire informant's reflections on interpretations. The first interview with the participants attempted to get a sense of their life history and prior knowledge as it pertained to their understandings role models. The lessons and activities looked to elicit their dialogue, experiences, and understandings of specific topics related to role models and citizenship. Lastly, the final interview was conducted to gain the participant's reflections and conceptualizations of the topics discussed throughout the duration of the project. Again, interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis between myself and the individual participant. The lessons and activities were conducted in groups. The first time I conducted a lesson and activity, it was with all ten participants at the same time. Trying to conduct a lesson with all ten participants at the same time proved to be very challenging therefore for the remaining lessons and activities, the participants were separated by grade level – with the five 1$^{st}$ grade participants being together and the five 2$^{nd}$ grade participants being together. All interviews, lessons, and activities were recorded on an iPhone voice memo application. The recordings were then uploaded and transferred to UT Box storage for security purposes.

In a study incorporating phenomenology as its methodology, transcription of interviews moves beyond word-by-word discussion to capturing how researcher and participant in partnership work to create a common understanding (Fleming, et. al., 2003). I began subsequent interviews and lessons/ activities reminding participants of

key points from our previous interaction.  Because I met with ten participants each week, I simply did not have the time to transcribe the interviews or lessons and activities between each weekly session.  Rather, I used my notes from my reflection process and started subsequent interactions based on that and the organized scaffolding of lesson plans.

Keen observation of participants during interviews and lessons informed me of relevant questions to pose as well as provided context of participant meanings including why and how one's actions are informed by consciousness or forms of expression.  Field notes included observation comprising descriptions of participants, physical environment, and reports of events and activities (Bodgan & Biken, 1998).  Observational field notes can possibly entail movement, gestures, and expression of facial features and body to demonstrate meaning-making.

It was important to also be aware of my own reactions to situations and events as I entered into the process of discovery as "writing represents the author as much as it represents the field" (Graue & Walsh, p.210) and participants.  As new questions arose from observation, it was understood to be aware of bias and uphold as much as possible the principles of "objectivity" when recording such observations as to not distort actual occurrences.  Responses that stood out were chronicled and discussed with the participants to ensure accuracy then analyzed at a later time.

Field notes were recorded on my laptop using Microsoft Word. Vocal intonations, gestures, physical expressions and other non-visible responses were included within my field notes.  Since meaning is not only transmitted by words, but also by interaction, play, and work, my analytic memos yielded fruitful data(Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007).  Basically,

any observable evidence of participants' reasoning and strategies used to communicate their reasoning I attempted to record. This recording of multiple forms of information was important as "we often do not know what we know until we write" (Graue & Walsh, p.207). So far a comprehensive description of my interview process as a means to understand students' life-worlds has been explained. Next, I will detail an additional instrument utilized to further examine the role model, hero, and citizenship phenomenon.

### Collection of Artifacts and Texts

In order to help understand constructed meanings and the dynamics of power latent within students' sociocultural, political, and educational surroundings describing their life-worlds, artifacts and texts/ documents were collected. Artifacts represented symbols of culture and informed me as a researcher as to how students not only received various messages but also produced their own messages. This study viewed primary artifacts as "tools used directly in production to mediate the relationship between subject and object of activity" (Guy, 2003, p.3). I obtained these materials in the form of participants' written documentation and artwork. Secondary artifacts included posters and pictures in the classroom, hallway, cafeteria, and library, as well as articles of clothing worn by participants. This assisted with my understanding of their lived-worlds. In addition, these artifacts aid in explaining the narrative of our experience during the research study. All artifacts collected, observed and analyzed were essential to the study and helped answer the questions posed in this project.

Gadamer (2008) maintains that historical and cultural consciousness is embedded in artifacts and by way of analysis, the silent and latent assumptions situated by race, class, gender, age, and culture are made visible. It is important to understand that

research especially involving young children depends on context. Though mostly operating in spaces where they have little control, "they are able to invent, with-in adult created contexts, their own sub-contexts, which most often remain invisible to adults but are most visible and salient to children. Young children, nevertheless, are markedly both more context dependent and context vulnerable than older children and adults (Graue & Walsh, p.12). This recognition and utilization of artifacts assisted in capturing and understanding the meaning and experiences of participants as it related to role models and citizenship.

### Lessons – Historical Thinking Approach

I conducted four lessons about role models and citizenship. A lesson was facilitated per week. Of important note is the utilization of historical thinking as the major strategy and technique to elicit participants' dialogue, understandings, and experiences as it related to role models and citizenship. As Vansledright (2004) states, "historical thinking is a very close relative to active, thoughtful, critical participation in text-and image-rich democratic cultures" (p.232). Aligning with this study's frameworks of critical childhood studies and Foucault's notions of discourse and discursive formations, historical thinking "involves certain distinct problems that cannot be collapsed into a more generic 'critical thinking'…and attempt(s) to show that students' social, political, and historical orientation requires confronting these problems" (Seixas & Peck, p. 116). Students even in early elementary need to engage in opportunities to assess, reassess, and develop their own interpretations of histories and prescribed curriculum. It has been illustrated that although the implementation of historical thinking is intricate and often difficult, elementary teachers should shed their limiting thoughts of

their students' capabilities due to numerous studies showing that this attitude is inaccurate (Vansledright, 2004).  Early elementary students can definitely think historically!

Historical thinking revolves around six distinct concepts, however during this study five of these concepts surfaced as important components of our lessons and activities.  These were (as defined by *The Historical Thinking Project*):

- Historical significance – the linkage to larger trends and stories revealing something important depending on one's perspective and purpose.

- Continuity and change – the understanding that history is not a list of separate events. Suggest looking for change where common sense indicates there is none and looking for continuities where we assumed that there was change. The ideas of progress and decline help in history's evaluation.

- Cause and consequence – explores the how and why. Causes can be multi-layered involving long-term ideologies, institutions, and conditions and short-term motivations, actions and events.

- Historical perspective – comprehending the social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional settings that shaped individual's lives and actions in the past.

- Ethical dimensions of history – navigating the moral dilemmas of the past to help us face the ethical issues of today.

Participants discussed, wrote, drew, and collaborated with fellow participants during the lessons and activities.  Specifically, lessons and activities drew upon how participants made meaning of role models and citizenship vis-a-vis historical figures, cartoon

characters, people in the community, and popular figures or any other 'titles'/ 'categories' sprouting from interactions with participants.

This study recognizes the challenge of delegating instructional time to the subject of social studies due to high-stakes testing (Hinde, 2005; Salinas, 2006), many students having little basic knowledge of history, civics, economics, and geography (Leming, Ellington & Schug, 2006) and the call for social justice into social studies curriculum (White, 2008).  As a result, this project demonstrates how adherence to the Social Studies TEKS for 1st grade and 2nd grade allows for and justifies time delegated to social studies.

**TEKS – State Standards**

The lessons adhered to the current standards of 1st and 2nd grade TEKS identified as:

- 110.12 (b)(18) Writing. Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas.
- 110.12 (b)(24) Students determine, locate, and explore the full range of relevant sources addressing a research question and systematically record the information they gather.
- 113.12 (b)(2) The student understands how historical figures, patriots, and good citizens helped shape the community, state, and nation.
- 113.12 (b)(12) Government. The student understands the role of authority figures, public officials, and good citizens.
- 113.12 (b)(13) Citizenship. The student understands characteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals.
- 110.13 (b)(13) Reading/ Comprehension of Informational Text/ Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.
- 110.13 (b)(18) Writing/ Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas.

- 113.13 (b)(4) History. The student understands how historical figures, patriots, and good citizens helped shape the community, state, and nation.

- 113.13 (b)(13) Citizenship. The student understands characteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals.

- 113.(b)(19) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms.

**Schedule**

The pre-research preparation and data collection was conducted in the following manner:

Activities

(Warming the Site)

Week 1: Pre-research preparation. Met with principal, school counselor, and teachers of potential student participants. Discussed research study and roles of the researcher.

Week 2: Pre-research preparation. Served as teacher assistant for one of the 1$^{st}$ grade teacher's classroom. Talked, ate food, and sat with students in the 1$^{st}$ and 2$^{nd}$ grade during their lunchtime in the cafeteria.

Week 3: Pre-research preparation. Discussed the research study in detail with the school counselor. Talked, ate food, and sat with students in the 1$^{st}$ and 2$^{nd}$ grade during their lunchtime in the cafeteria. Visited the classrooms and engaged with students about the work they were attending to.

Week 4: Pre-research preparation. Blank parental permission and assent forms are sent to the school counselor via email. The school counselor selects the pool of participants. There was a total of 13 potential participants. Seven (7) were in the 1$^{st}$ grade and six (6) were in the 2$^{nd}$ grade. The school counselor contacted the parents and guardians of potential student participants. The school counselor explained the purposes of the research study as we had discussed as well documented on the permission forms. The permission forms were then given to the 13 potential participants to be delivered to their parents.

(Research Study & Data Collection)

Week 5: I contacted the parents and guardians of each potential participant. I spoke to eight (8) out of the thirteen (13) parents and guardians. I left a voicemail message that included: my name, title and position as primary researcher, affiliation with the University of Texas at Austin, purpose of the study, encouragement of a talk with the potential participant about the study, and my contact information in the form of email address and phone number. Each parent and/ or guardian I spoke with expressed a positive attitude towards me, the study, and the overall purpose.

Week 6: Ten (10) of the potential participants returned the parental permission formed signed. I conducted the pre-activity interviews. I recorded field and reflective notes.

Week 7: I conducted a whole group lesson that included all ten (10) participants. Activities included selecting a role model previously mentioned in the pre-activity interviews. Then participants wrote that name or title and drew a picture of what that person does. I recorded field and reflective notes.

Week 8: I conducted 2 group lessons. The groups were separated by grade level (1st & 2nd grade). Activities included a historical thinking approach to showing images of historical figures and a dollar bill activity. I recorded field and reflective notes. I began to search for emerging themes and areas of difference.

Week 9: I conducted 2 group lessons. The groups were separated by grade level (1st & 2nd grade). Activities included "What Makes a Good Citizen" survey and a historical thinking approach to showing images related to citizenship and counter-narratives. I recorded field and reflective notes.

Week 10: I conducted individual activities and post-activity interviews. The activity included a historical thinking approach to showing images related to role models and citizenship. I recorded field and reflective notes.

Week 11: Pizza party was held.

Week 12: Cross-checked themes with participants.


**Explication of the Data (Phenomenological Analysis)**

Although there exist step-by-step guides to the interpretive process of hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis, it serves to understand "the process is iterative and not linear" (Crist & Tanner, p.202). Heidegger's notions of hermeneutic interpretative phenomenology discards the idea of bracketing (suspending researcher's preconceptions) and instead calls for investigators to acknowledge their presumptions and positionality in relation to the phenomenon being studied. This recognition of assumptions is seen as the forward arc of the hermeneutic circle. Accordingly, as interviews were inspected along with emerging interpretations artifact collection, the return arc is formed – thus the "movement of uncovering" the circle (Parker & Addison, 1989) or deeper understanding of the role model phenomenon takes place. Experience and understanding are thus intricately linked.

*Basic form of the hermeneutic circle (Bontekoe, p.4)*
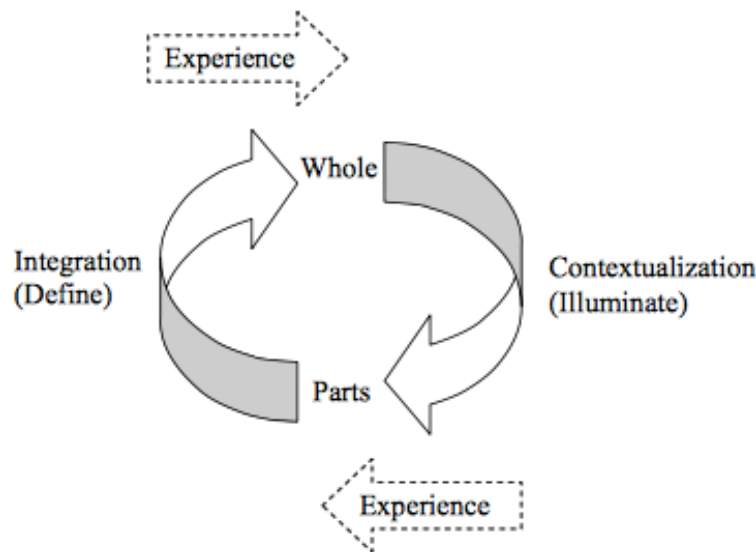


Throughout all the stages of data analysis, crosschecking interpretations with initial transcripts, field notes / analytic memos, and artifact collection, along with

consistent involvement of participants, I sought to maintain an intimacy and faithfulness to the expressions given by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) recommend continual assessment of "pre-research assumptions about the phenomena by comparing and contrasting these assumptions with the findings in the research text" and addressing "any prejudices developed from the literature and personal experience" (p.621). The next section includes details of the stages of data analysis, standards of evaluation, and methodological reflections/ presumptions.

In the fore of my analysis, were the major tenets of the theoretical (Foucault's notions of discourse and discursive formations) and conceptual (critical childhood studies) frameworks guiding this research. I paid close attention to students' lived experiences relating to: power, social practices, identity formation, sociocultural constructions, and production, maintenance, and disruption of standard discourse.

**Stages of Data Analysis:**

1. Immersion

   a. Organize data-set into texts

   b. Iterative reading of texts

   c. Preliminary interpretation of data to facilitate coding

2. Understanding

   a. Identify first order (participant) constructs

   b. Code data using NVivo software

3. Abstraction

   a. Identify second order (researcher) constructs

   b. Group second order constructs into sub-themes

4. Synthesis and theme development

    a. Group sub-themes into themes

    b. Further elaboration of themes

    c. Compare themes

5. Illumination and illustration of phenomena

    a. Link the existing literature to the themes identified above

6. Integration and critique of findings within the research team and externally

    a. Critique of the themes by peer review and externally

    b. Report final interpretation of the research findings

*Stage One: Immersion*

Interview transcriptions, field notes of observations during lessons and activities, and artifact collection were gathered for each participant. This information was collated into subgroups. These datasets were organized for iterative reading, preliminary interpretation and coding. I repeatedly listened to audio recordings and read and re-read the transcribed data collected. This stage of phenomenological analysis included my presumptions and pre-understandings of the phenomenon being studied. This constituted my initial 'horizon' – that being as far as I could see or understand the phenomenon at hand. Yet the goal of data analysis is a 'fusion of horizons' amongst myself as the researcher, previous relevant literature, and participants' experiences. As a result, 'understanding' is the fusion of our past and present (Gadamer, 1976/2008). This viewpoint granted me an open-mind to the fluidity of my initial thematization. Thus understanding was co-constituted over time. Following the hermeneutic circle allowed for various evolutions of initial thinking and themes to generate and obtain an 'essence.'

Transcriptions of the interviews and lessons were uploaded to NVivo software for coding. This process of immersion (van Manen, 1997) assisted the researcher in gaining a sense of the meaning of data, initial interpretations and facilitation of coding (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

*Stage Two: Understanding – Identifying first order constructs*

First order constructs are the words and meanings of the participants themselves. These first order constructs related to the research questions pertaining to the phenomenon of role modeling and citizenship. These constructs were identified for all participants and then used for coding – meaning information was gathered "about what people mean when they use certain words, how these are related to each other in a meaning structure, what 'theories' they are using and what 'ideal types' they construct among themselves" (Aspers, p.7). Coding for this study was creative yet consistent and rigorous (Langdridge, 2004).

The software, NVivo was used to help code texts and identify constructs, nonetheless a constant checking for relevance and completeness was practiced. Participants' involvement and feedback took place both naturally and intentionally during the data collection phase which provided a deeper and richer understanding of their life-worlds and experiences. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) asserts, everyday social actors are engaged in practical interpretations of their own social worlds. Thematic statements generated from participants' verbatim expressions were selected and isolated (van Manen, 1990), as sentences or portions of sentences can help identify emerging themes. These emerging themes or codes were identified as nodes and sub-nodes within the NVivio software.

*Stage Three: Abstraction – Identifying second order constructs & grouping to create themes and sub-themes*

As researcher, my theoretical and conceptual frameworks as well as personal knowledge was used to generate second order constructs – as they are crafted in relation to and built off first order constructs. These constructs were assisted from observations and comments during the immersion stage. In other words, second order constructs were 'accounts of accounts.' I took all data (interviews, observations/ field notes, and artifacts) and using these frameworks and intimate knowledge created themes and sub-themes.

This illustrates the stage of analysis from simply description to interpretation granting room for researcher sense-making (Smith, et. al., 2009; Conroy, 2003). Conroy (2003) goes on to encourage the seeking of "new apprehensions that change the understandings of all connected with the research: reader, narrator, and/or researcher" (p.4). In summation, my reading of transcriptions line-by-line and repeatedly, inclusion of field notes, and the recognition of my presumptions was used to differentiate incidental from essential themes. Two questions were asked to distinguish the two: 1) Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon? 2) Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning (van Manen, 1990)? Shared meanings were found within (in-depth) and across (breath) participants' life-worlds.

*Stage Four: Synthesis and Theme Development*

This stage involved further extricating and expounding of the themes and sub-themes.  NVivo synthesized the first and second order constructs and themes and sub-themes were listed in chronological order. At the forefront of the researcher's mind at this point was the practice of the hermeneutic circle.  As interpretation of the phenomenon of role modeling and its association with citizenship evolved, I sought a more accurate description of their life-worlds.  An evolving understanding of the phenomenon took place by movement between each part of data creating a whole narrative or picture.  This data includes: literature review, presumptions, interview transcripts, observational, field, and reflective notes, and stages of analysis.

The *interpretative and dialectic* procedure (Radnitzky, p. 23) utilized to generate knowledge is displayed by the image below:



P= pre-understanding.
U= understanding.
P₁= advanced pre-understanding.
U₁= advanced understanding

Not every meaning encountered was unique to the phenomenon or experience and some meanings were often historically and culturally determined and shaped" (van Manen, p.106).  In addition, researcher interpretation and synthesis was used to "identify meanings that the participants could not articulate considering the complexity or tacit nature of the phenomenon being investigated" (Ajjawi & Higgs, p.625).  Central to the process of synthesis and theme development is to unearth "qualities that make a

phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (van

Manen, p.107). As Heidegger (1977) suggests we should investigate "the way in which it

remains through time as what it is" (p.3).

Themes were with discussed with peers within the graduate school and also with

those outside working outside of academic settings. How readers make sense of the

phenomenon researched was taken into consideration. This external check of peer review

assisted with capturing themes' 'sense of essence' and reducing misunderstandings. This

stage of refinement of helped solidify arguments and explanations.

*Stage Five: Illuminating and illustrating the phenomena*

This stage included highlighting key findings from the entire data set by

examining the literature in its relation to the themes and sub-themes. By linking first and

second order constructs to existing bodies of theory and literature, this study allowed for

these interrelationships to produce key findings that connect to, and ultimately expand,

complex, and nuance our understandings of early elementary Black males' understanding

and talk about role models and citizenship. In this stage, it is of utmost importance that

the participants "recognize themselves, and the account that you as a researcher have

made" (Aspers, p.8). This involved interweaving first order constructs and participant

driven data into stories that are accurate and remain faithful to their experiences.

*Stage Six: Integration - Critique & dissemination of findings*

A table of themes was created in NVivo identifying recurrent themes with

examples and sub-themes. These were presented to the participants for their feedback

attempting to ensure the verisimilitude of this study's interpretive hermeneutic findings.

The findings of this data searched for a "fusion of horizons." Neither consensus nor absolute truth was the purpose of producing results. Results were presented to help understand what Black male role models and citizenship meant to us. This narrative of life-worlds operated in an attitude of openness. Therefore the "fusion of horizon" allows for the third hermeneutic, the reader, to glean what they will from the results, as they introduce their own horizon into the interpretation. Although interpretation is a continuous process, central to this final stage was "whether one's concern has been answered" (Packer & Addison, p.279).

Manuscripts of this study were disseminated to my dissertation committee. These actions were performed to gain feedback as well as test for clarity and meaningfulness of findings. Final adjustments and edits were incorporated. This study by way of implementing these stages of data explication and phenomenological analysis shared Wilcke's (2002) view that:

> The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology, is to "reveal a totality of meaning in all its relations" (Gadamer, 199, p.471) through a process of interpretation which involves making manifest that which is hidden by going "beyond what is directly given" (Spiegelberg, 1982, p.712), reading between the lines (Odman, 1988) and paying attention to what has been omitted, the silences and the assumptions, to that which has been so taken for granted that it has not been questioned. Hermeneutic phenomenology thus seeks a deeper understanding of human experience by rediscovering it and opening it up (Bergum, 1997).

**Standards of Evaluation**

Guba and Lincoln (1999) identify four standards for trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Nevertheless, these claims of quality did not necessarily fit and sometimes were not appropriate when utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology. van Manen (1997) enlists four areas/criteria of rigor in which to employ for this type of research. These include: orientation, strength,

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richness and depth. Langdridge (2007) too issues three components of quality standards when conducting hermeneutic interpretative phenomenology: analytical rigor, persuasive account, and participant feedback. For this study, I adhered to van Manen's notions of quality as Langdridge standards view a phenomenon as a whole and not broken down into themes (Willing, 2013).

For van Manen (1997), orientation is the involvement of the researcher in the world of participants and their stories. I addressed this through prolonged engagement (warming the site and data collection phase) with and of their setting and paid careful attention to the ways in which data is collected, interpreted, and documented. Strength denoted the capacity of the text to represent the core intention of understanding as expressed by the participants. Eliciting and focusing on the first-order constructs accomplished this.

Richness referred to the aesthetic quality of the text to communicate meanings as perceived by the participants. I addressed this criterion by documenting their experiences using quotations and blocks. I also shared vocal intonations, gestures, physical expressions and other non-visible responses made by the participants. Depth was seen as the ability of the research text to penetrate down and express the best of intentions of the participants. I accomplished this by cross checking the experiences of participants. I was also aware of possible threats to quality; therefore I verified no discrepancy between spoken and transcribed account by simultaneously listening to the recordings and checking the transcription. By employing these means, our phenomenological research design contributed toward accuracy and focused on insider perspective (Schurink, et. al., 1998).

All data collected was stored securely.  Paper documents and artwork was transported to my home and stored in a locked storage bind.  Electronic data was stored in a digitally encrypted, password protected online source, UT Box.

**Summary**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how first and second grade African American males in an urban school understand and talk about role models and citizenship.  The study included ten (10) participants.  Five of the participants were in $1^{st}$ grade and five participants were in $2^{nd}$ grade.  A total of 14 weeks was spent at the research site. Semi-structured interviews, artifacts, and observational/ field notes were collected.  The data was analyzed using the stages of phenomenological analysis adapted from Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Smith, et. al., 2009; Conroy, 2003.  I implemented van Manen's (1997) four areas of criteria to assess rigor and trustworthiness.  Peer reviews and follow-up interviews aided in producing an authentic account of the phenomenon.  The findings were shared with my dissertation committee and SISD's research and data collection office.

