

WHEN WE PLAY OUR WAY: A CULTURALLY GROUNDED
INTERVENTION TO BUILD SOCIAL EFFICACY AND COUNTERACT
MARGINALIZATION AMONG BLACK HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

BY

ZAKKIYYA WITHERSPOON

SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLING

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ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

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ABSTRACT

Black girls navigating predominantly white educational institutions carry more than academic demands. They bear the labor of code-switching, the weight of adultification bias, and the persistent erasure of the identities that sustain them. These conditions actively constrain social efficacy development. This Dissertation-in-Practice centers the question: How does participation in a culturally grounded intervention influence the social efficacy of Black girls in a predominantly white educational spaces?

Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, Black Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Critical Pedagogy, Manuscript One builds an improvement science framework across macro, meso, and micro levels, informed by scholarship and a local needs assessment at Crescent Academy. Manuscript Two documents a Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle examining the Clap Club, a six-week intervention built around traditional hand-clapping games with nine Black high school girls. Using a mixed-methods design, the intervention surpassed its 10% improvement target: participants achieved a 30.6% mean increase in social efficacy scores. Six qualitative themes revealed deeper shifts in identity affirmation, critical consciousness, and self-advocacy. Manuscript Three translates findings into actionable recommendations for culturally affirming programming and structural change. The argument is straightforward, data-supported, and long overdue: identity-affirming spaces are not supplemental. They are essential.

Keywords: *Black girls, social efficacy, Black feminist theory, social cognitive theory, hand-clapping games, predominantly white institutions*

DEDICATED

to

My Bigmama, Helen Delores Witherspoon

*This dissertation is written in honor of your legacy. Your strength, wisdom, and
unwavering love still fills me up.*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All praises and thanks are for Allah alone, who has no partners or helpers. By His grace and mercy, I complete this Ed.D. journey triumphantly.

Thank you, Mama. You are my queen and I see you. I hope I have made you proud.

To Zorah and Musa (my children), thank you for honoring me with your advice, your support, your love, and forgiveness. You are my greatest teachers and my deepest inspiration. I hope I have made you proud.

To my brother Quentin: I'm proud of the man you've become. I hope I have made you proud too.

To my St. Louis family: thank you for the love. I hope I have made you proud.

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To the 2023 cohort: thank you for the ride. We didn't die. We got a terminal degree!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
DEDICATED.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	15
LIST OF FIGURES.....	16
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction to the Dissertation-in-Practice.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Significance of the Problem.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	3
The Intervention.....	5
Evolution of Study.....	5
Leadership Development Across the Process.....	7
CHAPTER II: MANUSCRIPT 1.....	9
Problem Framing.....	9
Figure 2-1.....	10
National Pushout Trends.....	10
Figure 2-2.....	12
Student Diversity in the Crescent School District.....	12
Figure 2-3.....	13
Teacher diversity in the district.....	13
Refined Problem Statement.....	16
Current State Versus Desired State.....	17
Causal Factors.....	19
Macro Level.....	19
Meso Level.....	21
Micro Level.....	23
Alternative Scholarly Framings.....	25
Conceptual Framework.....	28
Figure 2-4.....	29
Conceptual Framework.....	29
Evolution of Understanding.....	29
Figure 2-5.....	31

Fishbone Diagram.....	31
Understanding and Positionality.....	31
Systemic Patterns and Student Experiences.....	34
Conceptualizing the Change Process.....	37
Needs Assessment II: Identifying Possible Solutions.....	38
Figure 2-7.....	40
Driver Diagram.....	40
Limitations and Implications.....	40
Implications and Recommendations.....	42
Institutional Level.....	42
Policy Level.....	43
Research Level.....	43
Collective Responsibility.....	44
References.....	45
CHAPTER III: MANUSCRIPT II.....	52
Refined Theory of Improvement.....	52
Description of Collaborators.....	53
Table 3-1.....	54
Description of Collaborators.....	54
Problem Diagnosis.....	56
Figure 3-1.....	57
Original Fishbone Diagram.....	57
Figure 3-2.....	58
Revised Fishbone Diagram.....	58
Figure 3-3.....	60
Original Driver Diagram.....	60
Figure 3-4.....	61
Refined Driver Diagram.....	61
Explanation of Guiding Assumptions.....	63
Theory of Improvement and Addressing Core Equity Issues.....	64
Theory that Tackles Root Causes and Core Equity Issues.....	65
Figure 3-5.....	67
Conceptual Framework.....	67
Individual and Interpersonal Level.....	69
Institutional Level.....	70
Core Equity Impact.....	70
PDSA Cycle 1: "Plan" Phase.....	72
Short-Term Goals and Planned Intervention.....	72

Table 3-2.....	73
Short-Term Goals.....	73
Timeline for Implementation.....	74
Table 3-3.....	75
Timeline for Implementation with Specific Activities.....	75
Methodological Approach to Improvement.....	76
Research Questions.....	76
Data Collection Methods.....	77
Session Observations.....	77
Rationales for Specific Data Collection Methods.....	79
Semi-Structured Interviews.....	79
Session Observations and Audio Recordings.....	80
Artifact Collection.....	80
Description of the Development of Data Collection Instruments.....	81
Quantitative Instrument: Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy (SPSSE).....	81
Culturally Responsive Qualitative Instruments.....	82
I Am Worthy Workbook.....	82
Semi-Structured Interview Protocols.....	82
Session Observations, Audio Recordings, and Artifacts.....	83
Description of Setting and Sample Selection Criteria.....	83
Sample Selection Criteria.....	84
Exclusion Criteria.....	84
Principles of Improvement Science.....	85
Small-Scale Testing for Deep Learning.....	85
Evidence-Building and Documentation.....	85
Context-Specific Focus with Transferable Insights.....	86
Intended Data Analysis.....	86
Validity and Trustworthiness.....	87
Member Checking.....	88
Research Ethics.....	88
Positionality Statement.....	90
Limitations of the Study.....	91
Possible Barriers to the Study.....	94
Methodological Complexity and Research Validity.....	96
PDSA Cycle 1: “DO” Phase.....	97
Implementation Narrative.....	97
Session Setting and Format.....	97
Session Progression.....	98

Change 1: Shift to Solo Facilitation.....	99
Change 2: Journal as Gift Rather Than Ongoing Data Source.....	99
Change 3: Restructuring Session Five to Prioritize Advocacy Skills.....	100
A Report on PDSA Cycle 1: The “Study” Phase.....	102
Quantitative Analysis.....	104
Individual Participant Results.....	105
Qualitative Data.....	107
Theme One: Safe Space Creation as Foundational Mechanism for Vulnerability and Authentic Disclosure.....	107
Theme Two: Cultural Connection and Identity Affirmation Built Pride and Positioned Participants as Cultural Producers.....	109
Theme Three: Critical Consciousness Development Reframed Marginalization from Personal Failure to Systemic Oppression, Protecting Against Internalized Racism.....	111
Theme Four: Documented Experiences of Pervasive Racism and Institutional Failure Validated the Necessity of Culturally Affirming Counterspaces.....	113
Theme Five: Social Efficacy Growth Enabled by Cultural Affirmation and Peer Solidarity Manifested as Individual Confidence and Collective Action Capacity....	115
Theme Six: Advocacy Strategy Acquisition and Real-World Application Translated Critical Consciousness into Concrete Resistance Practices.....	117
Report on PDSA Cycle 1: The “Act” Phase.....	120
Adapt the Intervention.....	120
Revised Fishbone Diagram.....	121
Revised Driver Diagram with Critical Consciousness.....	122
Revised Driver Diagram.....	123
Revised Theory of Improvement.....	123
Revised Conceptual Framework.....	125
Reflexivity and Positionality.....	125
Duration & Timeline.....	126
Session-by-Session Modifications.....	127
Participant Recruitment.....	128
Expanded Collaborator Team.....	130
Methodological Refinements for Cycle 2 Data Collection.....	131
Expected Outcomes and Success Metrics for Cycle 2.....	131
References.....	132
CHAPTER IV: MANUSCRIPT 3.....	139
Executive Summary.....	139
Root Causes of the Problem.....	139
Theoretical Framework and Intervention Design.....	140

Methodology and Research Approach.....	141
Research Questions.....	142
Findings.....	143
Quantitative Outcomes: Exceeding Expectations.....	143
Qualitative Themes: Six Pathways to Transformation.....	143
Recommendations.....	145
Short-Term Recommendations (Immediate).....	145
Recommendation 1: Expand and Sustain Black Identity-Affirming Programming..	145
Recommendation 2: Establish Youth-Led Accountability Mechanisms.....	145
Medium-Term Recommendations (1-3 years).....	146
Recommendation 3: Implement Structural Changes to Reduce Surveillance.....	146
Long-Term Recommendations (3-5 years).....	147
Recommendation 4: Invest in Diversifying Staff.....	147
Recommendation 5: Integrate Critical Consciousness Development into Curricula.	147
Challenges to Implementation.....	149
Financial Barriers.....	149
Ideological Resistance.....	149
Capacity Constraints.....	150
Deeply Rooted Systems Mindsets.....	151
Action Plan.....	152
Recommendation 1: Expand and Sustain Black Identity-Affirming Programming..	152
Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 1.....	153
Barriers and Alternatives.....	155
Budget Constraints.....	155
Facilitator Recruitment Challenges.....	155
Recommendation 2: Establish Youth-Led Accountability Mechanisms.....	156
Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 2.....	156
Barriers and Alternatives.....	158
Technology Platform Selection.....	158
Student Skepticism About Administrator Response.....	159
Time Commitment.....	159
Recommendation 3: Implement Structural Changes to Reduce Surveillance.....	160
Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 3.....	161
Barriers and Alternatives.....	163
Professional Development Scheduling Constraints.....	163
Physical Space Allocation for Affinity Groups.....	164

Recommendation 4: Invest in Diversifying Staff.....	164
Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 4.....	165
Barriers and Alternative.....	167
HBCU Partnership Development Timeline.....	167
Limited Candidate Pool Despite Recruitment Efforts.....	168
Recommendation 5: Integrate Critical Consciousness Development into Curricula.....	169
Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 4.....	170
Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 5.....	172
Barriers and Alternatives.....	172
Parent Community Concerns.....	172
Volunteer Teacher Recruitment Challenges.....	173
References.....	174
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION.....	179
Conclusion to the Dissertation-in-Practice.....	179
Conclusion.....	179
Linkage Among the Manuscripts.....	180
Lessons Learned.....	181
Future Directions.....	182
REFERENCES (Overall).....	184
Appendix 1-A.....	197
Glossary of Terms.....	197
Appendix 1-B.....	202
Empathy Interview Protocol for Black Girls at Crescent Academy.....	202
Appendix 1-C.....	205
Appendix 1-D.....	207
Guidance Counselor Protocol and Questions.....	207
Appendix 2-A.....	209
Informed Consent Form.....	209
Appendix 2-B.....	218
Assent Form for Participation in Research Project.....	21
Appendix 2-C.....	219
Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy.....	220
Appendix 2-D.....	221
Pre-Intervention Interview.....	221
Appendix 2-E.....	223
Post-Intervention Interview Protocol.....	223
Appendix 2-F.....	225

Clap Club Engagement Observation Rubric.....	225
Appendix 2-G.....	229
Miss Mary Mack (Original Version).....	229
Appendix 2-H.....	230
Miss Miracool (Participant-Created Version).....	230
Appendix 2-I.....	232
Appendix 2-J.....	236
Appendix 2-K.....	238
Appendix 2-L.....	239

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3-1: Description of Collaborators.....	52
Table 3-2: Short-Term Goals.....	71
Table 3-3: Timeline for Implementation with Specific Activities.....	73
Table 3-4: Individual Participant Results.....	104
Table 4-1: Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 1.....	152
Table 4-2: Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 2.....	155
Table 4-3: Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 3.....	160
Table 4-4: Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 4.....	164
Table 4-5: Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 4.....	169

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1: National Pushout Trends.....	9
Figure 2-2: Student Diversity in the Crescent School District.....	11
Figure 2-3: Teacher diversity in the district.....	12
Figure 2-4: Conceptual Framework.....	27
Figure 2-5: Fishbone Diagram.....	29
Figure 2-6: Concept Map Note.....	30
Figure 2-7: Driver Diagram.....	39
Figure 3-1: Original Fishbone Diagram.....	55
Figure 3-2: Revised Fishbone Diagram.....	57
Figure 3-3: Original Driver Diagram.....	59
Figure 3-4: Refined Driver Diagram.....	60
Figure 3-5: Conceptual Framework.....	66
Figure 3-6: Revised Driver Diagram.....	122
Figure 3-7: Revised Conceptual Framework.....	124