## Chapter 4: Findings

In Chapter 1, the stated purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe how 1st and 2nd grade African American males in an urban school understand and talk about heroes, role models and citizenship. This research study concentrates on "illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding" (Laverty, p. 22). By use of the hermeneutic circle incorporating pre-understanding, background, and co-constitution with participants, not only are themes highlighted, but also an account of the research experience is unveiled. According to van Manen (1990), to write phenomenologically is to write poetically, attempting to depict the ambiguity and complexity involved in the lived worlds being described. This venture of both art and science seeks to bring about a "phenomenological reverberation" (Bachelard, 1964) whereby the power of the text is perhaps "ultimately successful only to the extent that [the] readers feel addressed by it" (van Manen, 2007, p.26). Particular attention is paid to channeling the voices of the participants and eliciting what is shared in culture, history, practice, and language.

### Understanding Heroes

This study sought means that could introduce the concepts of role modeling and citizenship in a fluid and easily understandable way. Because of my personal experience teaching 1st grade and also due to the existing body of literature and analysis, I understood that there was a high probability of most students at these grade levels being unfamiliar of a working definition for role models or citizenship. As a result, I used the term "hero" to bring student participants into this initial conversation and experience. The

thinking was that they would have knowledge of and could express their thoughts and actions as it applied to experiences of heroes. According to Graue and Walsh (1998), "understanding children well requires combining varied approaches as well as looking for new ones" (p.16). Several themes surfaced throughout the duration of the study related to their understanding and talk about heroes. These include: a) Heroes save; b) Majority of heroes are fictional characters; c) Heroes in popular culture but not included in curriculum; and d) Heroes' specialties are imaginative.

| DC & Marvel Comic Characters | Batman (twice) | Superman (three times) | Hulk | Spider-Man (twice) | Mask | Deadpool |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Others | Dad (twice) | Granddad | God | Classmate | | |

Heroes identified by participants during Pre-Lesson/ Activity Interview.

**Heroes Save**

The primary theme emerging from the student participants related to heroes is that "heroes save." Heroes take it upon themselves to go out into the world and rescue people. Heroes save in a variety of ways and their value is assessed in terms of protection, prevention, and maintenance. Even though during the pre-activity interviews only two of the participants claimed to have known what a role model was, each participant expressed knowledge of what a hero is and what a hero does. As expressed within their pre-lesson/activity interviews, 80% of the participants stated the word, "save" in some capacity in their initial response to the researcher's question, "What is a hero?"

In their responses, Newton, Hopkins, and Steve all claimed that a hero is, "Somebody who saves people." Jennings stated a hero, "Saves your life" and Chris expressed that, "A hero is like a person who saves someone's life." Mike said a hero, "saves someone" and Miami put forth, "A hero can save your life." The participants articulated a clear sense of their thoughts about a heroes' main objective being to "save." As Chris continued in the pre-lesson/ activity interview after being asked, "So if a person saves someone's life, what type of person is that? He replied, "It's just a life saver." As a result of repeatedly hearing the term "save" or variations of such (i.e. saves or saved), I began to associate it with their understanding of heroes. In subsequent lessons, activities, and interviews I reminded them of their statements about heroes "saving people" and if my understanding of was correct. Evidence supporting exploring children's relationship with heroes is borne out by research that shows how morals are learned from them (McCrary, 1999; Martin, 2008).

A sacrificial element is noticed during the Historical Figures PowerPoint Lesson and Activity (2nd Grade), where the following exchange between myself and the group took place:

Researcher: Now before I before I finish, is George Washington a hero or role model?

Duncan: Hero.

Researcher: Hero. Why is he a hero?

Mike: Because he saved his life. Actually, he didn't save his life but he saved his life for us.

Mike: Yeah.

Chris: And he died for us.

As Kort-Butler (2012) observed with her study, *Depictions of Justice in Children's Superhero Cartoons*, that personal sacrifice, even the "ultimate one," was an action superheroes were willing to perform. The hero's work was not simply about saving an individual but the collective. I look to emphasize this aspect of the study, as being critical in approach seeks to counter the metanarrative individualistic and neglected communal qualities.

This feature of saving of society, group, and community continued. When the $1^{st}$ grade group was showed the picture of the Tuskegee Airmen, it was concluded by Mike that, "Army. Armies. Army persons. They save people. They fight back. They kill people. They kill bad people." Additionally, Duncan's remarks during his post-activity interview provided more insight into the thinking about the military.

Researcher: If this is you and you're watching TV, who's your role model or heroes that are on TV?

Duncan: Soldiers.

Researcher: Soldiers. Okay, why soldiers?

Duncan: Because they fight for us and they saved people.

Newton during his post-activity interview submitted the following:

Researcher: Hero is someone who saves people. So, who do you hear on the radio that could be your role model a hero?

Newton: (Shrugs shoulders to indicate that he doesn't know).

Researcher: Anybody? Okay. What about on the Internet? Who do you look at on a laptop, the iPad or the computer that can be a hero?

Newton: Superman.

This pattern was also observed with Hopkins during his post-activity interview.

Researcher: When you're watching TV, what role models or heroes do you see on

TV?

Hopkins: SpongeBob

Researcher: So, SpongeBob is your hero and role model on TV? Who else do you

see on TV? That you think is your role model.  Remember role model is

somebody who you would like to be when you grow up. A hero is somebody who

saves people. So who do you see on TV that you would like to be like when you

grow up or how do you see on TV who saves people?

Hopkins: The Hulk.

Researcher: The Hulk? Alright, okay, okay.

Hopkins: Or Ironman.

Observing this pattern of thinking about heroes, the following theme was concluded.

### Majority of Heroes Are Fictional Characters

The participants not only expressed that heroes save, but also communicated a

sense of who those individuals are.  During the pre-lesson/ activity interviews, five of the

participants articulated their heroes to be fictional characters in the form of DC and

Marvel Action Comic characters.  All of the characters were male.  These characters

included Superman, Batman, Hulk, Spider-Man, Iron Man, Flash, and Deadpool.

SpongeBob and The Mask were the other fictional characters mentioned.  Wandtke

(2012) puts forward the view that superhero narratives and iconography activate a

psychology and synergy between word and image that has taken a hold of our collective

memory.  Much like other cultures, this tradition of fictional superheroes has been passed down and shared.

During the pre-lesson/ activity interview with Foxx, he explains his understanding of heroes - who they are and what they do.

Researcher: Tell me this, what's a hero?

Foxx: Someone that saves people every time when something happens.

Researcher: Okay…do you know any heroes?  What heroes do you know about?

Foxx: Superman and Spiderman.

Researcher: Oh Superman and Spider-Man.  And why are they heroes? What makes Superman and Spider-Man a hero?

Foxx: They save the people when something happen.  And they fight the bad people.

Researcher: And how do I know people are bad?

Foxx: Because you can see what they are doing.

Numerous child psychologists believe the reason children this age are so attracted to superheroes is because this is a time when they are searching for their place in the world and attempting to assert themselves (Moore, 2014).  In additional interviews, fictional characters continued to be identified as heroes.

Researcher: Well, let me ask you this.  You say, you say hero.  Who are some people that save people then?

Newton: Batman.

Researcher: Alright. Got Batman in the building.  Batman saves people.  Who else saves people?

Newton: Superman.

After affirming that Superman was a hero that saves lives, Hopkins also included an additional fictional character.

Researcher: Who else?  You know any other heroes?

Hopkins: The Hulk.

Researcher: The Hulk too. Now why would you pick Superman?  What is it about Superman that makes him a hero?

Hopkins: He can shoot lasers and the Hulk can jump high!

Smith's conception of a hero included being a "good guy."

Researcher: You said the Mask is a hero…?

Smith: And Deadpool.  He's a good guy.

Three of the participants noted someone other than a fictional character to be their heroes. Chris after stating that, "A hero is like a person that saves someone's life" went on to describe heroes as "life savers, nice and they come quickly."  He then said that "policemen, firemen, and the ambulance (medics) are heroes."  Jennings and Miami selected family relatives as heroes.  Miami mentioned his Dad because "He buys me food, puts a roof over my head and without him I wouldn't be alive." Jennings' heroes included his Dad, Granddad, and God.  The reasons - his Dad paints cars, his Papa spends time with him, and God sacrificed his life for everyone to live, again alluding to a united recovery.  Nonetheless, Duncan's assessment of heroes summed up their collective experience by saying, "They have to have a cape.  Everybody knows that superheroes have to have a cape."

**Heroes in Popular Culture but not Included in School Curriculum**

There was a significant exemption of participants' heroes from school's curriculum. When asked during the pre-lesson/ activity interviews, "Are there people you know about from schoolbooks and class who are role models and heroes? If so, who are they?" When this question was posed, only two participants mentioned someone. Hopkins stated Spiderman and Jennings pointed out Moses, firefighters, and the police. All of the other participants expressed that their heroes were not talked about nor were they in any of the books they used in school. This finding lends support to the claim that although it's an established practice of building curriculum on children's interests, popular culture is seldom utilized in curricular and pedagogical processes (Hedges, 2011; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Dyson, 1997; Pawley, 2008).

The consensus about the qualities of their heroes was one of a positive nature. The participants shared ideas about their heroes that exemplified the positive virtues promoted within common moral and character-education curriculum. The pre-lesson/ activity interview with Smith demonstrated this.

> Researcher: …What are some words to describe a hero…so a good guy. What
> else would you say a hero is?
>
> Smith: Fearless, strong, and brave.
>
> Researcher: Now are there people, that you know from your schoolbooks,
> from class that you hear in class who are role models or heroes?
>
> Smith: (Turns head and begins to think)
>
> Researcher: Anybody you can think of? From your…from your books or from
> a class that's a hero?

Smith: You mean books at home?

Researcher: The books in school.

Smith: I really didn't see no books of heroes.

In the description of his heroes, Mike used the words, "powerful, indestructible, super, and needed." Steve referred to heroes as being "nice." Also, Miami said that heroes are "brave, respectful, and not disrespectful to others." These expressions echo the sentiments of *TEKS - 113.12 (b)(13) and 113.13 (b)(13) Citizenship,* whereby it's required that the student understands characteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals.

Interestingly, while you couldn't find the participants' heroes in the school's curriculum, you could definitely find the images of these heroes on their clothing and material possessions. On several occasions participants wore shirts, socks, and belts that displayed DC and Marvel Action Comic Characters such as Batman, Superman, Spider-Man, Flash, Green Lantern, and the Hulk. One of the participants even wore a Superman shirt that included Velcro attachments on the shoulder section for a cape.



Type of superman shirt worn by a participant.

Participants also had backpacks, pencils, and wristbands with these fictional characters on them. It was clear that the imagery of DC and Marvel action hero characters permeated a space within these young boys' lives.

### Heroes' Specialties are Imaginative

The participants also expressed their desire to emulate the superheroes' special powers. Though these abilities and powers were often imaginative and physically unattainable, the participants shared a longing to actualize these for a good cause. This result fits well within the context of Bandura's social learning theory (1977/ 1978) as children are more likely to imitate what they have observed. Curiosity and imagination are key aspects of youth development and "children demonstrate their fascination with things that are beyond their realm of possibilities" (Martin, p.239). Here, Hopkins explains the superpowers he would like to use and why:

Researcher: Do you want to save people?

Hopkins: Yes

Researcher: What would you do to save people?

Hopkins: Use my superpowers

Researcher: Use your superpowers? And what superpowers would Hopkins have?

Hopkins: I would have lasers.

Researcher: Lasers? You and these lasers. That's your thing huh. And what would these lasers do to people? Who would we shoot with lasers first of all? Why we hitting people with lasers?

Hopkins: Cause some bad guys will kill people.

Researcher: So, you would stop that.  You would stop people killing people by using lasers.

Steve talks about having superpowers also.

Researcher: What's something that you would grow up to be?

Steve: A superhero.

Researcher: Why a superhero?

Steve: Because I'll like to fly.

Duncan states that "If I were a hero, I would fly all day."  Smith goes on to speak about how his search for the "mask" would help him.

Smith: Really I want to be the Mask if I can find that mask.

Researcher: Oh, it's just about finding that mask?

Smith: Yeah, I just want to find it so much.  Because I wonder if it's in the ocean or sea somewhere.

Researcher: Oh. Okay.

Smith: I'm hoping.  If I can find it, I'll put it on every morning.

Researcher: You would?

Smith: Yeah and every time somebody bully me I'll put the mask on… and but first once you put the mask on, first your dog, he go-

Researcher: Hold on. Tell me have you had instances where you feel like you've been bullied?

Smith: Yeah.

Researcher: And what have you done?

Smith: Oh, what I did was I told the teacher.  But she didn't listen.  So I was watching the Mask like… I was thinking about finding it.  So I asked my mom, "Can you pull up a real, live mask thing?"  And she said it was in the ocean or sea somewhere deep, deep. So I said when I grow up, I'm going somewhere where it's a lot of water like the ocean or the sea…or the pond.  If I can find it, I'll put it on. So, but you turn around and you would be a tornado once you put the mask on.

To their credit, the personnel at Imagine Elementary seem to have honed in on this connection between young students and their affinity for superheroes. Below are examples of how the campus uses references to superheroes to encourage student academic achievement.



Doors to campus library.

**Discussion on Understanding Heroes**

While the notion of heroes was used as an entry point into our discussion surrounding role models and citizenship, data collected about the term produced significant insight into 1st and 2nd grade African American males' experiences related to the term. The data yielded by this study provided five themes centered around the concept of heroes. The themes are: a) heroes save, b) majority of heroes are fictional characters, c) heroes in popular culture but not included in school curriculum, and d) heroes' specialties are imaginative. As a result, we can to view heroes as more than a courageous person or fictitious being with magical powers. The idea is nestled within a social, cultural, and political matrix of which power is dispersed. Applying Foucault's (1972) notion of discursive formations, heroes are therefore organized. These aren't simply ideas but as discursive formations can be touched, seen, and experienced consequently having tangible effects. A brief examination of each finding is given.

A deeper understanding was gained about heroes' primary and fundamental function of "saving." This redeeming quality of the superhero displaces the "violence" which many studies have associated with children's interactions with media. The aggressive or violent behavior producing problematic outcomes (Boyatzis, 1997; Huesmann, 1994) was seen by these participants as not simply violence for violence sake, but a call to prevent harm to others (Morris, 2005) as well as produce justice (Kort-Butler, 2012). This supports the understanding that violence is and can be broadly defined. As Kort-Butler (2012) puts it, "good' characters were compelled to use violence to protect or save others…the characters' use of violence was often portrayed as justified

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or morally correct" (p. 51).  For participants, the ends did justify the means, as long as it was for a good purpose.

We also recognized the substantial role of DC and Marvel Comic fictional characters included among the label of hero.  The overwhelming majority of these fictional characters are White and male.  This finding is reminiscent of Coyne and team of researchers' article, *It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a Gender Stereotype!*  It found that boys viewed superhero programs more frequently than girls and therefore associated male identity with superheroes.  Also, there was a noticeable absence of Black racial representation among identified heroes.  The popularity of superheroes in American culture appears to growing as there have been 70 live action and 41 animated superhero movies to hit the big screen since 2000 (Coyne, et.al, 2014).  There were less than half of that the previous 50 years (Coyne, et. al, 2014).  This surge of interest in superheroes according to Di Paolo (2011) is a response to the events of September 11, 2001 and has historically served to highlight the direction of American public opinion and government policy.  Thus, questions continue to arise as to the extent to which superheroes are marred by racist and sexist ideologies.

Moreover, while participants illustrated ample knowledge of these heroes, even wearing the imagery on their clothing and material possessions, they advanced the idea that this knowledge is not capitalized on or utilized within their school curriculum.  The participants' engagement of the personalities, conflicts and contexts surrounding heroes was substantial and extended beyond just that of the screen.  Along similar lines, Dyson (1997) discovered "when engaged in superhero play, children (implicitly or explicitly) addressed issues of complex human relationships and social identity" (p. 242).  Yet, this

pool of information is divorced from their realm of formal education. Lerner (2002) suggests this knowledge can be used to tap the intrinsic motivation to carry out equality and fairness. This listening, conveying and application of children's perspectives is a major tenet of critical childhood studies as the result is to help improve the social standing of young people and enhance their well-being in everyday life (Alanen, 2010). Pardales (2002) and Bauer and Dettore (1997) advise educators to utilize the fascination of superheroes to foster children's development. Utilizing the knowledge children bring into the classroom helps to see them as valuable contributors to their own educational process.

Lastly, we see that a hero's ability to affect change and produce good was practiced by utilizing imaginative and unattainable superpowers. Whether shooting spider webs from their wrist, swinging laser swords, or turning green, growing muscles and pushing cars out the way, a hero's power was principally physical and inventive. Unlike Dyson (1997) and Kort-Butler (2012) whose studies found that students recognized the mental powers of heroes as well, the participants in this study focused more on the physical while ignoring the mental powers. Because Foucault's (1972) notion of discourse seeks to question how some "truths" have gained their currency and others are marginalized, it stands to posit that the injection of a hero and his out-of-this-world superpowers inherently served to illustrate the nonexistence of engagement and talk about our justice system and its role in society to uphold good at early elementary levels.

The following section will address participants' understanding of role models. Learning more about the concept of Black role models was the initial motivation of this

research project. My findings suggest that while there were distinctions between heroes and role models, participants' comprehension came by way of continuance and a gradual increase of sophistication of thought rather than detached domains.

**Understanding Role Models**

| Athletes | Entertainers | Professionals | Family/ Classmate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stephon Curry (three times) | Lil Wayne | Model | Older brother |
| Kyrie Irving | Meek Millz | Superhero | Hopkins |
| Cam Newton | Rock star | Astronaut | Aunt |
| Michael Jordan | Prince | Police (three times) | |
| Magic Johnson | Drake | Firefighter (twice) | |
| Clay Thompson | Michael Jackson (twice) | Medic | |
| James Harden (twice) | | Train conductor | |
| J.J. Watt (three times) | | Mechanic | |
| Andre Johnson | | | |
| Odell Beckam Jr.(twice) | | | |
| Kobe Bryant | | | |
| Dramon Green | | | |

Role models identified by participants during pre-lesson/ activity interview.

While all of the participants provided a definition of what a hero is during the pre-lesson/ activity interviews, only two of the participants gave a response to the question, "Do you know what a role model is and have you heard this word before?" Eight of the participants did not even guess what the term meant. Consensus on the term "role model" has been a struggle for researchers and scholars alike (Carrington & Skelton, 2010; Anderson, 1999; Speizer, 1981; Oberle, 1974). Eventually, I would go on to define a role model as "someone who you want to be like when you grow up and get older." This definition was given because I felt the participants would be able to comprehend the term and how it operates in their life. Several participants responded with an "Oh" as if they simply needed clarification of the term. As we continued through the study, on occasion, I would repeat the definition and examples of role models offered by the participants. As early as our first whole group lesson and activity, I recognized a seemingly unintended mistake in its understanding.

Researcher: All right last week what was the word-

Group: Role models!

Researcher: We talked about role models right. Role models. Now who can tell me what a role model is? What was the definition?

Various Participants: What you want to be when you grow up!

Upon reflection, later that day, I realized that, "someone who you want to be *like* when you grow up" and "what you want to *be* when you grow up" has different conations. To me, the inclusion of the word "like" was important to emphasize because a role model was to be an *example* not a *reproduction*. Adhering to the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology assisted in this process of reflection and clarification (Moustakas, 1994;

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Gadamer, 1976). Nevertheless, in subsequent discussions, I made sure to make this distinction.

**Role Models are Real People**

Unlike their experience relating to heroes, participants understood role models to be non-fictional, "real" people. From the 39 responses given by the participants about who their role models were during the pre-lesson/ activity interviews, only one of the responses referred to someone fictional and that was a "Superhero." This illustrates their comprehension of the difference between a hero and a role model. Further it points to a development of identity "through a process of crisis (exploration of alternatives) and commitment (a decision reflecting personal investment) …likely to impact their interactions" (Gordon, 2009, p. 278). Foxx rationalizes the difference of hero and role models in this way:

Researcher: Your mom and your brother? Now, are your mom and your brother on TV?

Foxx: Nah.

Researcher: So, who would be on TV that you see who would be your role model? Somebody who you would like to be like?

Foxx: Police.

Researcher: The police?

Foxx: The firefighters.

Researcher: And firefighters. Why the police and firefighters?

Foxx: Because they are real and cartoons are fake.

Researcher: Because they are real and cartoons are fake? Okay.

Foxx: Because you can't be something in the cartoons.

Researcher: Because you can't be something in the cartoons. Gotcha.

Foxx: Because the stuff in cartoons are fake.

I felt that we were reaching a turning point in our associations between heroes and role models. In the matter of one week, they were able to discern this distinctive quality.

### Role Models are Visible and have a Stage

One of the aspects about role models that immediately became clear throughout the study was the importance of being visible and having a ready-made stage to display and perform one's abilities. During the pre-lesson/ activity interviews, 64% of the role models mentioned were athletes or entertainers. Some see these professionals as highly visible commodities shaped by historical and contemporary factors of racism and capitalism (May, 2009; Edwards, 1999). The participants communicated that they knew these athletes and entertainers primarily from watching television, listening to the radio and surfing the internet. Participants displayed vivid images when prompted to draw a picture of their favorite role model listed on the board doing something. I also asked the participants to write four sentences describing the picture. One of these prompts included, "Where do you see or hear about this person (television, books, magazines, radio, internet, etc.)?" An overwhelming 80% of the participants stated they knew of their role model from watching television. The influence of media along with other institutional mediums seems to produce and uphold certain discourses by which participants clung (Burdsey, 2007; Spurgin, 2012).
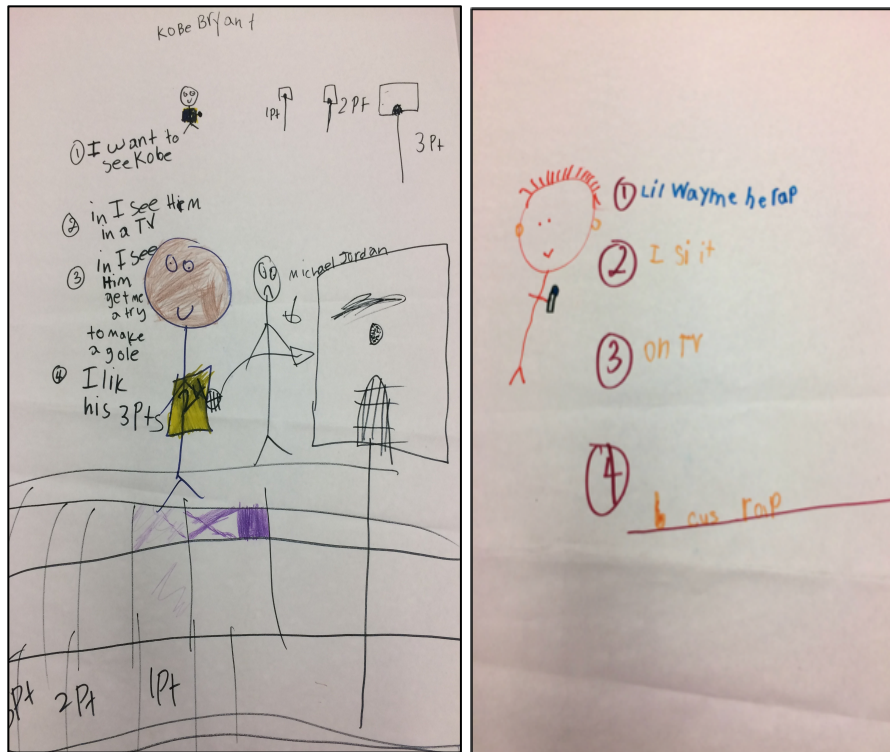
Drawings and descriptions of their favorite role models (Kobe Bryant, left; Lil Wayne, right).