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Dissertation-in-Practice

Introduction

This three-manuscript Dissertation in Practice investigates the impact of Clap Club, a culturally grounded intervention using traditional hand-clapping games, on Black¹ high school girls' social efficacy at Crescent Academy (a pseudonym), a private, college preparatory school with a religious based mission. The first manuscript establishes the problem of practice through national literature and two needs assessments. The second manuscript describes the design and implementation of a six-week intervention using Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles grounded in improvement science. The third manuscript presents an action plan for sustainable, system-level improvement. This study argues that persistent inequities in Black girls' educational experiences are driven not by deficits in students but by institutional practices and a lack of cultural responsiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Black girls in U.S. schools face disproportionate discipline, lower academic expectations, and systematic exclusion despite demonstrating academic capability (Annamma et al., 2019; Apugo et al., 2023; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016; Epstein)

¹ This dissertation capitalizes Black when referring to people of African descent to recognize shared identity, culture, and history (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2020). Lowercase white is used when referring to people of European descent because whiteness functions as an unmarked racial category rather than a cohesive cultural identity forged through collective experience (Tharps, 2014). This choice reflects contemporary scholarly practice in education and social sciences and honors Black self-determination in naming (Appiah, 2020).

et al., 2017). The intersectionality of race and gender creates unique experiences of marginalization that cannot be addressed by interventions designed around race or gender alone (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). Black girls are subjected to adultification bias, whereby educators perceive them as less innocent and more culpable than white peers, leading to harsher disciplinary responses (Epstein et al., 2017). In predominantly white spaces, they frequently experience cultural isolation, microaggressions, and pressure to suppress their authentic identities (Carter Andrews, 2012; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Harris, 2021).

At Crescent Academy, Black girls represent only 8% of the student population, yet account for disproportionate disciplinary referrals (Addington, 2023). Needs Assessment data substantiates this pattern: the school's guidance counselor confirmed that teachers were referring Black girls to the office for behavior characterized as disrespectful, and empathy interviews revealed that Black girl students consistently experienced differential treatment, reporting that they were sent to the office for behaviors that did not result in referrals for their white peers. Beyond the discipline disparity itself, empathy interviews revealed that Black girls felt exhausted from constantly navigating white institutional norms, experienced isolation, and lacked confidence in their ability to advocate for themselves and their communities. This exhaustion, isolation, and lack of confidence signaled diminished social efficacy, the very thing that students need to navigate social situations and advocate for themselves. The core problem of practice is therefore not individual student deficits but rather an institutional opportunity to intentionally create conditions that support Black girls' social

efficacy development, their belief in their ability to navigate social situations, build relationships, and advocate for themselves and their communities (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Significance of the Problem

This problem reflects persistent inequities affecting Black girls nationwide. Black girls are suspended at rates disproportionate to their white peers, face hypercriminalization for normative behavior, and are subject to disciplinary consequences rooted in bias rather than conduct (Anderson & Slate, 2024; Farinde-Wu et al., 2022). They are underrepresented in gifted programs and report lower school belonging (Brown et al., 2024; Cohen, 2022). These disparities stem not from student behavior but from systemic factors, including implicit bias, deficit-oriented school cultures, and the absence of culturally responsive practices (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016).

For Crescent Academy, this problem represents both a moral imperative and a strategic opportunity. As a private institution grounded in social justice principles, the school has an obligation to ensure all students, especially those marginalized, experience belonging and empowerment. Without intentional programming and interventions designed to cultivate social efficacy, build relationships, and support self-advocacy, Black girls will continue to move through this institution in ways that undermine their well-being and ability to successfully navigate such spaces.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Bandura's (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory, specifically his conceptualization of self-efficacy as individuals' beliefs in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Social efficacy, a domain-specific application of self-efficacy theory, focuses on confidence to

navigate social situations, build relationships, and advocate for oneself (Smith & Betz, 2000). Bandura identified four sources through which self-efficacy develops: mastery experiences (successful performance), vicarious experiences (observing others succeed), social persuasion (encouragement from others), and positive physiological/affective states (emotional well-being). The Clap Club intervention was designed to systematically activate all four sources to build Black girls' social efficacy.

Supporting this framework, three additional theoretical perspectives informed the intervention design and implementation. Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy provided the methodological approach, emphasizing dialogue, consciousness-raising, and praxis as vehicles for empowerment, essential processes for developing the critical awareness component of social efficacy. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) intersectionality framework and Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) critical race theory in education highlighted why Black girls specifically require intentional social efficacy interventions: their unique positioning at the intersection of racism and sexism creates distinct barriers to developing confidence in navigating social systems. Finally, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework shaped the intervention's content by positioning Black girls' cultural practices, particularly hand-clapping games, as assets that could serve as mastery experiences rather than deficits to be remediated, directly activating Bandura's most powerful source of social efficacy development.

Together, these frameworks created a coherent intervention logic: Critical pedagogy and critical race theory established that systemic marginalization undermines Black girls' confidence, making culturally affirming spaces essential for building social efficacy; community cultural wealth positioned hand-clapping games as mastery

experiences rooted in existing cultural resources; and Bandura's social cognitive theory provided both the developmental mechanism, the four sources of efficacy, and the measurement instrument, the Scale of Perceived School Self-Efficacy (SPSSE).

The Intervention

The intervention consisted of six weekly Clap Club sessions during Fall 2025 with nine Black girls in grades nine through twelve. Sessions included learning traditional and contemporary hand-clapping games, creating original games reflecting participants' experiences and identities, engaging in critical dialogue about experiences of marginalization, and practicing advocacy strategies. The study employed a sequential mixed-methods design, using the SPSSE survey alongside qualitative data from empathy interviews, weekly reflection journals, video recordings, facilitator observation rubrics, and a final focus group.

Evolution of Study

This dissertation reflects the iterative nature of improvement science across three interconnected manuscripts, each representing a distinct phase of scholarly inquiry and leadership development. The first manuscript, problem identification and causal analysis, established the foundation by documenting how Black girls at Crescent Academy experienced marginalization through surveillance, cultural erasure, and diminished self-perception. Through empathy interviews, the problem was identified not as individual student deficits but as systemic institutional failure to support Black girls' social efficacy development.

This manuscript employed ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), a framework that examines how multiple layers of a person's environment shape their

development and experiences. This theory is used to analyze how macro-level (societal stereotypes), meso-level (school policies), and micro-level (daily interactions) factors converged to undermine Black girls' confidence in navigating social situations and advocating for themselves. The causal analysis revealed that addressing social efficacy required culturally affirming spaces where Black girls' identities were celebrated rather than suppressed.

The second manuscript translated understanding into action through the six-week Clap Club intervention, a disciplined inquiry process grounded in Bandura's (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory. The intervention systematically activated all four sources of self-efficacy development: mastery experiences through hand-clapping games, vicarious experiences through peer modeling, social persuasion through facilitated dialogue, and positive affective states through culturally affirming community. Supporting frameworks included Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy for consciousness-raising methodology, Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) intersectionality for understanding Black girls' unique positioning, and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth for centering cultural practices as assets. Using Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles, the researcher collected quantitative data (SPSSE scores) and qualitative data demonstrating 30.6% improvement in social efficacy with 100% participant success rate. This manuscript documented not only outcomes but also the responsive adjustments made during implementation based on participant feedback.

The third manuscript extended beyond the intervention to propose institutional transformation through systems-level recommendations and organizational change. Drawing on the evidence from Manuscripts one and two, the researcher developed five

recommendations addressing root causes identified in the causal analysis: expanding culturally affirming programming, establishing youth-led accountability mechanisms, reducing surveillance through policy reform, diversifying staff, and integrating critical consciousness development into the curriculum. This manuscript employed systems thinking and organizational change theory to design actionable implementation plans that Crescent Academy can sustain independently, addressing barriers and creating sustainable structures.

Leadership Development Across the Process

The researcher's development as a scholar-practitioner evolved significantly across these three manuscripts. In Manuscript One, the researcher operated primarily as an outside researcher analyzing problems through established frameworks. By Manuscript Two, the researcher had transitioned to facilitator-researcher... In Manuscript Three, the researcher shifted to systems thinker and change consultant, considering how interventions scale, how organizations sustain change, and how to build internal capacity rather than create dependency on external expertise. This progression reflects growth from problem analysis to intervention design to organizational transformation, the complete arc of improvement science scholarship.

Throughout this progression, the researcher moved from viewing the problem as individual Black girls lacking confidence to understanding it as systemic institutional failure to affirm Black girls' cultural identities and provide spaces for collective empowerment. This evolution reflects genuine scholarly inquiry committed to centering participant voices in shaping both the intervention and the knowledge produced from it. The three manuscripts together demonstrate how disciplined inquiry progresses from

understanding problems deeply, to testing solutions rigorously, to designing sustainable systems-level change.

CHAPTER II: MANUSCRIPT 1

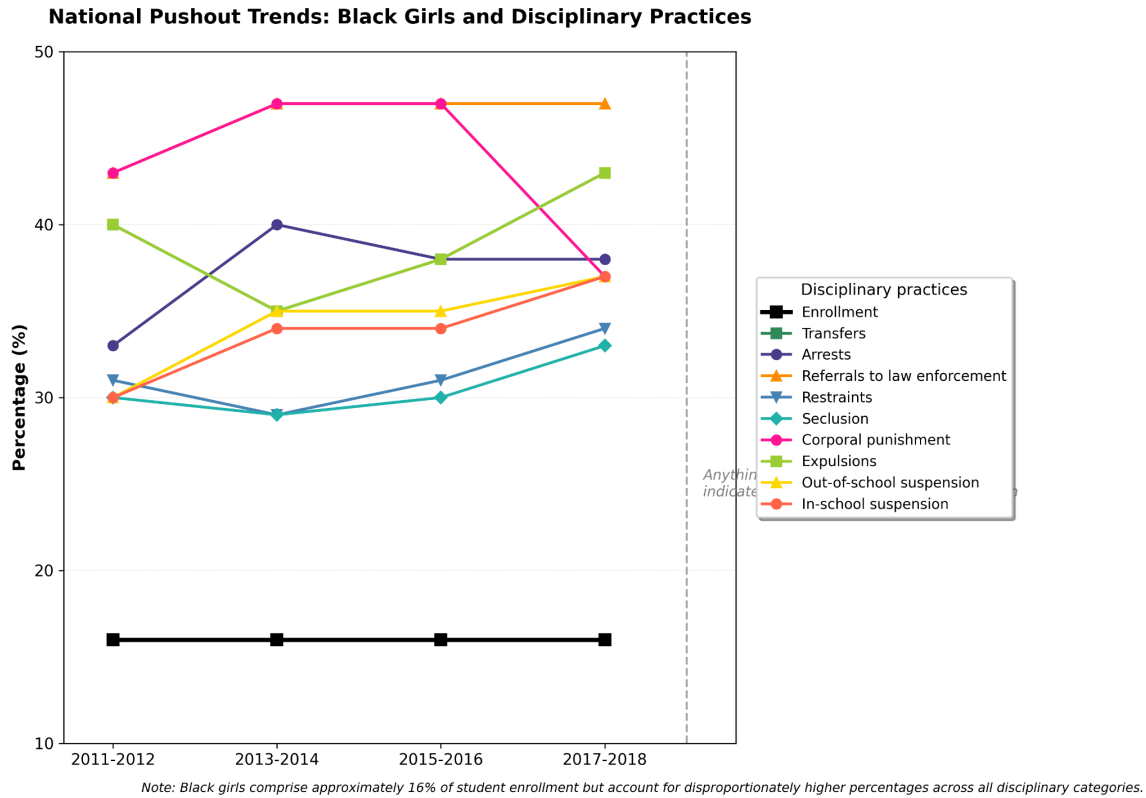
Problem Framing

The marginalization of Black girls in schools exemplifies how intersecting systems of oppression create barriers to equitable education (Crenshaw, 1991, 2010). Based on findings from empathy interviews and institutional data analysis, this marginalization manifested in four primary ways at Crescent Academy (pseudonym): disproportionate surveillance and disciplinary actions, cultural erasure and isolation, academic disengagement, and diminished self-perception. Despite these documented patterns, Crescent Academy had not implemented any targeted supports designed specifically for Black girls. This represents a missed opportunity. As a predominantly white institution, Crescent Academy is precisely the kind of setting where intentional, culturally grounded intervention is most needed, and most absent.