Above are just two examples of eight pictures drawn by the participants depicting their selected role models and the stage they are granted and perform on. Participants drew elaborate, detailed illustrations of these stages. Smith and Steve both portrayed Michael Jackson with a mic in his hand and musical symbols. Smith had Michael Jackson singing at the store, Party City and Steve had him on an auditorium stage with a band playing instruments behind him. Mike sketched and colored J.J. Watt on a football field with goal-posts and yard-markers. Additionally, participants remembered and illustrated some notable moments of their role model's career. Jennings did this by drawing a picture of Odell Beckham Jr.'s well-known one-handed touchdown catch - arguably the greatest catch of all time.

Jenning's drawing and depiction of Odell Beckham Jr.'s one-handed catch.

This awareness of the minute details concerning their role models continued to be exhibited. Both Jennings and Miami wrote the uniform jersey number (#13) of Odell Beckham Jr. on their drawing. This was recalled by memory because we never discussed his number as a group. Jennings also knew who the quarterback was that passed the ball to Beckham Jr., Eli Manning. Chris wrote some Michael Jackson's musical lyrics on his drawing and included a caption about Jackson's pet rat being killed. Mike's drawing not only involved his self-identified role model Kobe Bryant, but also Michael Jordan as his opponent. These insights lend support to the claim that learning literacy can be enhanced by making connections to children's lived worlds and experiences. (Dyson, 1993/ 1997; Dowdall, et. al., 2014). While telling me about his role models, Mike also mentioned the women of stardom, Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Nicki Minaj that were associated with these

men.  This caught me off guard, but when I thought about the personality of Mike, it made complete sense of him disclosing this.

Researcher: That's what's up.  Okay, so you said you would like to be famous for being a basketball player. What else would you like to be?

Mike: You know like what kind of wife I want?

Researcher: Nah, talk to me.

Mike: Beyoncé.

Researcher: Oh, okay so you want Beyoncé to be your wife.

Mike: Uh-huh (positive).

Researcher: So why Beyoncé? (Laughs)

Mike: She famous. And if I'm famous and she famous, then it makes sense.

Researcher: Gotcha. Okay. So if you're famous, you want a famous wife too? I'm I getting that right?

Mike: (Shakes head up and down meaning yes)

Researcher: Who else?

Mike: Rihanna

Researcher: Re-Re! What is it about Rihanna that you like?

Mike: I like her videos. And I like her shoes. My auntie got her some Rihanna Pumas.  She got the sandals, the black ones with the gold right here (pointing to his shoes). And I want Meek Millz Pumas too.

Researcher: What you know about Meek?

Mike: I know that he like Nicki Minaj.

The ability to recall and communicate specifics about their role models shows how early elementary children can be position themselves as teachers in the classroom and contribute to curriculum if encouraged. As Jackman (2014) states, power is also viewed as the potential of "students to take the lead in subject-referent discourse that creates a pathway to meaningful academic engagement" (p. 154).

Also of note was the pattern of self-identified role models whose professional careers are finished and/or those who are no longer living. Michael Jordan retired from sports in 2003 – before any of the participants were born! Yet his image was recognized by each participant and he was acknowledged as a role model several times. Miami mentioned that Jordan's jersey number was 23 and that he has Jordan shoes. During a group lesson and activity, again participants' knowledge of details related to their role models, in this case Michael Jordan, stood out. Though there was some confusion about the concept of "knowing a person" the details still revealed themselves.

> Researcher: Look at this list and think about it. Who are the people that we *know*? The people we talk to. Who we can touch? Who are some of the people we *know*?
>
> Various Participants: Police. Big brother. Michael Jordan.
>
> Researcher: Can you talk to Michael Jordan right now?
>
> Group: Yep.
>
> Researcher: How can you talk to Michael Jordan?
>
> Group: Instagram! You could drive to Chicago!

My thinking was, "How in the world do they know he's connected to Chicago?" Mike using the term "idol" during his pre-lesson/ activity interview included Michael Jordan and one of his distinguishable characteristics.

Mike: You know who my idol?

Researcher: What up?

Mike: My idol is Michael Jordan.

Researcher: What you know about Jordan?

Mike: Well when he dribbles and dunks the ball, he sticks his tongue out.

Hopkins illustrates his knowledge of Michael Jordan through sports and his very own clothing that day.
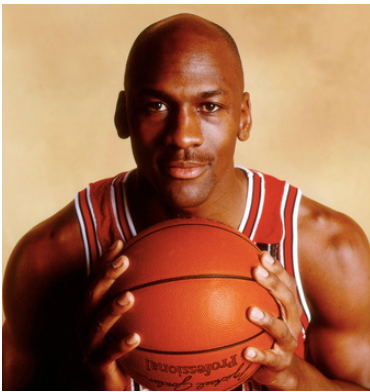


Image of Michael Jordan shown to participants.

Researcher: Who is this?

Hopkins: Michael Jordan.

Researcher: Michael Jordan. Now, how do you know Michael Jordan?

Hopkins: He used to…he always be in the basketball.

Researcher: Nice

Hopkins: And these Michael Jordan shoes (pointing to his shoes)!

So, part of Michael Jordan's recognition derived from his shoes being one of, if not the most valued shoe on the market. Even more so, Jordan gained substantial role model status by undergoing a remolding process or Disneyization (May, 2009) that divorced him from his Blackness. He was positioned as being *in* but not *of* the larger African American community.

Prince and Michael Jackson who were mentioned as role models do not have apparel. Yes, these entertainers experienced mega mania stardom during the 1970's, 80's, 90's and early 2000's. But how could kids running around with snotty noses know about the men responsible for *Purple Reign* and *Thriller*? This exchange between Chris and myself during the pre-lesson/ activity interview shed light on how they came to know them.

Researcher: Anything else you would like to be famous for? If I were to ask you…what rock stars do you know (he mentioned rock stars earlier)?

Chris: Michael Jackson.

Researcher: Michael Jackson…Michael Jackson a rock star? Why was he a rock star?

Chris: He did shows for one thing. And he did go on stage when he was little.

Researcher: So he started when he was little? And he's on stage?

Chris: Yes.

Researcher: Anything else about Michael Jackson?

Chris: For one thing, he does sound like a girl.

Researcher: Sounds like a girl…is that good or bad?

Chris: It sounds kinda good.

Researcher: Okay. Any other rock stars you would like to be like?

Chris: Prince.

Researcher: Prince oh snap!  What you know about Prince?

Chris: Well he did die a few…he died last year. And he was a good rock star.

Researcher: How did you find out about Prince and Michael Jackson?

Chris: Usually I watched it.

Researcher: Usually you watched it. Where did you watch it?

Chris: Maybe June 15th

Researcher: Do you listen to Michael and Prince with your parents or guardians or brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles?

Chris: Usually my Pa. My grandpa.

Researcher: Okay so grandpa is putting you on this game.

Culturally within the African American community, any time you get questioned with, "Whatcha know about _____," or "You don't know nothing 'bout _____," the person is attempting to settle in some ways the cognitive dissonance taking place about a shared knowledge, experience, idea, or narrative. For them, it just doesn't add up.  I was of the same thinking.  What did these kids know about Prince and Michael Jackson?  Did they know about the "back-side, cut-out pants Prince" or "The artist formerly known as Prince?"  Did they know about the "Black, afro or jerry-curl, Michael Jackson" or the "White, show up to court in pajamas Mike?" So while for Chris his introduction of Michael Jackson and Prince originated from his granddad, these illustrations by Smith and Steve give some insight into television being their main source of knowledge about these particular role models.
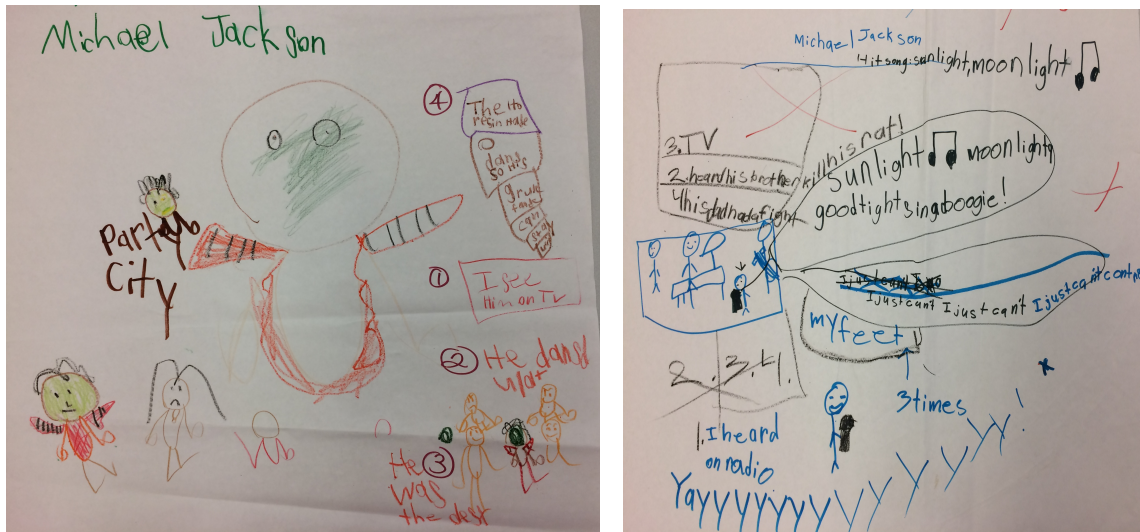
Drawings of their role model, Michael Jackson. Both stating they know about him from television (Smith, left; Steve, right).

The staying power of figures like Prince and especially that of Michael Jackson within the lives of young children speak to entertainers' stronghold within popular culture. Henry (2014) asserts in his examination of Michael Jackson's impact on popular culture that "Jackson successfully intertwined his art and popular culture to create a brand himself. He did this with image and stagecraft; primarily using the avenues of dance and the music video" (p. 2). At this point, it is essential to understand the role that video games played in the visibility and platform granted to role models especially in one's culture. Three of the participants stated that they also knew Michael Jackson as a result of playing video games on Xbox and PS3. Branded as being, "His Music, His Moves, Your Experience," the music video game entitled, *Michael Jackson: The Experience* was released in 2010. One of the most attractive elements of the game is the kinetic features that allow it to track and superimpose a player's body on the screen to different choreography and music. This makes the game family-friendly and potentially increasing

participation. The medium of video games to uphold a public figure's status within society is considerable and should be noted as being just as influential as television, radio, and the internet. This correlates with Love's (2015) insistence that "young children are entering learning spaces with complex language-shifting abilities, kinesthetic brilliance, creativity, focused play and reflective and critical thinking skills" which should be capitalized on.

One significant take away about the influence of media among the participants was their dispute of media's validity. Not all assumed that just because a story made it to the airways automatically equaled legitimacy. Our discussion about Abraham Lincoln brought this to light.

Researcher: Okay. Is Abraham Lincoln a hero or a role model?

Various Participants: Hero. Role model.

Researcher: Why is he a hero?

Duncan: Because he ended slavery.

Researcher: He ended slavery? And how do you know he ended slavery? Who told you that?

Mike: We learned that in first grade.

Chris: Last time I saw a TV. And I saw him in jail and he broke slavery.

Miami: But TV is not always right.

Researcher: Say that again Miami.

Miami: But TVs, TVs not always right.

Researcher: That's a good, great point!

Chris: Oh come on.

Researcher: What…you think TV is right?

Chris: When I see a person that's waaaay back. I know it's real.

Researcher: Well let me ask you this. Has anybody ever…has anybody ever told on you or told something about you that wasn't right?

Various Participants: Yes.

Researcher: How did you how did you feel?

Various Participants: Bad. Mad.

Researcher: You feel bad right? So imagine...imagine when people write a book or on TV that say something about bad about you.

Mike: So I'ma tell all the presidents to umm get him.

Jennings: How could you believe anybody that didn't even see it and they just said you did it, but they didn't even see it?

Researcher: I think what Miami does is bring up a good point. That everything that's on TV can't be believed alright.

So while media did shape their introductions and knowledge of role models, it is not without scrutiny. This illuminates misguided assumptions that marginalized groups including young children have not developed sophisticated means of consumption, production and participation (Duncan-Andrade, 2008). According to vanSledright (2008):

> Knowing the narrative and some of its romanticized heroes and their patriotic national scarifies and accomplishments does not necessarily result in the appropriation of self-identification with that narrative. Instead, in this case, the collective-memory approach appears to promote and reinforce among some Americans conspiracy theories and counternarratives that, with enough repeating, serve to nurture a cynical

view of it and the larger school system that serves as its officializing and sanctioning agent. If collective-memory proponents cannot find means for co-opting competing specific and local narratives through offerings, or by broadening the approach's appeal through genuine inclusion, it risks saliency among some groups and ironically may actually increase resistance and alienation. (p. 21).

### Role Models have Professional Authority

After athletes and entertainers, participant responses of role models included the general professions of policeman, firefighter, medic, mechanic, and train conductor. In many instances these figures are labeled and identified as "community helpers" or "community contributors." An emphasis on providing service is not unique to the construction of role models within an educational context. Most often this attribute is linked to one's job and profession (Bandura, et. al, 2001; Christiansen, 1979; King & Multon, 1996). Because three participants stated police as being role models, I pinned focus on their positionality. This study took place at the beginning of the academic school year. As a result, I would like to interject some of the educational standards required of them in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten to provide context of academic proficiency and expectations.

According to the TEA Early Childhood Outcomes and Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines Alignment document, the end of the pre-kindergarten year outcomes should result in "child discusses the roles and responsibilities of community workers" (VII.B.3, p.117). It also states that the child should "engage in role play of community helpers (e.g. fireman, doctor, dentist, nurse, teacher, postal worker, etc.)" (p. 117). The selection of these highlighted professions such as police officers, firefighters, doctors, soldiers, and

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astronauts as role models may be due to students' familiarity with them. Teachers

believe students can already explain how these particular people help others (pilot study).

By the 1st grade, TEKS states that students should "notice community helpers and the

vehicles they use." (p. 117). This seemingly taken for granted suturing of role models to

their profession is ubiquitous amongst role model discourse (King & Multon, 1996).

From its inception within the medical field to its' interventional programs, role models

and career choice appear inseparable. Training, access to information, social networks,

and employment opportunities are all valued commodities linked to role models and their

interactions with protégés (Oliver, 2006).

     Nonetheless, what's interesting about many of the professions thrusted upon early

elementary students and the curricular discourse surrounding role models is its'

preoccupation with authority, order, rules, and laws. Below are some examples of this

understanding control.

**Related TEKS**

| Kindergarten | 113.11 (b) | (8) Government. The student understands the purpose of rules. The student is expected to: | (A) identify purposes for having rules. | (B) identify rules that provide order, security, and safety in the home and school. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | (9) Government. The student understands the role of authority figures. The student is expected to: | (A) identify authority figures in home, school, and community. | (B) explain how authority figures make and enforce rules. |
| 1st Grade | 113.12 (b) | (11) | (A) explain the | (B) identify |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Government. The student understands the purpose of rules and laws. The student is expected to: | purpose for rules and laws in the home, school, and community. | rules and laws that establish order, provide security, and manage conflict. |
| | | (12) Government. The student understands the role of authority figures, public officials, and citizens. The student is expected to: | (A) identify the responsibilities of authority figures in the home, school, and community. | (B) identify and describe the roles of public officials in the community, state, and nation. |
| 2<sup>nd</sup> grade | 113.13 (b) | (11) Government. The student understands the purpose of governments. The student is expected to: | (A) identify functions of governments such as establishing order, providing security, and managing conflict | (B) identify governmental services in the community such as police and fire protection, libraries, schools, and parks and explain their value to the community |

I can understand the need for implementing rules and expectations concerning student behavior especially during early elementary education whereby students are still getting acclimated to an educational setting among their peers. However, there's an unsettling effect when routinely connecting certain professions with programmed and unquestioned positions of authority and control. Duncan may have eluded to what permits police officers' authority.

Researcher: What else would you like to famous for?

Duncan: A police

Researcher: So you would like to be a police. And why would you like to be a policeman?

Duncan: I like to carry weapons. And I want to be a secret agent.

Researcher: Why?

Duncan: You have lots of guns you defeat bad guys. And you get many guns.

This notion of authority and control was prevalent in the discourse surrounding professional role models. The idea of the tough, no-nonsense, authoritative position taken towards urban youth is indicative of discourse surrounding the Black male teacher. Yet, recent studies have challenged this essentialist construction of Black male teachers (Brown, 2012) in favor of questioning social and institutional inequities plaguing the lives of urban youth (Rezai-Reshti & Martino, 2010; Brockenbrough, 2014; Noguera, 2008).

**Current Ability to Emulate Role Model's Actions**

Participants communicated their ability to perform the actions of their role models. Unlike the imaginative abilities of their heroes to shoot lasers, or turn green and grow muscles, the special skills of role models were able to achieved…maybe not to the level of the role model but to some degree. Smith who talked about his enjoyment of dancing, elaborates on his affinity for Michael Jackson and his dance moves.

Researcher: So if Smith grows up to be big time famous…what would you like to be famous for?

Smith: Dancing. Dancing like Michael Jackson.

> Researcher: What do you know about Michael Jackson?

> Smith: That he was famous. He sings. He dance for people. But he always knew what to dance like. He always knew what to dance for.

Smith illustrates the point that it's not only that Michael Jackson can dance but that *he* can also dance…and dance like Mike. The ability to perform what they see repeatedly through media and by peers adds to the allure. Jennings said he enjoys playing football and basketball. Later in the interview he conveyed that James Harden, Stephon Curry, Clay Thompson, Dwight Howard, J.J. Watt, and Odell Beckham Jr. are his role models. Mike revealed that although his dad only lets him play on the weekends, he participates in playing football. He then goes on about J.J. Watt being a role model and that he can run and tackle like him. Identification with the person and some level emulation of their performance appears as foundations to role model status.
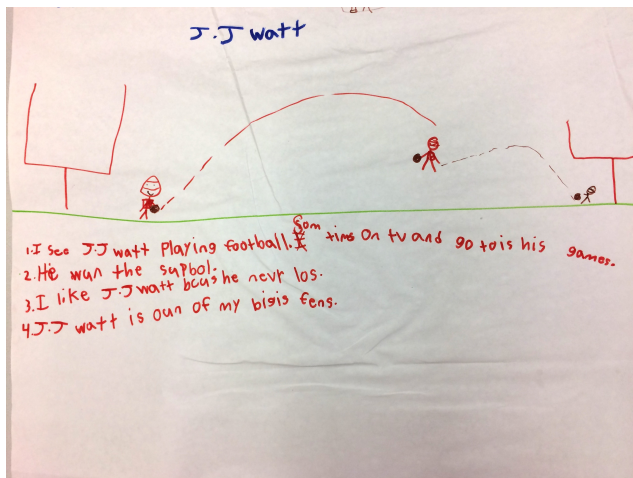


Mike's drawing of J.J. Watt playing football.

Miami also disclosed how much he likes playing football and that Odell Beckham Jr. and J.J. Watt are his role models. Hopkins talks about liking to run around and play with

friends then refers to Kyrie Irving and Cam Newton as being role models because of their abilities on the court and the field.  We can see that there is an association amongst these young boys related to role models and the present ability to enact those skills they admire most.

### Role Models Change According to Place and Space

While meeting with my dissertation committee, a member brought up a very astute point.  Because particular places and associated understandings of political institutions and structures may affect ones' identity (Schmidt, 2011), children's identifications of role models may change according to location.  That indeed occurred.  During the post-lessons/ activity interviews, I asked participants who would they consider their role models or heroes to be in various places.  These sites included home, school, church, the park, on television, on radio, and on the internet.  These questions along with our interactions throughout the study led to the understanding that their role models changed according to place and space.

When asked about their role models without specifying place and space, a substantial majority, 64 percent of participants identified athletes and entertainers their as role models.  Yet, when asked, "Who's your role model at home?" an overwhelming 70 percent stated a family member, particularly their dad and/or mom.  Only one participant, Miami, selected his male cousin.  When asked, "Who's your role model at school?" participants' selected educators at an 80 percent rate, in the form of a teacher, principal, and the study's primary researcher.  As the stated location shifted to church (if they attend), all responses included a religious figure or person.  These were comprised of God, Jesus, Virgin Mary, pastor, and bible teacher.

When asked about his role models and if they were different at various locations, Duncan's replies including reasoning also.

Researcher: When you at home, when Duncan is at home probably doing whatever you do when you're at home (laughs), who's your role model?

Duncan: My mom.

Researcher: Your mom…and why your mom?

Duncan: Because she knows how to do things in the house the right way.

Researcher: Okay, school?  When you're here at school, who's your role model here when you're here at school?

Duncan: Teachers.

Researcher: Teachers, okay and why would teachers be a role model?

Duncan: Because they make sure all the students grow up to know everything for their child.

Researcher: Okay. You go to church?

Duncan: I do.

Researcher: When you go to church, who's you role model?

Duncan: My bible teacher.

Researcher: Who's your bible teacher? What's her name?

Duncan: Sister Mary.

Researcher: Sister Mary, and what makes Sister Mary a good role model?

Duncan: Because she knows everything about God and sometimes she's a pastor and she sometimes comes and she teaches lots of things about God.

Smith and I had a noteworthy exchange when talking about his role models at school and if they actually change according to place and space.

> Researcher: Okay, what about in school? Do you have any role models or heroes at school?
>
> Smith: I'm gonna say you.
>
> Researcher: Okay.
>
> Smith: And who bullies and stands up to them.
>
> Researcher: Okay, alright. Have you had any man teacher? Have you had any teachers that was a man?
>
> Jayden: No, only ladies.
>
> Researcher: Only ladies? Would you want a man to be a--- would you want the teacher to be a man? Would you like your teacher to be a man or lady? Or it doesn't matter?
>
> Jayden: First, a man then a lady.
>
> Researcher: Why you say a man?
>
> Jayden: Because if Michael Jackson was a dance teacher, I'll follow the rules.
>
> Researcher: Okay (Laughter).
>
> Jayden: Because when he'll taught us how to dance and when I went home I'll tell them what I learned.

Miami's interpretation of his role model is a harbinger of things to come relating to citizenship as he complicates the "good and bad" dichotomy of role models.

> Researcher: When Miami's home, who's your role model? Who's your role model at home?

Miami: My cousin.

Researcher: Your cousin yeah? And why is your cousin a role model?