Black girls experience disproportionate disciplinary consequences in educational settings across the United States. According to the National Pushout Trends (2024) shown in Figure 2-1, Black girls are overrepresented in every type of disciplinary action. Although Black girls comprise only 15% of the student population nationwide, after tracking discipline rates for over four years, they account for over three times their enrollment share of disciplinary penalties and more than double their share in expulsions (National Pushout Trends, 2024). This pattern reflects what Morris (2016) terms "pushout," a systematic process through which Black girls are criminalized and excluded from educational spaces.

Figure 2-1

National Pushout Trends



Note: Adapted from National pushout trends - 2024 FINAL.pdf.

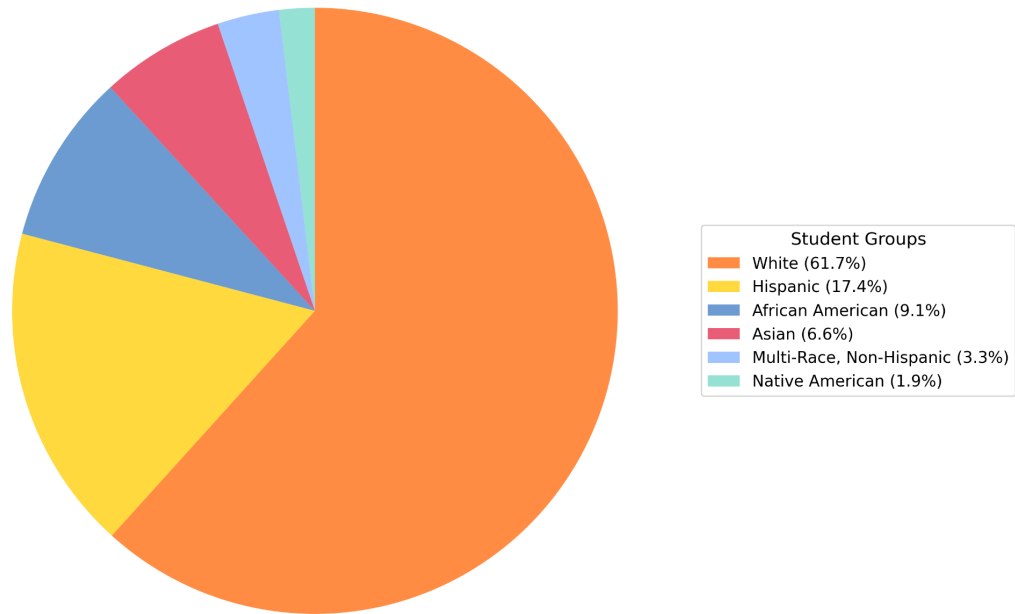
Research demonstrates that punitive discipline practices are associated with poor student achievement and failure to complete school (Pearman & Turner, 2019). When students deviate from dominant cultural narratives, their learning and academic achievement suffer (Cummins, 1986). The psychological costs of this marginalization are substantial: Black girls experience heightened stereotype threat (Spencer et al., 2006), engage in exhausting code-switching to navigate white-dominated spaces (McCluney et al., 2019), and face adultification bias that denies them the protections of childhood afforded to white peers (Epstein et al., 2017).

Scholars have documented systematic patterns of marginalization, cultural erasure, and adultification of Black girls in educational settings (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016). These national trends were reflected in the local context of Crescent Academy, where demographic data revealed a student population that was approximately 78% white, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 7% African American, 4% Asian, and 2% Multi-Race or Other. Within this predominantly white institution (PWI), Black girls reported experiences of isolation and diminished academic self-concept. These reports, gathered through empathy interviews, show how national patterns of marginalization manifested in students' daily experiences.

Figure 2-2

Student Diversity in the Crescent School District

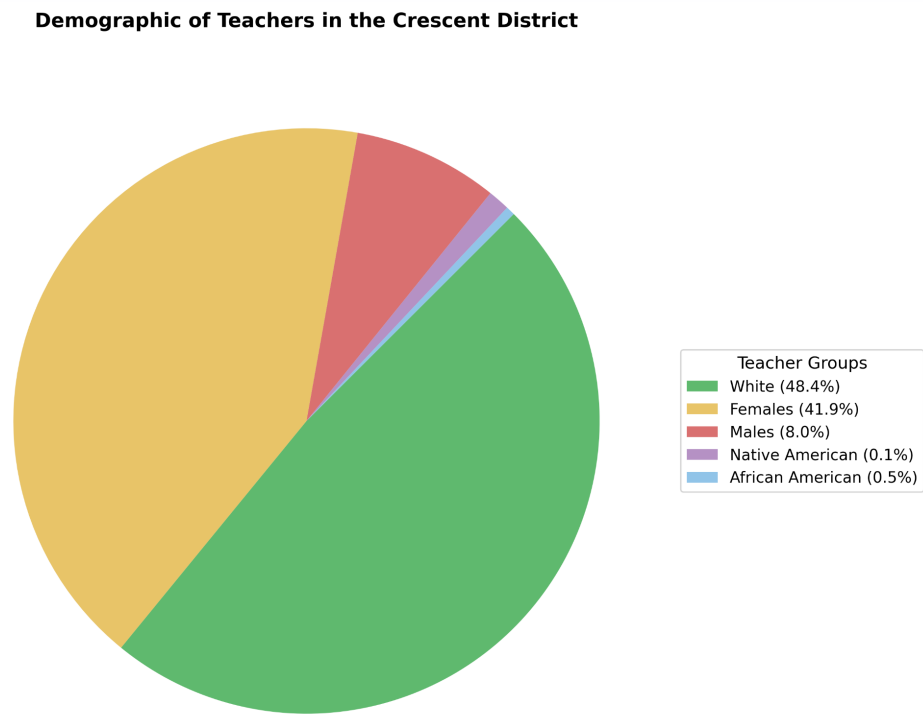
Demographic of Students in the Crescent District



Note: Ethnicity breakdown at Crescent Academy High School adapted from DESE.gov

Figure 2-3

Teacher diversity in the district



Note. Ethnicity breakdown in the Crescent School District, adapted from DESE.gov

Crescent Academy is an educational institution in the Northern region of Massachusetts. As a private college preparatory school, it offers a faith-based educational philosophy combined with rigorous academic programs. The school's educational approach reflects both its religious mission and commitment to preparing students for higher education. This private educational environment emphasizes community values and service while maintaining high academic expectations aligned with 21st-century challenges.