Miami: Cause my cousin…he's a uh football player.

Researcher: Football player? Okay.

Miami: And he's fun to be with.

Researcher: Yeah. What yal joke around and play around a lot? Is he older or younger or about the same age?

Miami: Older. Actually he's twenty-two.

Researcher: He's twenty-two, gotcha.

Miami: But he's bad too because he smokes. But he's a grown man.

Researcher: There you go. So can a grown man smoke?

Miami: Yeah, but I don't wanna smoke. That can mess up my teeth and that can mess up me because I want to play football.

Researcher: Alright so there that goes again. Does that make him a maybe citizen because he does something good and then something bad or what?

Miami: Mostly a maybe citizen.

Researcher: Okay.

Miami: All the way good citizen but with a pinch of bad.

**Discussion on Understanding Role Models**

What Miami speaks to is a growing sense among the participants that people and events can be complex.  As we began the study, heroes were understood to be fairly simple, straightforward and uncomplicated.  As we uncovered understandings and talk about role models, participants steadily demonstrated an active and fluid reading of

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context and background. The themes were: a) role models are real people, b) role models are visible and have a stage, c) role models have professional authority, d) current ability to emulate role model's actions, and e) role models change according to place and space.

We found that role models are "real" people. This was a far cry from their associations with heroes who were mostly fictional characters. Public figures were ascribed the role model status and the students' reverence of the role model was for both their professional skills and in their personal life. The basis that participants understood role models to be "real" people, in particular athletes and entertainers, as opposed to the fictional aspect of heroes may point to Spurgin's (2012) assertion of unjustified and unfair obligation placed on public figures to be role models. Bandura's argument that protégés are more likely to emulate a model due to shared characteristics is evident here simply because of the common human element.

Additionally, role models are visible and have a stage. The media and other mediums appear to present athletes and entertainers as role models in general, but young Black males receive a greater concentration of this message (May, 2009; Whannel, 2002; Edwards, 2000). This visibility and platform along with the acceptance of the hegemonic ideologies provides a conduit for role models to possess professional authority. This professional authority aligns itself with top-down practices of control and power. The goal of role models or as Sternod (2011) refers to them "normalizing agents" is to demonstrate what proper 'masculinity' looks like. Yet this presents a disturbing and enduring pattern of pitting the "good" Negro versus the "bad" Negro. Recent studies have even disturbed the attention and discursive space of Black male teachers as role models (Brown, 2012; Carrington & Skelton, 2010; Sternod, 2011; Brockenbrough,

2012).  As Brown (2012) states "Black males' performance and capacities are reduced and essentialized through explicit and subtle discourses of deviance and difference" (p. 308).  Interestingly enough this contradiction of Black male role models being visible and having a stage while simultaneously neglecting and omitting the dynamic complexity of Black males is required in order to maintain current power system.

Unlike with participants' comprehension of heroes' acts, role models' actions could be currently emulated.  Participants are actually able to perform, to some degree, what their role models do. These actions were steeped in reality (throwing a football, shooting a basketball, dancing, etc.) unlike the whimsical and imaginative nature of heroes' actions.  Also, these reproductions may not be direct imitations of the actions or behaviors observed as individuals can create adaptations and combinations (May, 2009).  This view aligns with critical childhood studies contention that youth are not simply influenced by their social environment but also enact agency in various ways that are many times hidden.

Building on the previously discussed finding, finally I observed that role models can change according to place and space.  The idea that children's identifications of role models are fixed illustrate flawed notions of their ability to recall the necessary associations given their context at that particular time.  This suggests a dispersion within role model discursive formation as a fresh workable idea.  One of which can be linked to Urrieta's (2016) saberes (knowings) and 'smartness' that he found was  developed with US Mexican-indigenous heritage children among their families and community.  This modification of role models by participants also reveals certain knowings and smartness that can encourage social participation.  Social and educational environments that support

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and believe in an expanding potential of young children cultivate an increase in competence and confidence that can and should be utilized in classrooms (Brooms, 2016; Love, 2015; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Sexias, 1993).  These operations of making-meaning persisted in a number of ways as their talk and understanding became even more sophisticated when addressing issues of citizenship.

## Chapter 5: Findings

**Understanding Citizenship**

This study utilized instructional scaffolding as a method to arrive at the participants' talk and understanding of the concept of citizenship. The researcher provided needed scaffolding, primarily by posing questions, as a means of co-constructing understanding within a collaborative learning setting (Brophy & Alleman, 2008). First we explored heroes, then role models, and now we arrived at citizenship. Citizenship is "primarily conceptualized as an explicitly public membership of a political community, and with the institutions that ensure the rights and duties accruing to the status of citizen" (Pawley, 2008). The complexity of citizenship was not lost among the participants. Matter of fact, this was one of the first times that I witnessed a distinguishable difference in the levels of initial comprehension and explanations between 1st grade and 2nd grade participants. The following illustrates the distinction of co-constructed meaning between the two groups.

(1st grade group)

Researcher: What's citizenship?

Smith: A citizen is a good guy and he didn't do nothing bad.

Researcher: Have anything else for me?

Newton: A citizen, he did not do nothing wrong or he never made mistakes or he never be bad.

Researcher: Let's go!

Hopkins: A citizen is a kind of person that get treated good. He make other people get treated good to White people. White people get treated good to Black people.

Researcher: White people get treated good to Black people. Yes.

Smith: A citizen helps people like (long pause).

Researcher: A citizen helps people. All right last one.

Steve: I think a citizen is a type of friendship.

(2nd grade group)

Researcher: Anybody knows what the word citizen means?

Duncan: That's easy for us.

Miami: We're citizens…to the school.

Researcher: Okay. We're going to come to you. What's a citizen?

Jennings: A citizen is like a person who has to do their job to make their place a better place.

Researcher: Okay. Mike, what you think a citizen is?

Mike: I think a citizen is like someone who helps someone save a community or stand up for somebody.

Researcher: Okay. Miami, it seems like you knew what a citizen was.

Miami: We are a citizen to this school.

Chris: Citizens that help animals even sharks.

Researcher: Okay. What's a citizen?

Duncan: A citizen's a person who helps another in their community and helps them in their neighborhood and do good things for them so they don't have to do it. And they can appreciate you.

Researcher: Mike?

Mike: I think a citizen means you can pick after yourself and you can clean the house for your mom.

One can observe the difference in our preliminary discussions of citizenship. The 1st grade participants treaded more along the lines of "good and bad," while the 2nd graders cited notions of their own inclusion within citizenship. As we continued our discussion, 1st graders eventually made up ground on having a foundation on which to rest their ideas about citizenship.

Researcher: …Rights are like protection. Rights give you the ability to be-

Smith: Who you are.

Researcher: -Who you are, yes, without somebody doing anything bad to you. Listen you got the government who claims to make sure that all of the citizens, people who live in the United States, are okay. All right? Now-

Foxx: How do they do that?

Researcher: They make sure we do that by making sure you come to school, making sure you get your mail, making sure that they make laws, making sure that your food is okay to eat when you get it, making sure when you go to the hospital that the doctors are treating you right, making sure that your parents and people in the community are treating you right and safe.

Hopkins: And make sure milk is not spoiled!

We came to rationalize that a citizen is a person in the local, state, national and global community that has rights and protections while also upholding a social responsibility of treating others right. Next I conducted a survey of ten questions about the characteristics of being a good citizen (Appendix E). The participants individually answered these questions by circling the responses they felt most appropriate. The options were: a) very important, b) kind of important, and c) not important. What stood out the most were their responses to three questions in particular. Seven participants answered that *being physically strong* was either "kind of important" (5) or "not important" (2). Also, seven participants responded that *playing sports (football/ basketball)* was "kind of important" (4) or "not important" (3). Finally, of note, seven participants circled that *being an entertainer* was "kind of important" (1) or "not important" (6). These results exhibit a line of demarcation in their thinking about heroes and role models and now citizenship. According to them, heroes are strong. The majority of their role models are athletes and entertainers. Yet, those attributes lessened in value in relation to being a good citizen. For them it appeared that heroes and role models were more about "who you are" and citizenship was more about "what you do." This pattern continued as we delved more into issues of citizenship.

### "Maybe Citizens"

As a way to extend social studies curriculum into popular culture, I selected to show historical and current political figures, athletes, and entertainers to the participants. This method was selected in order to help reveal if and how certain discourses are maintained and also acquire an insight of how 1st and 2nd grade African American males in an urban school interpreted and oriented themselves towards these figures, their well-

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known contextual stories and especially counter-narratives.  This activity was conducted individually with participants by showing them an image of the person, asking if they recognized her/ him, asking what type of citizen she/ he is, asking for an explanation of their thinking, and eliciting responses to possible counter-narratives.  What emerged was the concept of being a "maybe citizen." Miami and I were discussing the professional football player, Colin Kaepernick, who at the time was kneeling to one knee during the playing of the national anthem before the start of football games.  Kaepernick, when asked his desired outcome for protesting stated, "Ultimately it's to bring awareness and make people you know realize what's really going on in this country.  There are a lot of things that's going on that's unjust. People aren't being held accountable for and that's something that needs to change.  This country stands for freedom, liberty, justice for all. And it's not happening for all right now" (Visuals, 2016).  Below is the image shown and excerpt of my exchange with Miami and how this phrase came to be.



Image of Colin Kaepernick shown to participants.

 

Researcher: …Yeah all right. Know who this is?

Miami: Football players.

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Researcher: Okay, so check this out. If you look right here, if you look at this guy,

look at this guy (pointing to coaches) - they have their hands over their heart right

and usually when you put your hand over your heart what are you doing?

Miami: Saying your pledge.

Researcher: Right, you're doing the pledge. So the whole stadium is saying the

pledge or and anthem and standing up with their hand over their heart, but these

three gentlemen are not.  So do you think…what type of citizens does that make

these three and why would they be taking a knee instead of standing up? Why do

you think they would take a knee?

Miami: Because they're bad citizens.

Researcher: And what makes them bad?

Miami: Are they bad citizens?

Researcher: That's a good question, the reason why they're taking the knee during

the pledge is because they say that police are not treating Black people good. So

until that or something happens with that, when people stand up to say their

allegiance, the players they're gonna take a knee so they want more awareness

and people to be aware of the that trouble is going on. So, in that case do you

think that makes them…what type of citizens do you think that makes them?

Miami: A maybe citizen.

Researcher: A maybe citizen?  Alright okay and why would they be a maybe

      citizen?

Miami: Well, they did you have a good point.

Here, Miami's thinking is representative of most participants who contextualized ethical dimensions and social, cultural, intellectual and emotional perspectives of the figures displayed and discussed. Of the fifteen images of people shown, there were four that participants disagreed on and/ or disentangled the "good-bad" dichotomy and were viewed as a "maybe citizen." These included Donald Trump, Colin Kaepernick, Tupac, and George Washington.

| Hillary Clinton | Donald Trump | President Obama | Michelle Obama | The Obama family |
| Mayor Sylvester Turner | Colin Kaepernick | Malcolm X | Mickey Leland | Nat Turner |
| Tupac | Oprah Winfrey | Michael Jackson | Michael Jordan | George Washington |

List and names of images shown to participants during historical thinking lesson and activity.

**Donald Trump**



Image of Donald Trump shown to participants.

Reputations do exceed you, even to 1st and 2nd graders.  In one of my first pre-lesson/ activity interviews with Mike, he divulged what he would do if he ever crossed paths with the 45th president of the United States.

Mike: You know who I seen today.

Researcher: Who?

Mike: I seen Hillary Clinton and I seen Don King.

Researcher: You seen Don King and Hillary Clinton?

Mike: And when I see Donald Trump, I'll punch him in the face.

Researcher: (Quiet - searching for a reply).

Mike: Cause he a idiot.

Researcher: Ohhhh. Okay. Why, where you get that idea from?

Mike: Cause, cause, cause, cause he don't like Black people. He only like Black people less. He like Black people seven.

Researcher: Ohhhh. Okay.

Mike: And Hillary Clinton like Black people eighty-two.

Mike's assessment of Donald Trump was unprovoked as we were talking about something totally different at the time.  Oh, but the participants' negative views of Donald Trump continued.  Here, Jennings equates our current social and political realties with those of the past.  Two features of historical thinking are seen to have taken place, a) historical significance – the linkage to larger trends and stories; and b) continuity and change – the understanding that history is not a list of separate events.

Jennings: Because some people, they really do speak like that and like they really look like that because like sometimes they do, they have like she has the accent of African-American, so yeah.

Researcher: Mhmm... Okay. She has the accent of an African American, okay. And what type of citizen do you believe Hillary Clinton is?

Jennings: Good.

Researcher: Good? Why do you think she's a good citizen?

Researcher: Because who's--- like Donald Trump, he's not a good citizen. He's trying to like take the White people out of everything, I mean the Black people out of everything. It's just like kind of what happened with Martin Luther King and other people, like that.

Researcher: Okay. So, what does she do that makes her a good citizen?

Jennings: Well, she's like she's doing like something that that's gonna like had to get you into a good citizen job.

Researcher: Okay. Who's this (revealing the image of Donald Trump)?

Jennings: Oh, Donald Trump.

Researcher: Alright and what do you know about Donald Trump? Is he--- ah what type of citizen?

Jennings: He's a crazy, bad one.

Researcher: Alright. Well, what makes you say that?

Jennings: Because so like, remember the old days with Martin Luther King? The problem with him?

Researcher: Okay, yeah.

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Jennings: That's kind of what's going on with him.

Researcher: And what problem are you referring to?

Jennings: He's like, he only wants like White people, like Mexican people and not like African people.

Researcher: Oh okay, alright. So, that makes him what type of citizen?

Jennings: Bad.

This boldly illustrates the argument promoted by Sexias (1993) that "history curricula must be developed not only with attention to what students *should* know, but also with an awareness of *how they think and learn* about the past and their own place and time" (p.302). Also, Mike's capacity to make connects of the past and present at the early elementary level speaks to the high ability of African American males in urban schools (Ford & Moore, 2013). This inclusion of race while discussing Donald Trump and was seen later in Mike's post-lesson/ activity interview.

Mike: Hillary Clinton.

Researcher: That's right.

Mike: President.

Researcher: She's running for president and what type of citizen you think she?

Mike: Good citizen.

Researcher: Why do you think she's a good citizen?

Mike: Because she's like she's like Black people more. She like she's like she's like two people…two persons of skin. You don't have to be like don't like or like Donald Trump. He just he just like White people. He doesn't like Black people or Mexican people.

Researcher: All right let's get to it, who is this then?

Mike: Donald Trump, bad citizen.

Researcher: Bad citizen, why is he a bad citizen?

Mike: Because he don't like Black people, only just like White people. Want to take Spanish people away.

Researcher: Okay how did you know that?

Mike: From TV.

Concluding this focus on Donald Trump brings us back to the Miami's forwarding of the "maybe citizen."

Researcher: Okay. What about him do you know who that is?

Miami: Donald Trump

Researcher: Donald Trump, and what do you know about Donald Trump? Do you think he's a good what type of citizen do you think he is?

Miami: Well he said, "F" everybody, he can be good sometimes but not all the times.

Researcher: But not all the times, all right okay.

At this point, not only were the participants going more into depth while tacking issues of citizenship, but they were also becoming more comfortable, accurate and genuine with their language as displayed by Miami's use of saying "F everybody". This wasn't the only time participants eluded to using curse words. On one occasion, another participant said, "F" implying the curse word when talking about a song. Also, one participant when attempting to explain a situation referred to "That B." Although I did not use profanity during this study, admittedly, I have a propensity for using curse words. I think they can

be incredibly useful for driving a point home.  Therefore I encouraged them to say what was on their minds with the assurance that no disciplinary actions would take place as a result. I felt that this simple act of promoting saying whatever came to mind fostered a closer relationship with them. Hell, I curse when talking about Donald Trump also. Oops, see it just happened.  The participants who stated Trump was a good citizen rationalized this by associating the image of him speaking, with being a good citizen.

**Collin Kaepernick**

The participants continued to exhibit modes and aspects of historical thinking when placed before contextualized circumstances.  Only one participant identified Colin Kaepernick when shown the image, however two participants believed he was a bad citizen and four others broke away from the simplistic notion of being the "good" or "bad" dichotomy and situated him within the "maybe citizen" classification.  First a window into the thinking of Steve and Mike who classified Kaepernick as a bad citizen. Their reasoning was the same – because he was not smiling.

> Researcher: What type of citizens would you consider the three gentlemen that are taking a knee?
>
> Steve: They're watching the people do it.
>
> Researcher: His name is Colin Kaepernick. What type of citizen does this person look like?
>
> Steve: A bad.
>
> Researcher: Why?
>
> Steve: Because he's not smiling here.

Mike makes his decision about based on Kaepernick's facial expression as well.

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Mike: I think these two (pointing)…I think they're not doing that because they are like saying the pledge of allegiance and I think they do not like to pledge of allegiance and they not saying it.

Researcher: Ok so they don't like it. Does that make them…what type of citizens does that make them?

Mike: Bad.

Researcher: Do you think so why is that?

Mike: It's because they are not smiling.

Researcher: They're not smiling.

Other participants were not drawn to developing decisions of citizenship based one's countenance. They navigated the situation with slightly increased levels of intricacy. Here, Chris explains his thinking.

Researcher: You know who this is?

Chris: Football.

Researcher: That's right. So you see these three people are taking a knee and kneeling down. Everybody else in this stadium and even behind them, what are they doing with their hands?

Chris: They are doing the pledge.

Researcher: So why do you think these three people are kneeling down when everybody else is standing up and doing the pledge of allegiance?

Chris: Cause probably they might want to do they might want to kneel down and probably they don't want to pledge so they can hurry.

Researcher: So, do you think these three people are…what type of citizens are they?

Chris: I'll probably say good and at the same bad, but mostly good and bad because…

Researcher: They're good and bad.

Chris: Yeah because they were supposed to stand for the pledges but they aren't. They make people's hearts go up because cause they're winning for their family.

Researcher: Okay. His name is Colin Kaepernick.

Duncan's thinking resembles some of the same sentiments even to the point of referring to "people's hearts."

Researcher: Ok right here that's got took off his hat as his hand over his chest if you have a whole stadium doing the pledge of allegiance but these three young men decided not to what do you want you think they're not standing up and putting their hand over their heart?

Duncan: Because they probably don't really know what President and they probably don't like you do need to be in this really.

Researcher: You think they don't need to be in this?

Duncan: But I do I do no but I think I'm making like they're not part of it.

Researcher: They're not a part of it okay. That's basically what they're saying. What they're doing is doing the Pledge of Allegiance. These three young man started by Colin Kaepernick decided because of police brutality and other reasons that black people are not treated well in this country they said that they're going to take a knee during the pledge of allegiance so even though everybody else is

standing up and they're taking in the knee what do you think what kind of citizens are they now?

Duncan: Still good and bad.

Researcher: Still good and bad? Why is that?

Duncan: Because they're supposed to know how to treat people right way and because of good decisions they make people's hearts go over like if give one --- lady and he has someday grew up for football, he will make her proud.

Jennings, the only participant who recognized Kaepernick, had me thinking he was a future Black conservative or republican until he completed his thoughts.

Researcher: Pledge of Allegiance. Now, if all of these people in this stadium are standing up with their hands over their heart to say the Pledge of Allegiance and these three gentlemen are not, what type of citizens do you--- why do you think they're not standing up and putting their hand over their heart? And what type of citizens does that make them?

Jennings: That may seem kind of bad.

Researcher: Why would they be considered bad?

Jennings: Cause like every time like they have those flags and other stuff, you should always do that. But I think they're kneeling because like they're just looking at it like this (shows an expression on his face of indifference). Like okay…so!

Researcher: Okay, so you think they're kneeling and looking at it like, okay…so!

Jennings: (Nods head in agreement).

Researcher: Alright, what do you mean like, okay…so?

Brandon: Like this, alright so what's gonna happen. Just disappointed.

Colin's Kaepernick's defiance of observing one of America's most known traditions, without coloring and complexing the issue with his reasoning, could have firmly positioned him the "bad citizen" category with most participants. However, the participants' consideration of Kaepernick's agency within the realm of historical thinking shows their understanding of multi-layered causes and motives for taking actions. Informing participants of these figures backgrounds certainly played a role in their talk and understanding of the figures we covered. This is was also observed with our discussions of Tupac.

**Tupac Shakur**

Hip-hop legend, Tupac is both beloved and despised but what is undeniable is his influence on pop culture. The legacy of Tupac Shakur is examined within the pages of books, magazines, and journal articles, while at the same time his song lyrics and poetry are studied in college and university classrooms. I wanted to acquire the participants' talk and understanding of a figure who a just a generation ago captured the public's attention and imagination. My thinking was that the image of Tupac presented to the participants, would cause them to further unravel the "good-bad" dichotomy thus providing a more intricate exploration of thinking. Jennings had a unique way of conceptualizing the image and persona of Tupac.

Image of Tupac Shakur shown to participants.

Researcher: Okay. We got a couple more and we'll be done. You know who this is?

Jennings: I'm thinking of a name uh...

Researcher: Just by the picture, do you think he's…what type of citizen?

Jennings: A gangster citizen.

Researcher: He's a gangster (Laughter)--- a gangster citizen. What makes you think he's a gangster citizen?

Jennings: Because he really--- He looks like, he looks like that um--- that he's a rapper and rappers are gangster, yeah.

Researcher: Okay, his name is Tupac.

Jennings: Tupac? Oh, I've heard of that name.

Researcher: Yeah, Tupac, he was an entertainer, he was a rapper, he was an actor, he was an activist.

Jennings: Did not know that.

As I continued to explore this image with participants, it appeared that a "misremembering as mediated action" was informed by schematic narratives (Willis, 2011; Wertch, 2004).  Meaning, attempts to make sense of Tupac as a citizen was informed by innuendo, specific inaccuracies, or confusing his movie acting with reality.

> Researcher: Okay just have a couple more to go. You know who that is?
>
> Hopkins: I know, I know he's in a show, but I don't know his name.
>
> Researcher: By the picture, what type of citizen does he look like?
>
> Hopkins: I don't know.
>
> Researcher: You don't know? His name is Tupac. You know who Tupac is? Who is Tupac?
>
> Hopkins: He on the show, his name is Tupac. It's the same thing and he used to beat up, it's another show that he was on…he had a gun, it was the other show that he had a gun.
>
> Researcher: Okay, so you say…if he has a gun does that make them good, bad citizen?
>
> Hopkins: He had a gun to shoot nice people, so that's bad.

It should be acknowledged that Tupac did appear in several movies where violent scenes did take place, *Above the Rime*, *Juice*, *Grindlock'd*, *Gang Related*, and *Bullet*.  Also in many ways, his life did imitate art, as he was involved in several acts of violence (most protecting himself), the last eventually taking his life on the fateful day of September 13th, 1996.  Nevertheless, some participants labeling him as "bad" conglomerated events taking place on stage and in real life.  Here, my conversation with Mike about Tupac's actions exhibits this.

Mike: Tupac!

Researcher: Ahh you know Tupac. How did you know Tupac?