The school culture at Crescent Academy reflected both traditional private school values and evolving demographics, as the student population had become increasingly

diverse over the past decade. While maintaining high academic expectations evidenced by strong college acceptance rates and Advanced Placement offerings, the school faced challenges common to PWIs attempting to support growing minority populations (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Research demonstrates that PWIs often struggle to move beyond surface-level diversity initiatives to address the systemic barriers that marginalize students of color (Castagno, 2014). As revealed through student interviews, there remained a significant gap between the school's aspirational culture of inclusion and the lived experiences of minority students, particularly Black girls, who reported feeling marginalized and under constant surveillance.

The demographic data revealed that Black students comprised only 11% of the student population at Crescent Academy, with Black girls representing an even smaller subset. This numerical minority status creates what Collins (2000) describes as heightened visibility paired with social invisibility; Black girls are simultaneously hypervisible as racial others, yet socially invisible as their experiences and perspectives are dismissed or ignored. Combined with a predominantly white faculty and administration (only 0.8% Black teachers institution-wide), this demographic reality created unique challenges that demanded immediate attention.

The stark representation gap between students and educators was particularly problematic given research demonstrating that teacher-student cultural synchrony significantly impacts educational outcomes (Gay, 2018). Black students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from having Black teachers who serve as cultural interpreters, advocates, and role models (Achinstein et al., 2010). The absence of Black women educators at Crescent Academy meant that Black girls lacked adults who could

authentically understand and validate their intersectional experiences as both Black and female in a predominantly white space.

Cultural competency training for teachers needed to be specifically tailored to address the intersectional experiences of Black girls, moving beyond generic diversity workshops to engage with the actual lived experiences of students in the building (Kohli, 2019). Research demonstrates that effective professional development for culturally responsive practice requires sustained investment over multiple years, not one-time workshops (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, such training must address implicit biases and adultification attitudes that lead educators to perceive Black girls as less innocent and more deserving of harsh discipline than their white peers (Epstein et al., 2017).

Conversations with school administrators indicated a concerning gap: while teachers had reported difficulties working with Black female students, no formal investigation or data collection had been conducted to understand these students' perspectives or needs. This reactive rather than proactive approach perpetuated misunderstandings and cultural disconnects between staff and students, reflecting what Picower (2009) identifies as "unexamined whiteness of teaching," a failure to recognize how educators' own racial identities and cultural assumptions shape their interactions with students of color.

While targeted support for Black girls was crucial, it required integration into a comprehensive strategy for educational equity. This broader framework addressed systematic collection and analysis of disciplinary data disaggregated by race and gender (Morris, 2016), regular feedback mechanisms for minority students to share their

experiences (Mitra, 2018), curriculum review to ensure cultural relevance and representation (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and professional development that specifically addressed teacher-student cultural dynamics (Gay, 2018).

Refined Problem Statement

Initial analysis identified the marginalization of Black girls at Crescent Academy as a persistent institutional concern. Evidence included disproportionate surveillance and disciplinary referrals, cultural erasure and social isolation, academic disengagement, and diminished self-perception. National data and academic literature confirmed these patterns were not unique to this setting (Blake et al., 2011; Morris, 2016; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; National Women's Law Center, 2017; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). However, a deeper causal analysis revealed that marginalization is itself the product of interconnected root causes, not the root problem to be solved.

Those root causes include systemic racism and implicit bias (Jones, 2000), the absence of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), stereotyping and adultification of Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017), insufficient representation of Black women in educational leadership (Achinstein et al., 2010), and inadequate teacher preparation in cultural competency (Gay, 2018; Morris & Perry, 2017). Together, these factors produce the conditions in which Black girls' social efficacy erodes.

Crescent Academy had implemented programs intended to support belonging and student success, including faith-based community service initiatives and mentorship programs. While these efforts reflected institutional good faith, they did not address the

underlying conditions producing marginalization. Black girls continued to report feelings of cultural isolation and diminished confidence in their ability to navigate the school environment authentically.

Empathy interviews conducted in Spring 2025 deepened this understanding. A concerning pattern had emerged between educators and Black female students: some teachers reported to administrators that they perceived certain Black girls as disrespectful and difficult to manage. This perception raised serious questions about cultural misunderstanding, implicit bias rooted in controlling images of Black femininity (Collins, 2000), and the institution's readiness to respond. Students, meanwhile, described exhaustion from code-switching, from surveillance, and from the daily work of surviving a space not built for them.

The core problem of practice is therefore institutional: Crescent Academy has not created the conditions that support Black girls' social efficacy development. For the purposes of this study, social efficacy is operationalized as a student's belief in her capacity to navigate social situations, build relationships, and advocate for herself and her community (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Marginalization is the outcome of that failure. This study addresses that gap.

Current State Versus Desired State

The gap between current and desired states showed a stark contrast. Currently, Black girls navigate an environment characterized by constant surveillance (Morris, 2016), cultural isolation (Collins, 2000), academic self-doubt (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and limited representation in leadership positions. This surveillance culture reflects what Foucault (1977) termed disciplinary power: a system of monitoring and control that

shapes behavior through constant observation. For Black girls in PWIs, this surveillance operates through what Morris (2016) identifies as "attitude policing," where their culturally specific expressions of emotion, communication styles, and behaviors are pathologized and punished.