Mike: He's a bad citizen.

Researcher: Why is he a bad citizen?

Mike: It's because like you know how the police chasing him when he running and that's how they shot him and then he still alive. And when he was doing the concert somebody shot him.

Researcher: So, what type of citizen is he?

Mike: Bad citizen.

Researcher: And he's bad again, because?

Mike: Because he got shot in the concert.

Researcher: If he got shot in the concert - if somebody shoots you, does that make you bad?

Mike: No? But he's still bad because he was in jail before.

Again, we see that citizenship according to these young people was about *what people do*, unlike with heroes and role models which was more about *who they are*. This was not more evident than with their scrutiny of our nation's first president, George Washington.

**President George Washington**

Image of President George Washington shown to participants.

The General of the Continental Army, first president of the United States, presider of the Constitutional Convention, planter and entrepreneur, George Washington holds a special place not only within American history but also educational curriculum. The man whose image was the first to be carved into Mount Rushmore, is many times the first to be engraved into minds of young students beginning the educational process. Nonetheless, what is hidden about President's Washington's legacy is the fact that he was a slave owner. Eight out of the ten participants recognized George Washington's image when displayed. They knew he was the first president of the United States and even knew his birthplace being in Virginia. Their initial response upon seeing the image and knowing the soon-to-follow question, "What type of citizen is he?" was to say he was a good citizen. Fascinatingly, when then told that President Washington owned slaves, their perspective vastly changed. Below is Hopkin's thinking and re-evaluating of George Washington's status as a citizen.

Hopkins: (when shown the image) George Washington!

Researcher: George Washington. What type of citizen was George Washington?

Hopkins: Good.

Researcher: Now, if I told…Why was George Washington a good citizen?

Hopkins: Because he read books and make…and he was in the White House and it's a statue about him that people can look and if he died that mean…Somebody made a statue of him so everybody can know George Washington is still good.

Researcher: Alright. What if I told you President George Washington, he used to have slaves? And did not treat the slaves very good? Would that make him a good citizen or a bad citizen if you found out the president, our first president, used to have slaves?

Hopkins: Bad.

Researcher: Why would he be bad now?

Hopkins: Wait, what is slaves?

Researcher: Slaves is when you make someone do a lot of work and you don't pay them for it and you treat them very bad.

Hopkins: Ah, I think that's bad because he gets to sit around and drink and have lunch but they don't do nothing.

Similar to Hopkin's reference of a statue, throughout our discussions of President George Washington, other participants such as Smith alluded to official symbols as well.

Smith: (when shown the image) George Washington.

Researcher: Yeah, alright. Now is this a good or bad citizen?

Smith: Good.

Researcher: Why is he good?

Smith: People killed him and the bad guys started the war and it was that Liberty Bell. It was broken so every time, the first time when they ringed it, it cracked so that lets him know that all the bad guys coming…well bad citizens.

Researcher: Alright. What if I told you that President George Washington, what if I told you he used to have slaves?

Smith: He used to? He would've broke them out, because I saw, once uh….(long pause)

Researcher: What if I told you President George Washington used to have slaves will that make him a good or bad citizen?

Smith: Bad.

Researcher: Why?

Smith: Because he'll be telling people that keep moving and never stop.

Other participants explained their change of mind very simply as to their designation of President George Washington being a bad citizen.

Researcher: Okay, you know who this is?

Mike: George Washington

Researcher: What type of citizen?

Mike: Good citizen.

Researcher: What if I told you George Washington owned slaves? Does it still make him a good citizen?

Mike: No

Researcher: What would he be then?

Mike: A bad citizen.

Researcher: Why is that?  Why do you think he is a bad citizen?

Mike: Because if you own slaves it just like he tells some people what to do. Like hit them and stuff, that's what you suppose to do with slaves. But that's a bad citizen and stuff. He could be a bad master.

Duncan thoughts were much the same.

Duncan: (when shown the image) George Washington.

Researcher: Alright, what type of citizen is George Washington?

Duncan: Good citizen.

Researcher: Good, what makes him a good citizen?

Duncan: Because he fights for good things.

Researcher: Because he fights for good things. All right. Now what if I told you that President George Washington owned slaves when he was a president?

Duncan: That will make him a bad citizen. Because he owns slaves.

Here, Jennings shows his acuteness and knowledge about this hidden history.

Jennings: *(when shown the image)* I just forget the name--- Oh! George Washington.

Researcher: Now, what do you know--- you think George Washington was good?

Jennings: Yes, yes.

Researcher: Why was he good citizen?

Jennings: Because--- wait, no.

Researcher: No? Why wasn't George Washington a good citizen then?

Jennings: He had his own pack of slaves.

Miami resorts to his coining of the term "maybe citizen" again when discussing President Washington's past.

Researcher: Know who that is?

Miami: First President.

Researcher: Yes, which will be?

Miami: President Ob…

Researcher: …George...

Miami: President George Washington!

Researcher: All right now what type of citizen you think George Washington is?

Miami: He's a good citizen.

Researcher: What makes him good?

Miami: They're men that helped him that were also good citizens too because men back then…they went to go and get water for their ladies and the ladies washed and folded. He's a good citizen because other people look up to him.. not me but other people..

Researcher: Now why don't you look up him?

Miami: Because I don't want to be a president.

Researcher: You don't wanna be a president. Gotcha. And what if I told you at the time that President George Washington owned slaves. What type of citizen will that make him then?

Miami: A bad?

Researcher: Why?

Miami: Because he owned it.

Researcher: Okay. Could he be a maybe citizen like you said earlier?

Miami: He could be…yes, he could be a maybe citizen.

Researcher: And what will make him that?

Miami: Because he is a good citizen and a bad citizen. So, a bad citizen and a good citizen can make him a maybe citizen.

The ability of these early elementary students to aptly traverse what might be considered inappropriate topics was very inspiring as a researcher. I grew more confident and did not hesitate with having frank and honest conversations with them about people and events traditionally ignored in early elementary curriculum. Yes, eight of the ten participants recognized President George Washington when he was displayed. They did know some of the common facts taught about him in classrooms. They also showed tremendous acumen with their thinking related to counter-narratives. But how would they react to a person and situation they never heard of before whose actions could be viewed as liberating, deplorable, or somewhere between the two?
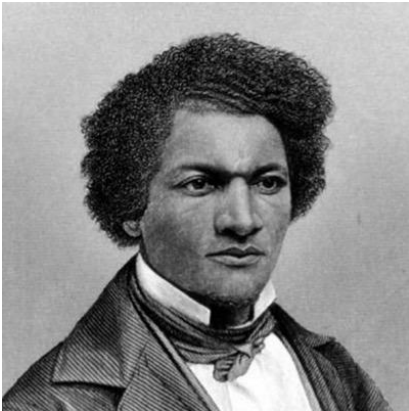
**Nat Turner**



Image of Nat Turner shown to participants.

At this point of the study we were "cooking with grease." Meaning, our conversations and interactions were far more fluid and pure. I was not beholden to

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enforcing many of the school's rules such as walking in a straight line through the hallway, tucking in their shirts, or denying the occasional playfulness and rough play in the classroom.  Many times, I joined or led in the laughter that took place.  Humor was a well-received respite, considering the topics we were addressing.

Nate Parker's, The Birth of a Nation film was released during this research study. This long anticipated production deviated from the plethora of recent "African American history movies" by telling the story of an enslaved African American, who led a rebellion of slaves and freed Blacks in Virginia.  I thought what better time to elicit their understanding of a man, who unlike most Black historical figures placed in front of students who took their butt-whippings with dignity, actually fought back.  I sought to explore what is referred to as "an inescapable double-bind' as their cultural participation and production is seen as a gesture that is simultaneously progressive and coopted (Duncan-Andrade, p. 114-115).  None of them were able to identify his image. As with all the images, I asked them just by looking at the image, "What kind of citizen do you think he is?"  After their response, I gave them a brief description of Nat Turner's narrative.  I then posed the question to the participants, "What kind of citizen do you think Nat Turner was?" All ten participants stated that he was a good citizen!  Various reasons were given, but again they all led back to citizenship being about *what you do*. Foxx explains his thinking about Nat Turner.

Researcher: Okay. You know who this person is?

Foxx: (Shakes his head no).

Researcher: His name is Nat Turner.

Foxx: Nat Turner?

Researcher: Yeah, he was way back in the day when there was slavery here in America. What Nat Turner did, he would go around to all these places and he was--- he used to seeing that other people were not treated well. So what he did, he got a group of men and they went around hurting people because they were hurting other people. So, does that make him a good citizen or is he---?

Foxx: Good.

Researcher: He's good? Why is he good?

Foxx: Because if he takes people to help people, that's good.

The clothes that Nat Turner is wearing in the picture had an effect on their initial thinking about him being a good citizen also. Then after hearing the story, several like Chris, were reassured of his good citizen standing.

Researcher: Alright, you know who this is?

Chris: (Researcher accidently reveals the name) Nat Turner.

Researcher: Yes, this is Nat Turner. Do you know by the look of it, what type of citizen would you say he is?

Chris: Good.

Researcher: Good? How so?

Chris: Because he has good clothes and somebody told me that Nat Turner was a good citizen to all people.

Researcher: That's right Nat Turner used to be a slave. And what he did was he went around to other places where people were slaves and gathered them made a group of them. And what they said was look we're not gonna be slaves anymore. We're tired of it, we're not taking it anymore and they went from place to place

hurting the people who were keeping the slaves, so that the slaves could be free.

So, do you think that makes Nat Turner a good citizen or bad citizen?

Chris: Good

Researcher: Why is that?

Chris: Because the people said they don't want to be slaves anymore. So he broke

them out and the people said they were tired of it. So the people…so the Masters

that kept them so they hurt them so they can be free from doing the work for

them.

Hopkins also commented on what Turner is wearing in the depiction and also speaks to

the age of the image.

Researcher: Okay. You know who this person is?

Hopkins: No

Researcher: This person is (reveals the name on the slide)…

Hopkins: Nat Turner.

Researcher: Nat Turner, okay. By looking at Nat Turner, do you think he's a good

citizen or bad citizen?

Hopkins: Good.

Researcher: What makes him good?

Hopkins: He doesn't have a smiley face but it still looks like he's good. Because

the only way he looks good, he was in the old days.

Researcher: He's in the old days? What makes--- how do you know that's the old

days?

Hopkins: Because the picture is grey.

Researcher: Okay. What about the way he's dressed?

Hopkins: His dress is good because he don't have everything is not black.

Researcher: Okay. What about…does he look like a good citizen or bad citizen?

Hopkins: Good.

Researcher: What if I told you that Nat Turner used to be a slave back when people were slaves. And what he did is he went around to other places where people were slaves and were not getting treated good. He had--- he went around and got a group of people and they went around and start hurting and killing people who are hurting and killing other people. So does that make Nat Turner…what type of citizen does that make him? If he was trying to stop other people from hurting people…but he was hurting them. What type of citizen is he?

Hopkins: He good because the other people are hurting the nice people. So the only way hurting the people in there because they want to treat good people to bad people.

The clothes continued to evoke a sense of elegance and designation of royalty and a high-class distinction with Duncan.

Researcher: Do you know him?

Duncan: He was fighter, he was a president.

Researcher: What makes him look like the President?

Duncan: Cause all Presidents wear all those types of clothes.

Duncan then precedes to state that Nat Turner was a good citizen, "because people don't need to be slaves and the slave owners should do things their own selves." Mike maintained that Turner looked smart because "most people don't look like that and have

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all those hairs" and "it looks like he reads and writes poems." Smith after finding out that television didn't exist during those days, believed that "no one should be a slave and be hot and tired all day." So in his estimation, Turner was deemed a good citizen.

One of the most fruitful interactions I had during the research study included a conversation with Miami. In this lengthy exchange, Miami makes several connections to role models and citizenship, even flipping the script and asking me who my role models are. Eventually, he positions Nat Turner as a role model not simply to the participants of this study, but also to the men Turner led in the rebellion.

> Researcher: ...just looking at this picture, you think he's a good citizen or bad citizen or what type of citizen would you consider him?
>
> Miami: Well, none of these pictures are bad citizens.
>
> Researcher: None of them? Okay. Well this is what Nat did. Nat used to be a preacher back when Black people were slaves. He was a preacher and he would go to different places and preaching, right...
>
> Miami: What is preaching?
>
> Researcher: He would read the Bible to people.
>
> Miami: Like Martin Luther King?
>
> Researcher: Umm hmm (positive). Kinda in the same thing. So, say for instance he would go to one place, preach, read out the Bible, preach, go to another place. But the places he was going had slaves.
>
> Miami: Can I ask you something?
>
> Researcher: Sure.
>
> Miami: Who is your...like...what is it called? Somebody you want to be like?

Researcher: Role model? Whose mine?

Miami: Cause you're doing all these great things for other people.

Researcher: Ummmm, my role model in many ways, it could be considered Malcolm X would be one. My father would be one. Umm, those two men are the first people that comes to mind but in a lot of ways it's just regular people who do really good things every day. I admire those people who are brave and courageous to say, to say and do things that other people wouldn't do or say…even if it makes them look crazy at the time. So those, I think those would be who mine are. I will say Malcolm and my dad for right now. And even in a lot of ways, you know it could be somebody younger than me, y'all could be my role model. They can be slightly older than me a lot of times. I don't look down on people, I don't look up to people, I just look at people and see if the information that they're telling me is correct and if it is, I can go on that.

Miami: My brother looks up to me!

Researcher: Is he older or younger?

Miami: Younger.

Researcher: Yeah, is that what do? You…do you think that's a good thing?

Miami: Well, all the times. Well, most of the time.

Researcher: Let me ask you about him because kinda like something we talked about earlier, his story is interesting because what he stopped doing…Check this out. He said man, you know what, I'm not about to go around preaching to all these different places and they have slaves. So what he said, he got a group of men together and what they did was they went to all of…they went to all of these

places where they had slaves. And these places were call plantations. So they

would go to each plantation and so the slaves could be free what they did was

start hurting people who were the slave masters. So that the slaves could be free.

So what do you think about that? What do you think that makes him? What type

of citizen does that make him now that you know that?

Miami: Does the police let them slave them?

Researcher: Back then there weren't police.

Miami: (long pause) But there is a God.

Researcher: There was, umm-hmm (positive). So his thinking was God does not

want people to live like this, so I need to help free them.

Miami: Well he is a good citizen.

Researcher: And what will make him good in that aspect? This is good, I like this

conversation. What will make him good then?

Miami: Cause he went around the world to help people during slavery time. And

he got a group of men this was trustworthy, because he's a trustworthy man. And

he got other trustworthy men to go around the world and help people also slaved.

So, they were like looking up to him.

Miami weaves through the concepts of role models and citizenship, implicating Nat

Turner and the men involved in the rebellion, myself the researcher, and himself in

relation to his brother as actors within these frameworks.

To the participants, the "maybe citizen" was a way of communicating the

multifaceted idea of being a citizen and the various acts involved in carrying out social

and moral responsibility.  Despite traversing these intricate ideas, there was one

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consistency among our dialogue involving all three concepts of heroes, role models, and citizenship – the salience of life and death, which is discussed in the next section.

### You're Nobody 'til Somebody Kills You

The referenced theme above is the title of a song by hip-hop icon, Notorious B.I.G. In this straight-forward melodic track, B.I.G. goes form flirting with this idea to full-fledge acceptance that a life not taken before its' time, is a life not remembered (i.e. "Dark-skin Jermaine, know what I'm saying"). An underling aspect of the participants' concerns dealt with both their imaginations and the realities of life and death. Some of the dialogue in previous themes demonstrates this. Participants talked about life and death both in their descriptions and inquiries. When investigating their understandings of heroes, the notion of life and death took on more fanciful and whimsical tones. However, as I took account of their comprehension of role models and citizens, life and death embodied a more palpable and legitimate quality. This mirrors Woodson's (2016) righteous blood theme as his participants consistently associated civil rights leadership with violence and death. This differentiation was noticeable.

For instance, Hopkins felt one of the main abilities about superheroes were not only did they "save people," but "they do not die." Earlier he mentioned that he would use lasers to "stop people from killing people." Other than dancing like Michael Jackson, Smith also alluded to superheroes and fighting crime when asked what he would like to be famous for.

Researcher: So what else would you be famous for?

Smith: Being a crime fighter.

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Researcher: What kind of crimes would you fight? What type of crime fighter would you be?

Smith: I'll be the Mask and I'll be Batman too.

Here, you can see that occasionally participants would call on their imaginations. Other times, especially as we moved through the study, the distinction between real and fake was clear. Foxx set the record straight with his explanation of career choice.

Researcher: Why the police and firefighters?

Foxx: Because they are real and cartoons are fake.

Researcher: Because they are real and cartoons are fake? Okay.

Foxx: Because you can't be something in the cartoons.

Researcher: Because you can't be something in the cartoons. Gotcha.

Foxx: Because the stuff in cartoons are fake.

The participants' understanding of "real and fake" was distinct. Pivoting from the imaginative characters identified during our discussion of heroes, to our conversations of historical figures led to a heightened awareness, sensibility and curiosity as to the life and principally the death of the people we talked about. The cause of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death came into question amongst the participants several times. Again, I witnessed the use of schematic narratives (Willis, 2011; Wertch, 2004) in order to construe what happened. Also amid our conversations, the issue of race was very noticeable as these students did not shy away from including this aspect. This discussion took place among myself and the group of 2nd grade participants.
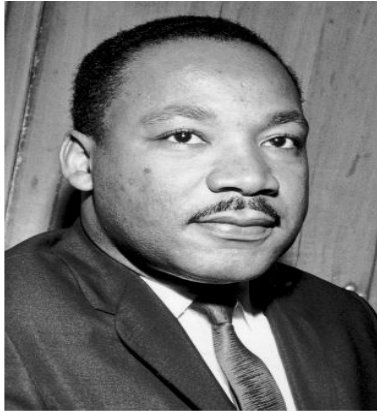
Images of Martin Luther King Jr. shown to participants (Historical figures PowerPoint).

Researcher: Here we go the next person.

Various participants: Martin Luther King.

Jennings: Hero!

Researcher: We'll start with Miami, then go around.

Miami: Black people couldn't go on the bus just because of their color.

Researcher: Okay.

Miami: They judged the Black people against their color. And the White polices

put him in jail and then they killed him.

Researcher: Oh they-

Jennings: -No they didn't!

Duncan: The Black people couldn't go in the White House so they tried. The

police got the things and they…and I seen a movie and they whooped an old man.

And he went on the ground.

Researcher: Okay tell me about Martin Luther King Jr.

Mike: I know he was the president of the world but uhhh he want the White people to understand Black people can be good like them. But White people do not do not want the Black people. And people do not want to be I mean…do not want Dr. Martin Luther King to be the president but he was the president of that world.

Researcher: Okay. Tell me about Martin Luther King?

Chris: Okay. He was a kid his friend wanted to play baseball with him but his dad but his friend's dad didn't like him since he was Black. And when they grew up, Martin Luther King friends killed him and got under arrest for killing Martin Luther King.

Researcher: Okay, we're going to come back around this way and we'll stop. Tell me what you know about MLK?

Jennings: So he was, he got, he was dead during one of his speeches to the Black folks. So like he was doing his speech and then there was this sniper on top of this building.

Chris: What?

Jennings: There was a sniper. And then that's how he died because like snipers shot straight to the head and he died because he was like oh he's trying to get the White people to go along with the Black people. And actually the White people thought that they were better than the Black people and all of that. And but. The Black people make most stuff than the White people cause the White people. How is this fair? If the White people have everything else. And then the White people just give the Black people the dirt and other stuff.

This pattern of trying to figure out MLK Jr.'s cause of death was evident with the 1st graders also.

> Researcher: What else you know about MLK?
>
> Steve: He lets some people ride on the bus if they need it.
>
> Hopkins: He don't let bad people go on the bus. Because they might shoot the driver.
>
> Newton: Everybody gets scared.
>
> Smith: Yes. He died with a I think with a gun or knife. I don't know.
>
> Foxx: He did die.
>
> Researcher: Do you know how?
>
> Newton: The White people didn't like him.
>
> Smith: The White people didn't like Black people that's why they didn't let them on the bus.

As we continued our lessons and activities, the participants' attention was still drawn to King's death.  Discussing the two images below, I asked the participants, "Why would someone who we have identified as a 'good citizen' such as Martin Luther King Jr. being getting arrested?"  The consensus was White people were arresting him for no reason and because he wanted to get everybody on the bus.  Nonetheless, there was still intrigue about his death.

Images shown of Martin Luther King Jr. (Historical Thinking PowerPoint)

Mike: How did he die? He got arrested from the-

Chris: Sniper! Sniper was in one of the..he was in one of those little things.

Mike: But how did he know after he said the speech-

Researcher: Do any of you know?

Mike:...and the police got him and then how did he die...because of a sniper? That

wasn't a sniper because he's not dead in that picture.

Researcher: Miami?

Chris:  It was a gunshot!

Miami: The police put him in jail and then whenever the police put him in jail,

they shot him with a pistol, not a sniper.

Jennings: Actually, he did get shot by a sniper. Actually it was a gunshot.

During one of his speeches he got let out of jail actually. Then during one of his

speeches he got hit by the head by the sniper. Because sniper, they powerful.

Chris: Uh-uh (negative). That's not how it is. Last time I saw a video, it said that a

person, a friend, when he was little and now grown up and he saw him and he said

hi. He had a gun behind him and then he told Martin Luther King to close his eyes

and he shot him with a gun.

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Researcher: Okay, let's go ahead and get-

Mike: He got arrested.

Researcher: It is correct, actually Martin Luther King he went to Memphis and that's a city in Tennessee. He went to Memphis to support, to help. At that time, what was a labor strike, people were protesting because you know the, hold on, you know the garbage men, the people that come around and pick up garbage-

Researcher: They were protesting because they felt like they weren't being appreciated-

Jennings: So I was right?

Researcher: Yes, so Martin Luther King went to Memphis, he made a speech. After that speech, he went to his hotel, all right. At his hotel he came out on the balcony and then when he was on the balcony, that's when unfortunately someone shot him from-

Chris: Buildings.

Researcher:...a building. Now, there's multiple stories about who did it and why.

Jennings: I know why.

Researcher: Why?

Group: Because that was a white person that was actually there because he was like, "Man, I think I should kill him so bad for trying to get us."

Initially I had the impression that this way of thinking among the participants only consisted with the historical figures presented to them. I mean "historical figures" in itself implies that the individuals are from the past and no longer living but upon further inspection these intelligent young boys revealed something interesting to me about many

of the Black men we discussed.  Yes, these men did live extraordinary lives that heavily

influenced past and present generations, but in doing so their death did not come by way

of natural causes.  They were either killed or their passing is mired in mystery.  This was

indicative with our conversations about Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Nat Turner,

and Tupac.  It even spilled to other popular culture figures.

Researcher:…Michael Jackson, what kind of citizen is he?

Smith: A good citizen.

Researcher: Why?

Smith: Because that Black man he did nothing to him and he just pour drugs, he

just pumps drugs in his tummy but it went to his brains. And he gave him a lot of

bad pills so he can die.