The desired state envisions a transformation to create safe, affirming spaces where Black girls' cultural identities were celebrated, their academic confidence flourished, and they saw themselves represented in leadership roles throughout the school community. This vision aligns with what Ginwright (2018) calls "healing-centered engagement," moving beyond trauma-informed approaches to create spaces that actively restore wellness, build agency, and affirm cultural identity. Such spaces recognize Black girls not as damaged subjects requiring intervention, but as holders of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) deserving of educational environments that honor their humanity and nurture their brilliance.

This gap represents not only an academic challenge but also a fundamental equity issue that impacted students' long-term educational outcomes and life opportunities. According to research by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2019), negative school experiences have long-lasting effects on confidence, self-esteem, personal relationships, and career opportunities. Research specific to Black girls confirms that school-based marginalization perpetuates cycles of disadvantage that extend well beyond the classroom, limiting their ability to develop the social efficacy needed to navigate academic and professional spaces (Apugo et al., 2023; Brown et al., 2024).

Causal Factors

The gap between the current state and the desired outcome represented a space of disempowerment and limited ambitions. Addressing the problem has the potential to advance gender and racial equity in our society and ensure that Black girls enter diverse fields and have the opportunity to make meaningful contributions and take on leadership roles (Crenshaw, 1991). The marginalization of Black girls in educational settings stemmed from interconnected factors operating at multiple levels, requiring analysis through what Jones (2000) describes as a "levels of racism" framework, examining how racism operates simultaneously at institutional, personally mediated, and internalized levels.

Understanding these causal factors through an ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) reveals how macro-level societal forces, meso-level institutional practices, and micro-level interpersonal interactions converge to create and perpetuate marginalization. This multilevel analysis is essential because, as Crenshaw (1991) argues, intersectional oppression cannot be understood by examining race or gender in isolation, nor can it be addressed through single-level interventions. Rather, meaningful change requires simultaneous attention to systemic, institutional, and interpersonal dimensions of inequity.

Macro Level

At the macro level, systemic racism manifests through widespread stereotypical beliefs that frame Black girls as problematic, defiant, and academically deficient. These controlling images, Collins (2000) identified as the Jezebel, the Sapphire, and the Mammy stereotypes, deny Black girls access to the protected status of childhood and

femininity afforded to white girls. Morris (2016) documents how these perceptions, rooted in historical dehumanization of Black women and girls, combine with limited access to resources and low representation in faculty to create structural barriers to educational success.

The adultification of Black girls operates as a particularly pernicious macro-level force. Research by Epstein et al. (2017) reveals that adults perceive Black girls as young as five years old as needing less nurturing, less protection, and less support than white girls of the same age. This adultification bias is compounded by teacher perceptions that frame Black girls' culturally grounded communication styles as disrespectful or defiant, resulting in disciplinary referrals that reflect bias rather than behavior (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). When educators view Black girls through this distorted lens, they are more likely to punish behaviors that would be understood as age-appropriate experimentation or emotional expression in white children.

The negative societal portrayal of Black girls, often influenced by media representations that emphasize hypersexuality, aggression, and deviance, directly impacts how they are treated in school settings (Crenshaw et al., 2015). These racialized and gendered stereotypes lead to what Blake et al. (2011) and Diem and Welton (2016) identify as unfair disciplinary practices and lowered expectations. National data confirms these patterns: Black girls receive harsher punishments for subjective infractions like defiance or disrespect, behaviors subject to cultural interpretation, while white girls receive more lenient treatment for objectively verifiable infractions (Anderson & Slate, 2024; Farinde-Wu et al., 2022; Morris, 2016).

Macro-level policies also shape educational inequity through what Ladson-Billings (2006) terms the "education debt," the accumulated historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral debts owed to communities of color. School funding formulas that privilege wealthy, predominantly white districts; tracking systems that funnel Black students away from advanced coursework; and standardized testing regimes that reflect white, middle-class cultural knowledge all represent macro-level structural barriers (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Meso Level

At the meso level, school culture and institutional practices perpetuate marginalization through what Bonilla-Silva (2018) describes as "racism without racists," organizational structures and policies that maintain racial inequality while individual actors deny racist intent. As evidenced in the empathy interviews, Black girls at Crescent Academy experience this through daily interactions. This cultural disconnect reflects what Gay (2018) terms a lack of cultural synchrony, the misalignment between students' home cultures and school culture that leads to misinterpretation of culturally appropriate behaviors as defiance or disrespect.

The guidance counselor acknowledged this cultural disconnect, noting the need to understand student backgrounds better: "Who are they? Are they coming from Africa? Are they coming from the Caribbean?" While this recognition represents important awareness, it also reveals how institutional practices often homogenize Black students' diverse experiences, failing to recognize the heterogeneity within Black communities (Tatum, 2017). This cultural flattening erases the specific histories, migration patterns, linguistic diversity, and cultural practices that shape individual Black girls' identities.

These institutional dynamics reflect what Morris (2016), Berry and Mizelle (2006), and Blake et al. (2011) describe as school cultures that mimic dominant group norms, marginalizing Black girls' experiences and cultural expressions. Curricula that center European and European American perspectives while relegating Black history and literature to supplementary status communicate that Blackness is peripheral to real knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). School dress codes that prohibit natural Black hairstyles, communication norms that pathologize African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and social expectations that privilege white middle-class interactional styles all serve as gatekeeping mechanisms that require Black girls to suppress their authentic selves to gain institutional acceptance (Morris, 2016).

Institutional policies around discipline disproportionately target Black girls through what Annamma et al. (2019) identify as the nexus of race, gender, and disability marginalization. Zero-tolerance policies, subjective infractions like "willful defiance," and the presence of school resource officers create a carceral environment that criminalizes typical adolescent behavior when performed by Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Research demonstrates that these disciplinary disparities cannot be explained by differences in behavior; rather, they reflect differential interpretation and response to behavior based on students' race and gender (Blake et al., 2011).

The absence of Black women educators compounds institutional marginalization. As participants noted, they could not identify a single Black woman teacher or administrator who could serve as a role model or cultural mentor. This representation gap matters profoundly: research confirms that Black students benefit academically and socio-emotionally from having Black teachers who serve as cultural translators,

advocates, and warm demanders (Achinstein et al., 2010; Kohli, 2019). Black women educators bring what Burciaga and Kohli (2018) term "community cultural wealth," pedagogical approaches rooted in their own experiences navigating racism and sexism that enable them to recognize and nurture Black girls' potential.