The same was illustrated with Mr. Purple Reign.

Researcher: Any other rock stars that you know about, that you'll like to be like?

Chris: Prince.

Researcher: Prince, oh snap! What you know about Prince?

Chris: Oh well he did die a few.... He died last year. And he was a good rock star.

So the participants' inquisitiveness was definitely warranted especially if these men are

placed in a positions to be emulated.  I started thinking, "Who would want to sign up for

this eventually fate?" I also remember contemplating, "Does activism, a preeminent act

of citizenship, when enacted by Black men lead to an inevitable and accelerated death?"

This conjured up some of my own repressed fatalistic thoughts about the fight for justice,

liberation, and honored humanity.  According to Neely Fuller, if you're born non-white,

the system is automatically against you.  It was then I remembered what Jennings and

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Miami stated earlier in the study.  When asked about his heroes, Jennings had a heart-felt response.

Researcher: All right. And what about God? Why is God your hero?

Jennings: Because he sacrificed his life for everybody to live.

Miami throughout this research project consistently captured the tone and tenor of this experience.  He simply had a knack for it.  Emblematic of the participants' understandings of citizenship was their underlining ideal of purpose, which in their hearts and minds affected the *doing* and enacting of the "maybe citizen."  My discussion with Miami about politician, Mickey Leland and Malcolm X exemplifies this accurately.
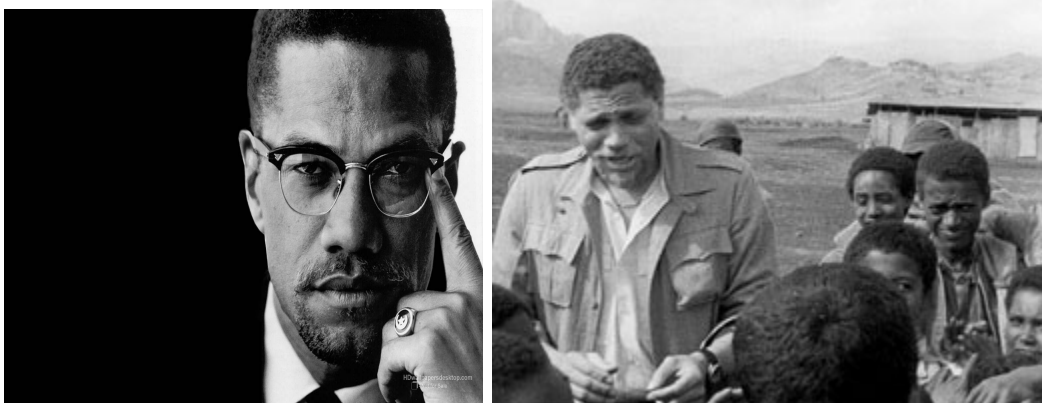


Image shown of Malcolm X (left) and Mickey Leland (right).

Researcher: Okay, this is Malcolm X. Malcolm X was much like Martin Luther King, doing that same time period where he led-

Miami: But he died?

Researcher: Yeah, he did die

Miami: For a good purpose?

Researcher: I would say it was a good purpose. Yeah he was assassinated while he was giving a speech but he used to travel all around the world and he wanted people to be treated right especially Black people to be treated right. He at first they did a lot of things that society would say was bad. He went to prison but when he was in prison he read a lot. He met somebody that challenged him to read a lot. So he read a lot, read a lot, read a lot and started changing how he thought about history about Black people and when he came back out he wanted to led Black people. So, just great man…great humanitarian. When you look at this picture what do you see?

Miami: Good citizens.

Researcher: Yeah what makes them good citizens?

Miami: Well, they're in India.

Researcher: What makes you say India?

Miami: Doesn't it look like India because of all the mountains and the people they don't look like they are dying.

Researcher: Okay check it out this is Mickey Leland. Mickey Leland a lot of people don't know about too. I used to know him like when I was your age, he was a Houston politician and he used to travel all around the world helping people. Unfortunately he died too in the plane crash. He was going over to Africa and he died of a plane crash, but you'll see some things in Houston that are-

Miami: Did he help the people in Africa?

Researcher: Um-hm (positive).

Miami: And then he went back, he was trying to go back home and then he died?

Researcher: Yeah in a plane crash.

Miami: Oh well that was a good purpose.

Researcher: Yeah very, very, good guy. Very good man.

Their compass was in many ways unswayed by the negative effects, but more focused on the just and noble causes. As Chris adamantly put it, "there's nothing wrong with doing something good."

### Discussion on Understanding Citizenship

In this chapter, I presented the findings based on the participants' talk and understanding of citizenship. As previously stated, the two themes which emerged from my analysis were: a) "Maybe Citizens"; and b) You're Nobody 'til Somebody Kills You. These two themes indicated not a estrangement from the previous findings in Chapter 4, but an extension of reasoning by virtue of the complexity involved with citizenship. At the cornerstone of the discourse surrounding citizenship are the issues of inclusion and exclusion "i.e. the relationship between the citizen and the non-citizen, or the citizen's 'other' (Pykett, p.804). As witnessed in this research study and along critical childhood studies attitudes, young children pick up on these concepts and are able to speak to these systems at play and their experiences with them.

A closer look at the term "maybe citizens" crafted by the participants advances the idea of early elementary students grappling with, if not rejecting, the nation-building, heritage-promoting curriculum and instruction sitting at the center of history and social studies classes ( Lowenthal, 1998; vanSledright, 2008). Incorporating differentiated citizenship, cultural products, and communicative cultural citizenship (Pawley, 2008) helps form a more complete membership in community. Young students engage these in

their everyday practices therefore we should employ issues of culture when addressing citizenship.

Also, "maybe citizens" helps illuminate the thinking and practices occurring in diverse schools and classrooms (Dilworth, 2004). Race and racism, sex and sexism, class and classism, ability and (dis) ability, age and ageism all influence student identities and their interpretations. Brophy and Alleman (2002) suggest that "a heavy concentration on inquiry and debate about social policy is premature for elementary students, especially K-3 students whose prior knowledge and experience relating to the issues often are limited" (p.106). To this assertion, I ask, "Why is the appropriate time for students to engage in these issues?" It certainly affects them. They are not silent about social policies and practices amongst themselves, families, and communities. They often incur the brunt of social policies. So, to postpone an educational interaction of these sort of issues only serves to further mis-educate young children. As brother Martin Luther King Jr. offered over 50 years ago in his, *I Have a Dream* speech, "This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism."

The theme of "You're Nobody 'til Somebody Kills You" can expose how for Black males, agency (the crowned jewel of contemporary academic vernacular) comes at a cost, and many times the ultimate cost. It shows how activism, one of the highest enacted forms of citizenship, for the Black male very likely accelerates his death. This indicates not the participants' fixation on violence but its' omnipresence within their lived worlds. Author and social critic, Neely Fuller Jr. reflecting on his youth, was perplexed by comic books, which contained so much violence were known as "the

funnies." Nonetheless, he contends there is nothing funny about violence, but in a system of White supremacy, it makes sense.

The participants' curiosity about death may stem from their various interactions with the concept – personally or by way of various mediums: television, movies, music, books, and video games. Facebook commissioned IPSOS Media CT in 2014 to conduct a study that reported African Americans watched more TV on average than any other group in the United States. Media's representation of Black males appears to confirm Patterson's (1982) social death. This along with the recognition that many of the Black males we discussed died by unnatural means seemed to enhance their inquisitiveness.

Yet, the participants and myself did not leave these Black bodies and memories to rot. Their legacies seamlessly found their way into our conversations, lessons, and activities. Those placed in the margins were being centered. As such, the participants' and their familial and communal attitudes and practices were centered. More about this aspect of calling out, eliciting, and raising Black males and Blackness in educational settings will be considered in the last chapter.

By explicating these themes, I answered the research questions guiding this phenomenological study. As a result, the findings sought to provide insight into the participants' thinking and understanding, as well as the nature of the research experience itself. In Chapter 6, I discuss the meanings of my findings in terms of the existing body of literature on urban education, early elementary Black education, and early elementary social studies education. I also explore the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the implications,

recommendations, limitations of my study, ideas for future research, and researcher

reflection and conclusion.

**Chapter 6: Interpretations, Implications, and Recommendations**

**Introduction**

This phenomenological study was conducted in order to acquire insight and gain increased knowledge of the lived experiences of Black boyhood. Specifically this research study set out to address the following questions:  1) How do 1$^{st}$ and 2$^{nd}$ grade African American males in an urban school talk about, understand, and make sense of heroes?  2) How do 1$^{st}$ and 2$^{nd}$ grade African American males in an urban school talk about, understand, and make sense of role models (e.g. mentors, teachers, popular figures, and historical figures)?  3) In what ways do 1$^{st}$ and 2$^{nd}$ grade African American males talk about and understand citizenship as it relates to civic identity and being members of the community?  Chapters four and five presented unique themes that emerged as a result of phenomenological explication or data analysis of ten participants (five in 1$^{st}$ grade and five in 2$^{nd}$ grade) over the span of 14 weeks.  The research study was completed in order add the voices of children, especially young Black boys, to the discourse on heroes, role models, and citizenship which many times goes ignored and dismissed.  This contribution seeks to add value to social and educational efforts to produce just and equitable outcomes for all youth, and in particular young Black males.

The theoretical frameworks, which governed this study's operation, consisted of Foucault's (1972) notions of discourse and Foucault's (1972) notion of a discursive formation.  Both involve constituting knowledge and social practices while forming subjectivity and power relations (Arribas-Avllon and Walkerdine, 2008).  Taking the social, cultural, and political context of individuals and groups into consideration, these applied theories view discourse as sites of domination and also resistance.  The

participants at Imagine Elementary, a school located in the southern region of the United

States, provided responses that illustrated experiences structured within dominate and

limited domains but also exercised agency and resistance in their thoughts and actions.

The conceptual framework of critical childhood studies was utilized to place emphasis on

the perspectives and practices of young children who like other marginalized groups

work within the lower rungs of power matrix relationships.

**Interpretations**

**Interpretations of Heroes**

The themes that emerged relating to heroes were: a) heroes save, b) majority of

heroes are fictional characters, c) heroes in popular culture but not in school curriculum,

and d) hero's specialties are imaginative. Heroes' main function according to the

participants is to save – save me, save you, save us from bad people. People were

considered especially bad when they would cause hurt towards others. In order to

prevent and / or halt the bad people, superheroes using their special powers would

intervene and save the day. Interestingly, this concept of "saving" was viewed as a

practice stemming from an external entity – so much so that they weren't just a hero, but

the prefix "super" was used to express this outer-body aspect. Even the mechanisms to

combat bad people consisted of creative and outer-worldly means. Perhaps this way of

thinking ushers in the initial mindset that "saving" is separate and outside of oneself. Not

only is this mission charged to some fictional character, but it is also very individualistic

in nature. Batman, Superman, Deadpool, and Spiderman don't link up in collective

action, instead they take up their own personal ventures and crusades to come to the aid

of society.

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This harkens back to one of the few individuals identified by the participants as a hero who was not a Marvel or DC comic book, Jesus. The similarities are amazingly clear. Jesus's primary function is/was to save. Those ascribing to certain religions believe his narrative to be real, while others see him as a fictional character. Jesus's imprint is steeped into popular culture yet the establishment of church and state calls for his exclusion into public school curriculum. Lastly, his powers are particularly imaginative and special – walking-on-water, turning water-into-wine, feeding a multitude with little food, and miraculously healing the blind and sick.

Taking the participants' talk and understanding about heroes into account, it's troublingly that power and salvation can be viewed as coming from a source outside oneself. This state of mind views escape from evil and harm to be reliant on the compassionate duty of some "other." While the participants wish to imitate the actions of their heroes, they were fully aware of the whimsical quality these actions possessed. As Foxx put it, "…you can't be something in cartoons…the stuff in cartoons are fake." Children seek instruments and methods to help address problematic situations (Dyson, 1997). Nonetheless, examples displaying these daring and gallant characteristics are mostly White and male – resulting in an obvious absence of racial and gender inclusion into these narratives. None of the superheroes acknowledged by the participants were Black and none were female.

Numerous studies have focused on the aggressive nature and violence of images depicted in the media to children (Huesmann, 1994; Boyatzis, 1997) which may in some sense connect with children's demonstrations of aggression in their own play (Coyne, 2014). Yet, my findings similar to those in other studies (Morris, 2005; Kort-Butler,

2012) saw that participants understood the "good" and justice resulting from this exercise of forcefulness.  As Duncan insinuated, "[If] you have lots of guns, you defeat bad guys." Smith referenced how if only he could get to the "Mask" in the deep sea, that would prevent bullying.  So again, the power and strategies to enact what's considered morally right and upstanding arise from something external.  First it was in the form of an outer-world being – a superhero, and it also appears as physical objects – guns, masks, lasers, etc.  It is as if for the Black male, he is devoid of and lacks the creativity to employ viable solutions for his own survival and good.  This speaks to the historical meta-narrative of African American male deficiency which is "often reproduced essentialized portraits of Black male performance" (Brown, 2011) and powerlessness.  The Negro body and mind was examined through pseudo-scientific means during the 1800s to justify the ideal of Black deviance.  More so, the placement of Blacks at the bottom of society was located within the divine realm.  According to Brown and Johnson (2014):

> It is one thing to develop laws and ideologies that enclose the experiences of enslaved Africans, but it is another thing all together to argue that the racial hierarchy between White men and Black men are set in place by God's will.  This places the context of enslavement not in the hands of men that may have corrupt means to enslave one of God's children, but in the very hands of God. (p.14)

Scientific and religious confirmation forcefully normalized the negative imagery of Blackness and Black males.  This way of thinking produced the entrance and sustainability of role model discourse, which as discussed in the next section, has been so firmly entrenched as one of the foremost solutions to challenges facing Black males.

**Interpretations of Role Models**

The participants demonstrated an increased sophistication while considering role models. The themes emerging from our discussions were: a) role models are real people, b) role models are visible and have a stage, c) role models have professional authority, d) current ability to emulate role models actions, and e) role models change according to place and space. Of note, is the participants' association of role models being real people unlike heroes who were predominantly seen as fictional characters. Helping to frame the definition of a role model as, "someone you would like to be like when you grow up" sixty-four percent of their responses included either an athlete or entertainer. The participants knew of these athletes and entertainers primarily through the medium of television. The glitz and glam, fireworks and smoke, audience and crowd adulation only added to the ready-made stage of their performance. This preoccupation of athletic and entertaining images paint a desirable picture of success while ignoring other career options and occupations (May, 2009; Edwards, 2000; Spurgin, 2012).

In addition, the role models as determined by the participants, held professional authority and therefore assumed a sense of social control. This was especially true for police officers, who several students stated were role models. In this aspect, role models were much like the superheroes whereby they do not have to appeal to a higher authority...they are the authority! Judge and juror are absent from the legal and especially social process of innocence or conviction. Police equaled right. Smith spoke about calling the police on bad people to help them "learn a lesson." Duncan considered them a role model because "they make sure we are safe." While discussing Nat Turner, Miami asked if there were police during the period of American slavery to help freed Africans. The unchecked and unexamined permission of police present an enduring

account of how we have seen this presumption taken advantage of by *race soldiers posing as police officers* in the unjust harming and killing of Black man, woman, and child. As Ice Cube referenced in the 1988 N.W.A. record, *F#% tha Police*:

> F#% the police! Comin' straight from the underground
> A young n* got it bad 'cause I'm brown
> And not the other color, so police think
> They have the authority to kill a minority

The recruitment of authoritarian figures to occupy the physical space where Black male bodies are gathered in addition to influencing the mental space of the Black male mind serves to constrict what can been done as well as what can be expected. Scholars have determined that these controlled expectations and denial of access to opportunities negatively affect the educational, vocational, and consequently the economic and social status of Black males (Ford and Moore, 2013; Delgado, 2015; Edwards, 2000). The most visible faces and loudest voices influencing perceived choices literally have a camera and microphone before, during, and after their performances.

As one of the findings maintains, role model's action can be currently emulated. As such, these young Black males could easily dance like Michael Jackson, catch a football like Odell Beckham Jr., and shoot a basketball like Stephon Curry – yet there was lesser knowledge of how to organize like Marcus Garvey, conduct worldwide humanitarianism like Representative Mickey Leland, or own a television network like Oprah Winfrey. These are not outlandish ambitions. The vision is simply seldom casted. Those who are given the camera and microphone are not only "good" role models, but at this age, they are the only role models. The "bad" role model or the "threat of a good example" is shunned, ignored, and omitted from not only the camera and microphone but

also the pages of school books in educational curriculum. Constructive methods to counter racist practices and exercise collective strength by non-whites are like mist. Children might encounter a sprinkle here or there - a peek of passive, non-violent resistance, as their familiarity of Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks illustrates. Yet they are far from being acquainted with the vast narratives of collective practices illustrating productive efforts to even power relations along the lines of race, gender, and class.

The usage of Foucault's (1972) notion of discursive formations (understanding discourse as having certain rules) and critical childhood studies (Dumas & Nelson, 2016) (allowing for children to forward their own interpretations within an ordered and controlled environment) aided in uncovering an exceptional theme – role models change according to place and space. These young Black males indicated the ability to look to multiple references as examples depending on context. Football star Cam Newton did not hold the same cache with participants in church as he did when they watched him on television. Lil Wayne's clot as a role model was substituted by aunts, cousins, and other family members when participants would be at the park. This understanding of participants relating to role models continues to grant the idea that if presented with more and varied examples of possibility, these young people could just as easily aspire to and emulate a new wave of role models. Matter of fact, the participants when introduced to new figures and counter-narratives exemplified a willingness to embrace and grapple with even more complex circumstances.

**Interpretations of Citizenship**

The bridge from role model to citizenship was traversed by capturing the traditional essence of Black role model discourse. Generally understood, Black male role models are presented as those who have conformed, adapted and assimilated to the values and demands placed before him by mainstream society. He is the example of what Black males should aim to become and sets the expectation of other groups should expect the Black males they know. As such, he is an object. He is a possession. Any deviation from the script results in added mistreatment, harm, and likely death. Yet, Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) expands this interpretation beyond the concept of "slave as property" to a powerless existence devoid of social and public worth. By viewing the internal relationship of slavery via absolute power, "elite slaves" are needed and can function within an oppressive system. Their rise from death, (i.e. attention and distinction) in the form of administrative or executive roles, though limited, is only granted – not earned. That determination rests on those who have the power to do so. Thus, this is where the research study's connection of role model and citizenship rests. Citizenship exists on a spectrum taking race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation and other factors into account of its' stratification. The participants even at $1^{st}$ and $2^{nd}$ grade levels understood the gradient nature of citizenship.

The two themes emerging from our interactions with citizenship were: a) "maybe citizens" and b) you're nobody 'til somebody kills you. The concept of "maybe citizens" was coined by $2^{nd}$ grader, Miami. It appeared during his attempt to label the tensions existing between an individual being branded as a "bad" citizen by conventional society

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yet recognizing the "good" and honorable purpose driving their actions. The story of

NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick served as the initial backdrop to channel his thinking.

This concept of "maybe citizen" works vice versa also. If society holds a person in high

regard due to a dominant narrative, but if information is encountered that disrupts their

stature, he or she can be considered a "maybe citizen" also. This aspect of the "maybe

citizen" came to life when discussing President George Washington's ownership of

slaves. The introduction of this information about President Washington ranged from

him being considered a "bad citizen" to a "good then bad citizen." Eventually the

"maybe citizen" characterization came to encompass their perspective.

This study offers that "maybe citizens" suggest evidence for three points. First,

"maybe citizens" comes to describe a contradiction of *title* and *action*. A nurse who

litters, a scientist who lies or in Miami's case an older cousin whom he admires that plays

football but smokes cigarettes. Donald Trump and President George Washington also

symbolized this for the participants. It illuminates the contradiction of the perfect person,

role model, or someone who abuses their position and power. Second, "maybe citizens"

comes to depict the hegemony enacted onto individuals and groups working towards

noble and just purposes. Astutely observed by participants, the concept of "maybe

citizens" isn't merely about *what you do* but also about *how you are treated*. Colin

Kaepernick, Tupac Shakur, and Nat Turner were categorized as such. A notable example

of this involved my question to the participants of, "Why would Martin Luther King Jr.,

who we have all agreed was a great man, role model and did good, be treated so bad,

arrested, and put in jail?" This question served as a compelling backdrop for participants

to confront societal issues. Historical thinking (vanSledright, 2004) was a strategy used

to investigate history and connect it to our present-day experiences. Third, the concept of "maybe citizens" points to the participants' process of learning more about the idea of citizenship itself. Citizenship is a moving target! Citizen identities constructed through discursive practices and shaped by geography within urban schools reproduce and oppose inequalities inherent within a selective education system (Pykett, 2007). For this reason, it could be hesitantly understood as "maaaaaaaybe citizens" as participants along with us as a members of society attempt to grasp such a malleable notion.

The second theme surfacing from our interaction with citizenship is, "you're nobody 'til somebody kills you." This ideal signifies the bodily harm and mental demise of the Black male. This physical death is associated with the attention given via various mediums such as educational curriculum that highlights what happens to those who have pushed the limits and challenged a system designed to oppress them. As we deliberated about citizenship and what that resembled for Black people, the participants maintained a curiosity as to the death of these individuals. The deaths of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Mickey Leland, Nat Turner, Tupac, Michael Jackson, Prince, and the Tuskegee Airmen all captured these young boys' attention. The way in which they died was a matter of concern, but also what were they doing when they died was of interest. Again, we saw that noble and just purposes, even for President Abraham Lincoln whose death they wanted to know more about, was met with violence.

The notion that "you're nobody 'til somebody kills you" also refers to the divorce and detachment from one's culture and identity in exchange for prescribed social norms and codes - all in the hopes of false honor or limited power. This death is akin to the constant erosion of social capital referred to by Valenzuela's subtractive schooling (1999)

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whereby youth are divested from social and cultural resources becoming progressively

venerable to academic failure. By complete and blind acceptance of hegemonic values

and mores the social ills and practices that plague our society is poised to continue.

Nonetheless, our research project illuminated and commemorated those who

forwarded the causes of freedom, liberty, justice, and a recognition and value of humanity

but were vilified by general society. Laudably, this respect was also allocated to our

family and community members as well as to each other. For instance, Hopkins

(participant) was identified by another participant as a role model because of his running

skills. Moms, dads, brothers, cousins, aunts, granddads, and uncles were acknowledged

as good citizens and role models. Community members such as mechanics, firefighters,

principals, teachers, bible teachers, and pastors made the list. To my surprise, several

times I was even mentioned as a role model. This cycle of recognition and affirmation

culminated into a space of love, care, fun, learning, sharing, and reprieve from traditional

educational methods. *Our* heroes, *our* role models, *our* citizens do not experience death

but live on through our hearts, minds, mouths, and actions. At this point, I would like to

introduce this concept and practice as "curricular and pedagogical resurrection."

Curricular and pedagogical resurrection has the ability to relocate Blackness from the

halls of mainstream obscurity to the Halls of Fame, from the whispers of a few to the talk

of the town, from the pages of an obituary to the pages of school books. Hip-hop artist,

J. Cole paints an accurate and vivid picture of this thinking in his song entitled, *Immortal*

(2016). In it he unpacks the meaning of relevance and death for Black males.

> [Chorus]
> Real n* don't die
> Form with the plot
> One-Seven-Forty-Five

Form at the plot
Real n* don't die
Form on the plot
Hood n* don't lie
Form on the plot
My n* don't die
Form on the plot
Real n* don't die
Form on the plot
Real n* don't die
Real n* don't die

[Outro]
To die a young legend or live a long life unfulfilled
'Cause you wanna change the world
But while alive you never will
'Cause they only feel you after you gone, or I've been told
And now I'm caught between bein' heard and gettin' old
Damn, death creepin' in my thoughts lately
My one wish in this b* make it quick if the Lord take me
I know nobody meant to live forever anyway
And so I hustle like my n* in Virgini-A
They tellin' n* sell dope, rap or go to NBA, in that order
It's that sort of thinkin' that been keepin' n* chained
At the bottom and hanged
The strangest fruit that you ever seen, ripe with pain
Listen!

In these few lines, J. Cole in many ways captures the essence of Black male discourse involving heroes, role models, and citizenship. By examining the historical and present-day struggle of valuing Blackness, the consistent traversing of life and death, the innate desire of purpose and remembrance, finicky nature of membership, and unyielding self-determination, he along with the participants command reflection of how we have addressed these issues and how we should address them in the future.

**Implications**

**Theoretical Implications**

This study utilized Foucault's (1972) notions of discourse and Foucault's (1972) notion of discursive formations as a theoretical lens to gain a better understanding of the lived-worlds or experiences of young Black males. Specific and considerable attention was paid to 1st and 2nd grade Black males' talk and understanding of heroes, role models, and citizenship in an urban school context. After conducting this qualitative study, I found using both of these Foucauldian notions to be effective in eliciting meanings tied to these various phenomena. My study offers suggestive evidence of an undercurrent message conveyed about Black males in relation to heroes, role models, and citizenship. These concepts do not exist in isolation. They can be seen as "product(s) of a society that views its children as being 'at risk'" (Crosset, p.35). Black male youth are seen as the consequences and contributors of negative pathologies that have historically come to justify mistreatment and oppression (Brown, 2012; Oliver, 2006; Tucker, 2007). Yet, because Foucaudian discourse "offer(s) sites where hegemonic practices can be contested, challenged and 'resisted'" (Pinkus, para. 8) young Black males' attitudes, talk and actions are not bond to existing or known discourse nor our perceived possibilities of it. Scholars and educators alike mistakenly seek to grant voice to the voiceless without recognizing that children have already carved out these place and spaces (Duncan-Andrade, 2008).

Many of the unexamined questions as it applies to these concepts can be more fully addressed. Foucault's theories help us in how we perceive heroes, role models and citizenship. Because power is seen to constantly circulate, though seeming to be so, it is never monopolized (Foucault, 1972). It is deployed and dispersed. As such, researchers can simply make themselves available for capturing the places and spaces of which youth exercise their power. Interestingly, the participants who contributed the most critical analysis during the research study, were the ones who were identified as having behavior issues in school. The power to speak about and to the issues and experiences covered in interviews, lessons, and activities illustrated its previous misread existence. Heroes, role models, and citizenship has currency and therefore power. Matter of fact, the concepts themselves suggest some form of expressed power. Using Foucault's ideas related to discourse serves to reveal children's undetected perceptions and practices involving these and potential more concepts.

Take for example, Foucault's stance on discourse, power and observation. According to Foucault, visibility is a trap. This surveillance by members of society project standards of appropriate behavior onto individualized subjects. Bodies are therefore disciplined becoming "the object of information, never a subject of communication" (Foucault, 1997, p. 200). This trap manifests itself as the fear of observation by supervisors is greater than the motivation to potentially do wrong in the eyes of the public. As such "he is seen, but he does not see" (Foucault, 1997, p. 200). Similar to being placed in a prison whereby divisions are placed between individuals. Not only is one separated from others but one's capacity to communicate what is seen is scripted, edited, or halted. The ultimate goal, alleging Foucault is the internalization of

surveillance.  The available evidence derived from this research study seems to suggest that further grappling with Foucault's notion(s) of discourse, discursive formations, and surveillance all have implications towards Black male interactions with heroes, role models, and citizenship.

**Methodological Implications**

One particular critique of Foucault's theoretical assertions and frameworks is his unwillingness to propose solutions towards the political and social concerns he discusses (Ashenden & Owen, 1999).  Some may consider a retreat using his notions based on this thought.  Nonetheless, when paired with a comparable methodology, this concern of providing ready-made answers is alleviated.  This helpful suturing took place in this study.  Foucault's intellectual framework coincides with the methodology adopted for this study, hermeneutic phenomenology.  As a method, hermeneutic phenomenology does not seek to prove or disprove, but to illuminate and reflect upon the lived meaning of the experience.

One basic tenet of hermeneutic phenomenology is that before any attempts to describe or understand our world, we are already immersed in it.  The meaning instantaneously rest upon the matrixes of personal relationships, histories, and cultures. As Adams (2014) maintains, the researcher "always arrives too late" (p.54) in their endeavors to elicit the "now" or present-day experiences of the participants.  As with Foucault's notions of discourse, 'meticulous rituals' encompass the various localized circulations and productions of 'micro-physics of power' (Foucault, 1977).  The day-late-and-a-dollar short approach of hermeneutic phenomenology nevertheless is more

adequately equipped than other methods to acquire the here-and-now unchartered experiences and understandings of the participants.

Also since the hermeneutic phenomenology is aimed at illuminating the seemingly trivial details that are taken for granted as we gain understanding, it makes sense not to enter the investigation with cookie-cutter prescriptions. Along this thinking, because the age of the researcher most likely will differ significantly from those seeking to conduct a study involving young children, being reflective, insightful, sensitive to language and open to experience (van Manen, 1997) is required. Researchers' argument in favor of applying hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology especially in conjunction with Foucault's theoretical frameworks can produce trustworthy data. Its application was extremely beneficial given that research on Black males in urban education is informative, but what is noticeable is the mounting need for Black male "voices to be centered in the analysis" (Howard, p. 64). This is especially true for Black males in early childhood education (Davis, 2003). This research study sought to accomplish that shift in focus.

**Practical Implications**

My initial inquiry of this study was to research young African American males' understandings of role models. Yet, by including their thoughts, speech, and actions centered around heroes and citizenship, this elevated the discussion on role models. Numerous studies have investigated the role of racial and gender matching as it relates to Black male role modeling (Howard & Milner, 2013; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Bonnett & Carrington, 2000; Brown, 2012; Gay, 2000; Gordon, et. Al., 2009; DuBois, et. Al., 2009). Given that there are benefits to having older Black males as role models to

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younger Black males, my study suggests that these identities can be recommended yet not required. Because as one of our findings indicates, role models can change according to place and space, the racial, gender, and other identities of a role model can change also. This potential expands the pool of candidates of whom can be role models for Black males.

The participants grasp of each concept showed how young children's thinking can change and maneuver amongst sophisticated topics. Although they were able to shift different qualities associated with each concept, one condition surfaced as a basic tenet of heroes, role models and citizenship – purpose. Given the centrality of thinking, speaking and acting "for a good purpose" demonstrates the agency of young children and specifically young Black males in determining the criteria for consideration. The children were much more concerned with the cause than the effect. Though having some initial clasp, they rejected outside labels and assignments for such personal and intimate concepts of heroes, role models, and citizenship.

A compelling point lies at the intersection of Black males in relation to heroes, role models, and citizenship. In line with the evidence put forth in this study, Black males are more likely to serve as role models and less as heroes and citizens. Role model identification has fewer constraints. It is more intimate and less controlled by external forces. The current overwhelming media portrayal of heroes as White males stifles Black males being identified as heroes. Additionally, the moving target of citizenship creates an unstable relationship. One that can't necessarily be trusted, hence the notion of "maybe citizens." The enduring fight of Black people and other groups to obtain the rights, privileges and protection assumed under the guise of citizenship has seeped into

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the families and communities producing an "other." Young Black boys' understanding of being part of this "other" protects their license and power to question the standards of citizenship. Therefore, the Black male community activist, street hustler, imprisoned family member, or athlete or entertainer that speaks truth to power has a significantly higher chance of being considered a hero or role model than a citizen. Matter of fact, some of the qualities exhibited by heroes and role models are diametrically opposed to those of citizenship. For example, heroes take matters into their own hands, but citizens defer to the authority of a system. Role models exhibit the highest forms of their craft; citizens allow the mistreatment of other citizens displaying a dismissal of humanizing and compassionate measures. These insights help complex otherwise simple approaches to how youth and adults interact with heroes, role models and citizenship.

### Recommendations

The exploration of how 1st and 2nd grade African American males in an urban school talk about, understand and make sense of heroes, role models, and citizenship produced valuable and useful data. Because these concepts are woven into the fabric of various people's lives and settings, suggestions supported by data are provided as a way to improve curricular and pedagogical choices and enhance the growth and development of children in particular, Black boys in early elementary. The areas covered in this section include: a) Teacher education and development; b) Social studies curriculum; and c) Family and community. The goal is to forward a more student-centered, proficient, fun and enjoyable way of teaching and learning. Ultimately, these suggestions are offered to produce a more just society.

**Recommendations for Teacher Preparation & Development Programs**

*Embrace popular culture as a viable pedagogical instrument*

Often suggestions of implementing popular culture within one's teaching are posed by the terms of inclusion and acceptance. I however advocate that the insertion of student's popular culture as a teaching tool not come across as an irritant or something to be tolerated. Moreover, educators should seize the opportunities to plan, design, and encourage the use of popular culture in classrooms. Rather than an *inclusion of* there ought to be a *presence of* popular culture. As illustrated with this study, students entered with valuable prior and constantly adapting knowledge that was utilized as an introduction and connection to concepts. This also assisted in instructional scaffolding. The influence of family and friends upon students' perceptions (especially those of Black, Latinas/os, Asian, and of Indigenous decedent) of historical meta narratives is a recognizable pattern. Simultaneously, the impact of popular culture via television, film, radio, Internet, and social media is increasingly made visible. The social values widely produced and circulated by popular culture can be the precursor/ supporter of sociocultural determinants (Apple, 2004) but it also serves as a site of resistance to hegemony (i.e. Hip-hop music). Popular culture in its many forms educates "children about the social roles, values, and ideals in a way that proves even more influential than traditional sites of learning, such as the family church, and public schools" (Lee, p. 87).

Being that popular culture has firmly imbued itself within certain groups such as American youth, especially that of poor students of marginalized groups (IPSOS Media CT, 2014; Goodman, 2003) their understandings and making sense of history is unique.

Utilizing this method of embracing popular culture as a viable pedagogical tool allows

for the critical participation and acquisition of historical knowledge and understanding

(vanSledright, 2004). Teacher embracement of popular culture and student familiarity

with it potentially enhances not only academic outcomes but also the teaching and

learning process.

### *Instill a Practice of Sharing Power in Educational Settings*

Recognizing and dismantling the limiting identities of teacher, student, and

community is admirable step in the direction of empowerment. Teachers, especially

novice teachers and Black male teachers, can experience the stressful burden of

projecting authority, control, surveillance, and discipline cloaked as classroom

management. As Freire (1970) states plainly, "education is suffering from a narrative

sickness" (p. 71) whereby teachers as the subjects, speak and direct, while students as the

objects quietly listen and follow instructions. Exercising the cyclical attitude and

position of teacher-as-student and student-as-teacher creates a dynamic relationship and

learning experience. Freire (1970) goes on to advance that:

> From the outset, her [teacher] efforts must coincide with those of the
> students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual
> humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people
> and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the
> student in their relations with them. (p.75)

Duncan-Andrade proposes "to manage the complexity of fulfilling the role of

instructional leader, while avoiding a replication of oppressive relations of power,

Grossberg suggests that teachers 'locate places from which [students] can construct and

disseminate knowledge in relation to the materiality of power, conflict, and oppression"
(p. 117). This builds on the previous recommendation as embracing the popular culture
of students as a pedagogical instrument also has the potential to empower them by
valuing and making their experiences part of their schooling.

What is lost within discourse surrounding early elementary Black male student
experiences is the competency and adroitness of which they successfully navigate the
multiple contexts of urban education. Brooms (2015) acknowledges how young Black
males have to "straddle several cultural contexts – school, neighborhood, community, and
identities – in order to strive toward success" (p. 278). Hitting the pause button and
exercising caution is necessary when indiscriminately linking young Black males to
disturbing pathologies especially when as Johnson (2013) argues, any outwardly
expression of masculinity deriving from Black male youth is seen as a threat.

A shift of interactions with the people and culture of urban communities can also
be brought into the picture in a more symmetrical way. Most understand the school to be
physically located in the community, but educators should be devoted to incorporating
the community in the school. Seeing how neighborhood environments "shape students'
understanding of who they are, the relationships that they develop, and influences on
their academic aspirations (Brooms, 2015; Noguera, 2003, Anderson, 1990) teachers
seeking increased engagement of their students can look to discussing factors within the
community. Also what becomes apparent is by simply focusing on reforms and changes
within the walls of urban schools are fruitless without addressing the social and economic
condition of that community of which that school resides. As teacher and student in
partnership engage in problem-posing methods (Freire, 1970) and build off the ideas of

intent participation (Rogoff, 2003; Urrieta, 2013) education becomes a process of living and not a preparation for future living (Dewey, 1897).

**Recommendations for Social Studies Curriculum & Instruction**

*Incorporate and Forward the Narratives of those who have Challenged the Limits of the Constitution*

Social studies as a subject, continues to find itself on the margins of academic proficiency discussions. Yet, when given the proper attention one can recognize the irony of social studies. Social studies or history is disguised as something children learn, but it reveals itself as what children should become (Lowenthal, 1998). Given this, schools and classrooms are seen as a contested battleground for the hearts, minds, and ultimately the bodies of students. This raises the significance of social studies into its proper place.

What makes social studies and history exciting aren't the lists of presidents, wars, and other "important" events. It's the conflict and divergence of groups and individuals who have stretched and challenged the Constitution. The boring and dried lists are the floors. The investigations of tensions and controversy are the ceilings. Yet as Weinstein (1996) reminds us, "simply willing higher expectations without attention to effective teaching practices will not result in higher achievement" (p.16). What's being called for is comparable to enacted curriculum (Ball & Cohen, 1996) – teachers, students, and materials jointly constructing curriculum. This is also similar to notions of permeable curriculum – the social and cultural interplay and scaffolds between teachers' and children's language and experiences (Dyson, 1993; Gritter, 2012) as well as third space critical literacy – the exploration and negotiation between traditional conceptions of academia and marginalized aspects of students' experiences (Gutierrez, 2008).

**Curricular and pedagogical resurrection**

Though similar, in this study I generated the term *curricular and pedagogical resurrection*. This is what I came to witness as the study was initiated, progressed and concluded. It is a response and counter to the social death (Patterson, 1982) incurred specifically by Black males. Resurrection entails the act of a living being coming back to life after death. As a result of social death, enslaved people have internal and external effects, as it changes how one views himself and the way the society regards him. The "maybe citizen" speaks to this conundrum. It wasn't simply about what you did, but how you were treated by society. By acknowledging and valuing their human existence, civic contributions, and connecting both to our present-day lives, *curricular and pedagogical resurrection* for these young Black male participants and the Black men and others we discussed took place.

The notion of *curricular and pedagogical resurrection* additionally speaks to the role and influence spirituality can have on educational settings and outcomes particularly within African American, Latina/Latino, and Indigenous communities (Jett, 2010; Talvacchia, 2003). There is substantial evidence for the idea that eliciting a spiritual dimension reflected in the lives of teacher and student is advantageous. A study conducted by Lindholm & Astin (2008) found that faculty who are highly spiritual are more likely to practice student-centered pedagogy. Norton (2012) highlighted how Black and Latina/Latino children ranging from 7 to 13 years old included spirituality within hip-hop literacies. In many ways the lens of spirituality in the Black community was foundational to addressing social justice issues of anti-oppression, notions of care, community uplift, and protest (Witherspoon-Arnold, et. al., 2014). *Curricular and*

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*pedagogical resurrection* seeks to repair an underlying separation of mind from body, mind from emotions, and mind from spirit (Riley-Taylor, 2002). It is presented as a useful strategy to assist in developing a critical consciousness and affirmation to marginalized individuals and communities for their empowerment.

It is recognized that teachers are challenged with the demands of high stakes testing and accountability measures in language arts and mathematics along with "a paucity of tools and texts available to represent history" (Willis, 2011). However, this tension provides opportunity and space necessary to engage the interpretive frameworks developed in students' families, communities, and throughout popular culture in classroom settings. A growing number of scholars are exploring viable pedagogies to suture apparently disparate domains. The approach that history curricula needs to involve what history students *should* know as well as how they *think and learn* about the past, has ushered in a method of reasoning skills for knowing and doing history called *historical thinking* (vanSledright, 2008; Sexias, 1993). Historical thinking consists of three elements: 1) ability to identify events of historical significance, 2) ability to refine, revise, and add to students' picture of history, and 3) conceptualization of agency, empathy, and moral judgment (Seixas, 1993).

The method of historical thinking was used in this study is definitely encouraged for teachers to implement as teaching social studies and history is not only about isolated facts (Brown & Brown, 2010; Salinas et. al., 2006). Being that our understandings of childhood and children lags behind their crucial and changing roles in society and culture (Jenkins, 1998) insight into their perspective and implementation of more critical

processes of historical inquiry can promote aid in vetting age-old paradigms and historical meta narratives.

**Recommendations for Urban Families & Communities**

*Focus on a Code of Conduct Rather than Following People*

Our children are our most valuable resource.  Attempts at assisting in their growth and development have been taken on by the prospect of role modeling.  Charles Barkley's proclamation that "I am not a role model" challenged and placed center stage one of society's most widely accepted beliefs – the incessant need of role models to produce successful outcomes for your youth expressly young Black males.  Scholars have explored the Black male role model phenomenon in various ways (Brown, 2012; Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Anderson, 1999; Staples, 1985; Brockenbrough, 2012; Whannel, 2002).  Findings have shown to be both positive and negative.  Fundamental elements of all interpersonal relationships are some aspect of conflict, disappointment, and regret.

As such, through personal experience and by way of study, at some point reverence, respect, and relatablity each or all can eventually wane. Even those who I have admire the most, I do not agree with all their ideas or actions.  Some may say it's about maturing and becoming an adult.  While that may be true, it is also about unpacking and questioning many of the assumptions underlying role modeling.  As such I put forth Neely Fuller Jr.'s (1984) assessment of role models:

> Avoid using this term.  During the existence of White Supremacy (Racism), do not think, speak, or act as if any person is the "quality" of person ("role model") that a person should be.  Instead, produce or use a "code" of correct thought, speech, and action that applies to every area of

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[people] activity. Use logic. "Follow" logic – don't "follow" people. People make too many mistakes. Study the laws of "cause and effect." Study the *results* of everything that is said and done – and not said and done. (p. 344)

Following this viewpoint, if you follow logic, you're a leader. As an individual, you're an organization. Genuine and constructive leaders of Black people, once they become too effective are killed by way of social death or physical death. Following the "appointment of leaders" or false representations in the form of role models is also a dangerous proposition. Therefore, as much as possible follow logic by your own personal means of analysis.

As we explored heroes, role models and citizenship, one thing was clear. Death while it might have come to the doorstep of heroes (i.e. superheroes) never entered the conclusion of their narrative. Nonetheless, for Black male role models and citizens not only was death omnipresent throughout their lives but often bookmarked their narrative. Regularly the way Civil Rights Movement and other movements are presented, death is almost a requirement. For Pace (2016) who studied curricular portrayals of the Civil Rights Movement and Black youth, this "highlighted some of the limitations of messianic master narratives in social studies classrooms and society…and seemed to prevent participants from recognizing their potential for civic agency (p. 203).

### *Produce Narratives of Identifiable Black Male Heroes*

One unique strategy of possibly endorsing the civic potential and agency for Black males in early elementary is to introduce them to easily identifiable superheroes who are Black males. The adage, "as a person thinketh, so is he," provides an

appropriate launching point supporting this proposal.  An overwhelming majority of heroes identified by participants were White male DC or Marvel comic figures. Participants' associations with these characters proved to be quite substantial so an increased the attachment to one constructed as a Black male is possible.

This is by no means to assume that young Black boys would automatically gravitate towards an identifiable Black male superhero.  Other factors would need to be included to effectively attract and maintain their attention.  Still, it is an admirable starting point.  Self-perception according to psychologists is an important aspect of early childhood development.  Self-perception (along with other methods of conceiving the self) involves attitudes and practices about the person you are and your relation to others in the world.  Historical metanarratives of superheroes serve as a formidable barrier in improving and awakening positive self-perceptions of those that are "othered."

As Garvey (1991) posits, "liberate the minds of men and ultimately you will liberate the bodies of men" (p. 204).  Students long for positive images and events that represent them and their community even in imaginative and otherworld spaces.  Dr. Leonard Jefferies (2015) purports, "Whoever controls the images, controls your self-esteem, self-respect and self-development (p. 8).  A recent study (Wang and Huguley, 2016) in the Journal of Child Development found that "when parents instill a proud, informed, and sober perspective of race in their sons and daughters, these children are more likely to experience increased academic success." (p. 1726).  Family and community efforts offering a disruption of superhero metanarratives serve our children a tremendous service.

One such effort worth noting as come by way of an iPhone and Android game app called Moorish Kingdom created by Tariq Nasheed. This action adventure, 3D game involves male and female characters of African descent combating evil forces to save the Royale family. It incorporates many of the aspects participants in this study identified as being positive. In a society where a young Black boy has a higher probability of not seeing a Black male of influence in his household, in his classroom, at his job and even his places of worship where his savior that looks nothing like him, I posit the endeavor to create Black male heroes is a noble and just cause.

**Limitations of the Study**

Hermeneutics was introduced into the study of phenomena by Heidegger (1954) believing pure description was inadequate in its ability reveal meaning. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology contains an interpretive nature therefore findings are subject to alternate interpretations. Qualitative studies such as these are conducted in natural settings and can be difficult to replicate (Creswell, 2007). Interpretations by participants and researchers are situated in specific moments of time and space (1998). Validity and reliability were addressed by the data collection of interviews, artifacts and texts, and observations of lessons and activities. Participants were involved in the co-constitutionality of interpretations to ensure accuracy. Nevertheless, there are limitations worth mentioning as it relates to this study.

**Time Period of Study**

This research study began in the month of August and concluded in November of the same year. This coincided with the beginning of their academic school year. Pre-lesson interviews, lessons and activities, and the post-lesson interviews addressed the

recognition of certain historical and contemporary figures.  Accordingly, their knowledge

of certain historical figures may have been more informed during a later time of the

school year.  Participants' prior knowledge of these figures could have affected their

understandings and ability to make sense of certain events.

**Prior Knowledge & Bracketing**

Husserl (1970) suggested that researchers engage in the process of

"phenomenological reduction" whereby the presumptions, beliefs, and pre-conceived

notions of the researcher are acknowledged, made explicit, then set aside to explore the

phenomenon objectively.  Heidegger (1962) didn't want researchers to dismiss their

preconceptions but rather recognize them as a means of how our understanding and

experience are inextricably linked.  Rather than bracketing, I utilized my preconceptions

as an essential part of the research process still understanding that individual experience

is unique.  Though uniqueness is present, generalization about the human condition can

be possible.  Perhaps a researcher utilizing the technique of "bracketing" would have

uncover different data.

**Selection of Participants**

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Etikan, 2016) was

employed to recruit and sample participants for this study.  My study focused on the talk,

understanding, and meaning-making of young Black boys therefore they were the only

participants involved in the study.  While I intentionally sought to center their voices

within the larger discourses of heroes, role models, and citizenship, perhaps a deeper

understanding would have taken place had the perspectives of parents, teachers,

counselors, principals, coaches, movie directors, musicians, and other members of their

immediate or distant lived-worlds been included as data. The pervasive influence of both structural and cultural factors in and out of school help explain students' aspirations, expectations, and experiences (Noguera, 2008). Unpacking these factors could possibly deepen the understanding of young Black boys' realities.

**Recommendations for Future Research**
**Longitudinal Studies**

One suggestion to expand and develop our understanding of young Black males' perceptions of heroes, role models and citizenship is to continue examining their experiences as they get older. As the researcher and participant seeks a "fusion of horizons" – when present understanding is moved to a new horizon or understanding by way of encounter, a constant putting forth and reexamining of our projections take place (Gadamer, 1976). This occurs outside of the researcher-participant relationship also. Therefore, horizons are not fixed. Participant experiences and interpretations may continue to change and develop as well as the researcher's. Acquiring the "uniqueness of human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p.22) in a more holistic manner could be conducted through longitudinal studies.

**Latina/Latino and Other Immigrant & Indigenous Experiences**

Throughout my study I found that there is fertile ground to conduct this research with other marginalized groups. In particular, the Latina/o population of early elementary students illustrate a potential to further amplify the voices all young children. Spotlight was casted upon the Trump administration as they sought to dehumanize, mistreat, and remove individuals of particular ethnicities under the guise of "criminality." Those targeted most were of Islamic faith and those of the Latina/o community. The

heighten sense of citizenship along with geographical location and displacement amongst these students, families, and communities could produce insight of how additional young children are experiencing these concepts.

**Researcher Reflection & Conclusion**

*"I'd rather die enormous than live dormant, that's how we on it."*

– Jay-Z,  Can I Live

Hip-hop artist and entrepreneur, Jay-Z exquisitely connects the attitude of those in urban areas, particularly Black males, to the "Give me liberty or give me death" spirit "that's woven into the fabric of what it means to be an American" (Carter, p. 123). The battle between ambition and stagnation, achievement and abstraction is wage many times with our bodies being the ultimate offering.  My inquiries of how 1st and 2nd grade African American males in an urban school talk about and understand heroes, role models, and citizenship sought to gain further insight into the lives of young children. Discourse surrounding these concepts is prevalent yet those affected by it the most, rarely have their voices included in the conversation.  Therefore, I aspired to prioritize, elevate, and honor expressions of their lived-worlds.

I am in agreement with Ladson-Billings (1995) that epistemological approaches reflect "who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have had" pertaining to "membership in a marginalized racial/ cultural group" (p. 470).  Scholars such as Scheurich and Young (1997) as the question, "Are our research epistemologies racially biased?"  I gravitate towards Dillard's (2006) notions of endarkened epistemology – "seeing research as responsibility" (p. 663).  Following Carter G. Woodson's proclamation, I see the researcher as accountable to the community and has a

responsibility to perform research that serves a purpose.  When a researcher omits their own voice, they are contributing to the "epistemological racism that lingers in the academy" (Hill, p. 90).  What a paradigm "allows" far too often resembles a power dynamic and hierarchy of what is permissible and respected.  The entire ontological and epistemological toolkit of researchers and participants alike should be utilized to its' full potential.

By viewing the participants as equal members of society, filled with valuable information and experiences, this research study was beneficial in terms of both expanding the literature and my very own personal growth.  I understood that these young African American boys would influence my life, I simply did not realize how much they would.  In my attempts to provide a constructive educational setting and positive human interaction, I was rewarded with a reciprocity that I have yet to quantify.  I am not the same.  I am a better person, better researcher, better educator, better listener, and better friend because of them.  I hope that those who read, listen to, or experience this research project are better because of them too.  So, let's work individually and in unison to supply them and future generations with a loving and justice-oriented society.

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IRB Approval

FWA # 00002030

Date: 09/09/16

PI: Marcus W Johnson

Dept: Curriculum and Instruction

Title: A Phenomenological Study of Early Elementary
African American Males' Understanding of Role Models

Re: IRB Expedited Approval for Protocol Number 2016-04-0051

Dear Marcus W Johnson:

In accordance with the Federal Regulations the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the above referenced research study and found it met the requirements for approval under the Expedited category noted below for the following period of time: 09/09/2016 to 09/08/2017. _Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date._ If the research will be conducted at more than one site, you may initiate research at any site from which you have a letter granting you permission to conduct the research. You should retain a copy of the letter in your files.

Expedited category of approval:

☐ 1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met. (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review). (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.

☐ 2) Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows: (a) from healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or (b) from other adults and children2, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.

☐ 3) Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means. Examples:
   (a) Hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner.
   (b) Deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
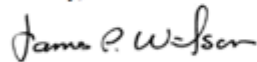   (c) Permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction.

   (d) Excreta and external secretions (including sweat).
   (e) Uncannulated saliva collected either in an un-stimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue.
   (f) Placenta removed at delivery.
   (g) Amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor.
   (h) Supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques.
   (i) Mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings.
   (j) Sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.

☐ 4) Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications).
Examples:
   (a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy.
   (b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity.
   (c) Magnetic resonance imaging.
   (d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography.
   (e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.

☐ 5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.

☒ 6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

☒ 7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.

☒ Use the attached approved informed consent document(s).

☐ You have been granted a Waiver of Documentation of Consent according to 45 CFR 46.117 and/or 21 CFR 56.109(c)(1).

☐ You have been granted a Waiver of Informed Consent according to 45 CFR 46.116(d).

**Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:**

1.  Report immediately to the IRB any unanticipated problems.

2.  Submit for review and approval by the IRB all modifications to the protocol or consent form(s). Ensure the proposed changes in the approved research are not applied without prior IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. Changes in approved research implemented without IRB review and approval initiated to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject must be promptly reported to the IRB, and will be reviewed under the unanticipated problems policy to determine whether the change was consistent with ensuring the subjects continued welfare.

3.  Report any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to continue to participate.

4.  Ensure that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.

5.  Use only a currently approved consent form, if applicable.
    Note: Approval periods are for 12 months or less.

6.  Protect the confidentiality of all persons and personally identifiable data, and train your staff and collaborators on policies and procedures for ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and their information.

7.  Submit a Continuing Review Application for continuing review by the IRB. Federal regulations require IRB review of on-going projects no less than once a year a reminder letter will be sent to you two months before your expiration date. If a reminder is not received from Office of Research Support (ORS) about your upcoming continuing review, it is still the primary responsibility of the Principal Investigator not to conduct research activities on or after the expiration date. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted, reviewed and approved, before the expiration date.

8.  Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the ORS.

9.  Include the IRB study number on all future correspondence relating to this protocol.

If you have any questions contact the ORS by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,

James C. Wilson

James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

Appendix A – Parental Permission Form

## Parental Permission for Children Participation in Research

**Title:** World Do You Hear Me? A Study of Early Elementary African American Males' Understanding of Role Models and Heroes

### Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to let your child participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to let your child be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

### Purpose of the Study

If you agree, your child will be asked to participate in a research study about how early elementary African American males understand and talk about role models and heroes. The purpose of this study is to gain insight from the perspective of young males in order to inform educational curriculum decisions, include more people in textbooks, and help role model and mentoring programs improve their effectiveness.

### What is my child going to be asked to do?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to:

- Be interviewed about their role models and heroes
- Participate in lessons and activities about role models and heroes

This study will take 6-8 weeks beginning in the fall of 2016. There will be approximately 8-10 students participating in this study. The interviews or activities on role models and heroes will take about 30 minutes to one hour per week.

Your child will be audio recorded to accurately document responses. Data collected from students in the form of written assignments and artwork will be anonymous, not contain any personal identifiers and will be kept securely by the researcher for privacy and confidentiality measures.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

### What are the possible benefits of this study?

The possible benefits of participation are aligned with improving students' skills associated with English Language Arts & Reading and Social Studies TEKS (i.e. write literary texts to express feelings about people, events and ideas). Other possible benefits include contributing to incorporating individuals and communities that are not presently included in educational curriculum and our role model conversations.

### Does my child have to participate?

No, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to

participate will not affect their relationship with Purple Sage Elementary or the University of Texas at Austin in anyway. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

This research study will take place during regular school hours.

**What if my child does not want to participate?**
In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If you child does not want to participate they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study they can change their mind later without any penalty.

Neither you nor your child will receive any type of payment participating in this study.

**How will your child's privacy and confidentiality be protected if he participates in this research study?**
Your child's privacy and the confidentiality of his/her data will be protected by use of study codes on data instead of recording identifying information, encrypting identifiable data, properly disposing, destroying or deleting study data, securely storing data within locked locations and assigning security codes to computerized records.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to your child will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your child's research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your child's participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with your child, or with your child's participation in any study.

If you choose to participate in this study, your child will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the researcher and research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for one year and then erased.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**
Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher Marcus W. Johnson at 832-704-4369 or send an email to mj2@utexas.edu for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed.

**Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?**
For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

**Signature**
You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have

decided to allow them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study you may discontinue his or her participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document

_____

Printed Name of Child

_____                    _____
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian                    Date

_____                    _____
Signature of Investigator                                   Date

Appendix B – Student Participant Agreement Form

**Assent for Participation in Research**

**Title:** World Do You Hear Me? A Study of Early Elementary African American Males'
Understanding of Role Models and Heroes

**Introduction**
You have been asked to be in a research study about young boys and their role
models and heroes. This study was explained to your [mother/father/parents/guardian]
and [she/he/they] said that you could be in it if you want to. We are going to have
lessons to help adults understand why you pick certain role models and heroes.

**What am I going to be asked to do?**
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Answer questions about role models and heroes
- Be a part of a lessons and activities about role models and heroes.

This study will take 6-8 weeks in the fall and there will be about 8 other students in this
study.

You will be audio recorded so if I miss something we say, I can hear it play it back and
hear it again. The IRB (a group of adults that make sure everything is okay with this
study) may audit or ask for study records at any time. What you write, draw, or create
will not be shared with your name on it or anything about you on it. All of your work
will be kept safe by the researcher for your privacy.

**What are the risks involved in this study?**
There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

**Do I have to participate?**
No, participation is voluntary and up to you. You should only be in the study if you
want to. You can even decide you want to be in the study now, and change your
mind later. No one will be upset.

If you would like to participate, sign your name at the bottom of this form. You will
receive a copy of this form so if you want to you can look at it later.

**Will I get anything to participate?**
You will not receive any type of payment or money for participating in this study.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**
The records of this study will be kept private. Only the person teaching the lessons
will know your name and information.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**
Before, during or after your participation contact the researcher Marcus W. Johnson (Mr.
Johnson or "MJ") at 832-704-4369 or send an email to mj2@utexas.edu for any questions
or if you feel that you have been harmed.

The University of Texas at Austin
Institutional Review Board – Revised June 2013

Page 1 of 2

**Signature**

Writing your name on this page means that the page was read by or to you and that you agree to be in the study. If you have any questions before, after or during the study, ask the person in charge. If you decide to quit the study, all you have to do is tell the person in charge.

_____          _____
Signature of Participant                             Date

Appendix C – Pre-Activity Interview Outline

"Student A"

*Interviews will be conducted in a semi-structure fashion. Therefore depending on the participant's response, the researcher might ask for clarification or elaboration.*

| Question | Response | Observation/ Comments |
|---|---|---|
| Do you know what a role model is?<br><br>Have you heard this word before? | | |
| What are some words to describe a role model? | | |
| What is a hero? | | |
| What are some words to describe a hero? | | |
| Are there people you know about from schoolbooks and class who are role models and heroes?<br><br>If so, who are they? | | |
| What have they done to be a role model or hero? | | |
| Are there people you know about who are role models and heroes that are not in schoolbooks or talked about in class? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| If so, who are they? | | |
| What have they done to be a role model or hero? | | |
| What do you like to do?<br><br>Do you know anyone who does this? If yes, then who? | | |
| What do you like about your neighborhood and where you stay?<br><br>Why? | | |
| Is there anything you don't like about your neighborhood and where you stay?<br><br>Why? | | |
| What problem do you want to solve? Or if you could fix anything in the world, what would it be?<br><br>Do you know anyone who is trying to solve this problem? If yes, then who? | | |
| If you could grow up to be famous, what would you want to be famous for? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| So do you know anyone famous for doing that? | | |
| Is there anything else you'll like to tell me about role models and heroes? | | |

Appendix D – Post-Activity Interview Outline

"Student A"

*Interviews will be conducted in a semi-structure fashion. Therefore depending on the participant's response, the researcher might ask for clarification or elaboration.*

| Question | Response | Observation/ Comments |
|---|---|---|
| Who did you pick as your role models or heroes? | | |
| Why did you pick these people? | | |
| What do you think about role models and heroes now? | | |
| If you could place your role models or heroes in a school subject, which one would you place them in (i.e. Math, Social Studies, Science, Reading, etc.)? | | |
| Do you think that you will have different role models and heroes when you get older? Why? | | |
| What would you like to do to help your community or neighborhood? Why? | | |
| Is there anything else you'll like to tell me about role models and heroes? | | |

Appendix E

**Name:**_____

Characteristics of being a good citizen.  Circle the best answer.

1. Serves the community.

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

2. Is physically strong/ powerful

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

3. Helps people

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

4. Has special abilities

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

5. Overcome obstacles

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

6. Is brave and courageous

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

7. Is smart

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

8. Plays sports (football/ basketball)

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

9. Is an entertainer

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

10. Gets into trouble but for doing the right thing.

   Very Important          Kind of Important          Not Important

Lesson Plan - 1

Lesson Plan 1: *Just Who Are Role Models?*

Marcus W. Johnson, Instructor

| Grade: 1st & 2nd | Duration: 20 minutes | |
|---|---|---|
| Topic: Role Models/ Heroes/ Historical Figures | TEKS: <br> - 110.12 (b)(18) & 110.13 (b)(18) Writing. Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas <br> - 113.12 (b)(2) & 113.13 (b)(4) History. The student understands how historical figures, patriots, and good citizens helped shape the community, state, and nation. <br> - 113.12 (b)(13) & 113.13 (b)(13) Citizenship. The student understands characrteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals. | |
| | | Materials: |
| Objective: <br><br> Students will know: <br><br> Examples of role models | Prompt 1: Share with your partner who you said were your role models/ heroes. <br><br> Based on their pre-interview responses, I will provide them with a list of people who they noted as their role models / heroes. | - List of responses indicated during pre-interview |
| Students will understand: <br><br> The definitons and differences of/ between a role model and hero | Prompt 2: Divide the list into people who we know and don't know <br><br> Example: <br><br> Know: dad, uncle, mom, mailman, teacher. etc. <br><br> Don't Know: Lebron James, Drake, Superman | - Paper and pencil <br> - White Board <br> - Smart Board |
| Students will be able to: <br><br> Share information with peers <br><br> Identify and list characterisitcs about noted individuals <br><br> Generate an image along with written text to provide a cohesive unit of interpretation | Prompt 3: Brainstorm a list of words that describe each chatergory of people. | - Paper and pencil <br> - White Board <br> - Smart Board |
| | Prompt 4: Draw a picture showing where you see and hear about them the most. | - Construction paper |

| | | - Crayons<br>- Markers<br>- |
|---|---|---|
| | Example: Picture can include images of home, school, television, family members, friends, computer, radio, books, etc. | |
| | Prompt 5: Write at least 4 sentences about your role model / hero.<br><br>Students first sentence will start by stating where they remember first hearing about or seeing their role model/ hero. | - Paper and pencil |
| | Lesson Concluded | |
| | | |

Lesson Plan – 2

## Lesson Plan 2: *Historical Figures & Role Models*

Marcus W. Johnson, Instructor

| Grade: 1st & 2nd | Duration: 20 minutes | |
|---|---|---|
| Topic: Social Studies & Language Arts<br><br>Role Models/ Heroes/ Historical Figures | TEKS:<br>- 110.12 (b)(18) & 110.13 (b)(18) Writing. Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas<br>- 113.12 (b)(2) & 113.13 (b)(4) History. The student understands how historical figures, patriots, and good citizens helped shape the community, state, and nation.<br>- 113.12 (b)(13) & 113.13 (b)(13) Citizenship. The student understands characrteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals.<br>- 113.12 (b)(12) Government. The student understands the role of authority figures, public officials, and good citizens. | |
| | | Materials: |
| Objective:<br><br>Students will know:<br><br>Historical figures within official school curriculum<br><br><br>Students will understand:<br><br>The contributions these historical figures have dedicated to society | Prompt 1: Teach lesson on selected historical figures who are identified within Social Studies TEKS<br><br>- I will introduce/ present images of each person first to see if they can identify them.<br>- Ask students to tell me what they know about each person.<br>- Describe contributions to society<br><br>*Images will include George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Soujouner Truth, Thurgood Marshall, WEB DuBois, Ceasar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Christopher Columbus, Barbra Jordan, Tuskegee Airmen (All identified within Grade 1-5 Social Studies TEKS) | - Projector<br>- Images can be printed out beforehand |
| Students will be able to:<br><br>Extrapolate their most salient and relevant historical figure<br><br>Identify and list characterisitcs | Prompt 2: Brainstorm a list of words that describe these people.<br><br>- Students will identify what they like about these individuals.<br>- Words will be recorded on the board by researcher | - Projector<br>- Whiteboard/ Smartboard |

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| about noted individuals<br><br>Develop questions to illustrate curiosity<br><br>Compose an image along with written text to provide a cohesive unit of interpretation | Prompt 3: Select who you like the most. Draw a picture showing where you see and hear about them the most.<br><br>Example: Picture can include images of home, school, television, family members, friends, computer, radio, books, classroom, library, etc. | - Consturction paper<br>- Crayons<br>- Markers |
| | Prompt 4: Write 3 questions you would like to have asked this person.<br><br>- Students will record the three questions on paper | - Paper and pencil |
| | Prompt 5: Write at least 3 sentences about the person you selected.<br><br>   -   Freewritng | - Paper and pencil |
| | Lesson Concluded | |
| | | |

Lesson Plan – 3

## Lesson Plan 3: *Citizenship, I'm a Citizen, and "Good & Bad"*

Marcus W. Johnson, Instructor

| Grade: 1st & 2nd | Duration: 20 minutes | |
|---|---|---|
| Topic: Social Studies & Language Arts Citizenship/ Role Models/ Heroes/ Historical Figures | TEKS: <br> - 110.12 (b)(18) & 110.13 (b)(18) Writing. Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas <br> - 113.12 (b)(2) & 113.13 (b)(4) History. The student understands how historical figures, patriots, and good citizens helped shape the community, state, and nation. <br> - 113.12 (b)(13) & 113.13 (b)(13) Citizenship. The student understands characrteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals. <br> - 113.12 (b)(12) Government. The student understands the role of authority figures, public officials, and good citizens. <br> - 110.13 (b)(13) Reading/ Comprehension of Informational Text/ Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. | |
| | | Materials: |
| Objective: <br><br> Students will know: <br><br> The term citizenship and its implications | Prompt 1: Teach lesson on citizenship <br><br> - I will introduce the term (i.e. being a good and contributing member of your family, neighborhood, city, state, world) <br> - I will ask students to identify anyone that we have or havent talked about who fits in this category. | - Projector <br> - Images can be printed out beforehand |
| Students will understand: <br><br> Being a good citizen implies action and doing something <br><br> Citizenship is performed in many forms | Prompt 2: Identify ways that you are a good citizen <br><br> - Students will discuss and use playdoo to illustrate how and why they believe they are good citizens. Show what good citizens do. | - Playdoo |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Students will be able to:<br><br>Associate themselves as being citizens<br><br>Determine, rate, critique and assess characterisitcs and actions associated with being a good citizen. | **Prompt 3: Identify how important some characrteristics/ actions are to being a good citizen or role model**<br><br>- Student responses will be either: V = very important, K = kind of important, N = not important.<br><br>- 10 characteristics/ actions will be presented on paper (i.e. serves the community, is physically strong, helps people, has special abilities, overcome obstacles, etc.) | - Paper and pencil |
| | **Prompt 4: Discuss their thoughts about when good people make bad mistakes**<br><br>- Student decides and gives rationale<br><br>- Examples include: A coach who only plays certain players; the mayor running red lights; a nurse who litters, etc. | - Paper and pencil |
| | **Lesson Concluded** | |
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Lesson Plan – 4

## Lesson Plan 4: *Top 3 & The Ultimate Role Model*

Marcus W. Johnson, Instructor

| Grade: 1st & 2nd | Duration: 30 minutes | |
|---|---|---|
| Topic: Social Studies & Language Arts<br><br>Citizenship/ Role Models/ Heroes/ Historical Figures | TEKS:<br>- 110.12 (b)(18) & 110.13 (b)(18) Writing. Literary Texts. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas<br>- 113.12 (b)(2) & 113.13 (b)(4) History. The student understands how historical figures, patriots, and good citizens helped shape the community, state, and nation.<br>- 113.12 (b)(13) & 113.13 (b)(13) Citizenship. The student understands characrteristics of good citizenship as exemplified by historical figures and other individuals.<br>- 113.12 (b)(12) Government. The student understands the role of authority figures, public officials, and good citizens.<br>- 110.13 (b)(13) Reading/ Comprehension of Informational Text/ Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.<br>- - 110.12 (b)(24) Students determine, locate, and explore the full range of relevenat sources addressing a reserach question and systematically record the information they gather. | |
| | | Materials: |
| Objective:<br><br>Students will know:<br><br>Arrange and synthesize material and information for presentation | Prompt 1: Select top three role models/ heroes<br><br>- Students will identify the three role models/ heroes they like best | - Paper and pencil |
| | Prompt 2: Construct your Ultimate Role Model/ Hero | - Construction paper |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Students will understand:**<br><br>How to gather and organize material and information as well as explain their knowledge | - Students will partner with a classmate and co-construct who/ what they believe is the Ultimate role model/ hero<br>- Various materials will be provided to create the role model/ hero | - Crayons<br>- Markers<br>- Triboard<br>- Computers |
| **Students will be able to:**<br><br>Team-build<br><br>Justify and support how they arrived at their conclusions | | - Triboard<br>- Computers |
| | Lesson Concluded | |
| | | |
| | | |

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