Micro Level

At the micro level, individual interactions between teachers, peers, and Black girls revealed the intimate manifestations of these broader patterns. One student's experience captured this dynamic: "When this other student came late, it wasn't a problem...but when I got the late pass and my teacher, she just like kept asking me where I was." (Empathy Interview, 2025). This differential treatment exemplifies what Sue et al. (2007) identify as racial microaggressions: brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights toward people of color.

These microaggressions accumulate to create what Smith et al. (2007) term "racial battle fatigue," the psychological, physiological, and behavioral strain experienced by people of color as they navigate predominantly white spaces. The constant vigilance required to monitor one's behavior, anticipate stereotyping, and protect oneself from racial slights creates cognitive load that impairs academic performance and well-being (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Spencer et al., 2006).

Peer interactions compound these challenges. Black girls at Crescent Academy described being called ghetto for wearing braids, being told they were "acting white" when performing well academically, and experiencing social isolation as they attempted to navigate conflicting cultural expectations. These interactions reflect what Fordham and

Ogbu (1986) analyzed as the "burden of acting white," the social sanctions Black students face from both Black and white peers when they demonstrate academic achievement. However, more recent scholarship problematizes this framework, arguing that Black students resist not achievement itself but the cultural erasure that schools demand as the price of academic success (Carter, 2005).

This differential treatment, combined with academic self-doubt, demonstrated how daily interactions eroded both confidence and engagement. The internalization of negative stereotypes represents what Steele (1997) identifies as "stereotype threat," the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about one's group, which creates anxiety that impairs performance. When Black girls repeatedly receive messages that they are less capable, less deserving, and more problematic than their white peers, these messages become internalized, shaping their academic self-concept and limiting their aspirations (Spencer et al., 2006).

Teacher expectations operate as particularly powerful micro-level influences. Research demonstrates that teachers' beliefs about students' abilities become self-fulfilling prophecies, shaping the opportunities and support students receive (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). When teachers hold deficit perspectives toward Black girls, viewing them through lenses of cultural deprivation rather than cultural wealth, they are less likely to encourage advanced coursework, nominate them for gifted programs, or provide the academic and emotional support necessary for success (Yosso, 2005).

The cumulative impact of macro, meso, and micro-level factors creates educational environments that systematically undermine Black girls' sense of worth, belonging, and possibility (Love, 2019). Understanding these multilevel causes is

essential for designing interventions that address root problems rather than merely treating symptoms.

Alternative Scholarly Framings

Scholars have approached the marginalization of Black girls in education through various theoretical lenses, each offering distinct insights into the nature and solutions to this complex issue. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) foundational work on intersectionality demonstrates how the experiences of Black girls are uniquely shaped by the convergence of race and gender discrimination. Their challenges cannot be fully understood through either a purely racial or gendered lens, as traditional educational policies and practices typically focus on race or gender in isolation, missing the distinct vulnerabilities and strengths that emerge at their intersection.

Morris (2016) and Blake et al. (2011) center their analysis on criminalization and disciplinary practices. Their research reveals how school discipline policies disproportionately impact Black girls, not due to higher rates of misbehavior, but because of cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes. Seemingly neutral disciplinary policies become tools of oppression when implemented within systems shaped by racial and gender bias. Reform must begin with reimagining discipline itself, rather than merely adjusting existing punitive systems.

Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) offer a Critical Race Feminist perspective, highlighting Black girls' agency and strategic navigation of hostile educational environments rather than positioning them solely as victims of systemic oppression. This approach challenges traditional frameworks by centering resistance and resilience. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory provides an important complement to this

perspective, as his conceptualization of self-efficacy highlighting how beliefs about one's own capabilities are shaped by social experiences, modeling, and environmental feedback. When Black girls are denied affirming environments, their development of social efficacy is directly undermined. This framework aligns with Berry and Mizelle's (2006) examination of how women of color negotiate academic spaces while maintaining cultural integrity, emphasizing the sophisticated strategies Black girls employ to survive and sometimes thrive despite institutional barriers.

Love's (2019) abolitionist teaching framework argues that traditional reform efforts often perpetuate rather than challenge fundamental inequities. The marginalization of Black girls represents not a problem to be solved within existing educational structures, but evidence of the need for complete educational transformation. This radical perspective suggests that meaningful change requires moving beyond incremental reforms to reimagine education entirely, dismantling rather than adjusting systems built on white supremacist foundations.

Muhammad and Haddix (2016) offer a cultural-historical framework that centers Black girls' literacies and ways of knowing. Traditional educational settings often fail to recognize and build upon Black girls' unique cultural knowledge and experiences, treating cultural difference as a deficit rather than a resource. Solutions must begin with validating and incorporating Black girls' cultural practices and perspectives into educational spaces, rather than expecting them to assimilate into existing structures. This asset-based approach recognizes Black girls as holders of valuable knowledge, sophisticated literacy practices, and rich cultural traditions that should inform rather than be erased by schooling.

Paris and Alim (2017) extend this cultural-historical approach through culturally sustaining pedagogy, which moves beyond cultural relevance to actively support students in sustaining their cultural ways of being. Rather than merely acknowledging culture as a bridge to dominant knowledge, culturally sustaining pedagogy positions students' home cultures as valuable in their own right and worthy of preservation and development. For Black girls, this means educational spaces that honor African American Vernacular English, celebrate natural hair and cultural aesthetics, and incorporate Black feminist traditions of resistance and community building.

Ginwright (2018) proposes healing-centered engagement as a framework that moves beyond trauma-informed care's focus on individual symptoms to address collective healing, cultural restoration, and building agency alongside awareness. While trauma-informed approaches have been valuable in recognizing the harm inflicted on Black girls in educational settings, they risk pathologizing students and communities rather than addressing the systems causing harm. Healing-centered engagement shifts attention from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" and ultimately to "What's right with you?" recognizing the strengths, wisdom, and resilience Black girls bring to educational spaces.

These varied theoretical perspectives share common ground in their rejection of deficit thinking and their insistence that Black girls' experiences must be understood on their own terms rather than through comparison to white, middle-class norms. However, they differ in their emphasis on individual versus collective action, reform versus transformation, and the role of existing institutions in either perpetuating or potentially

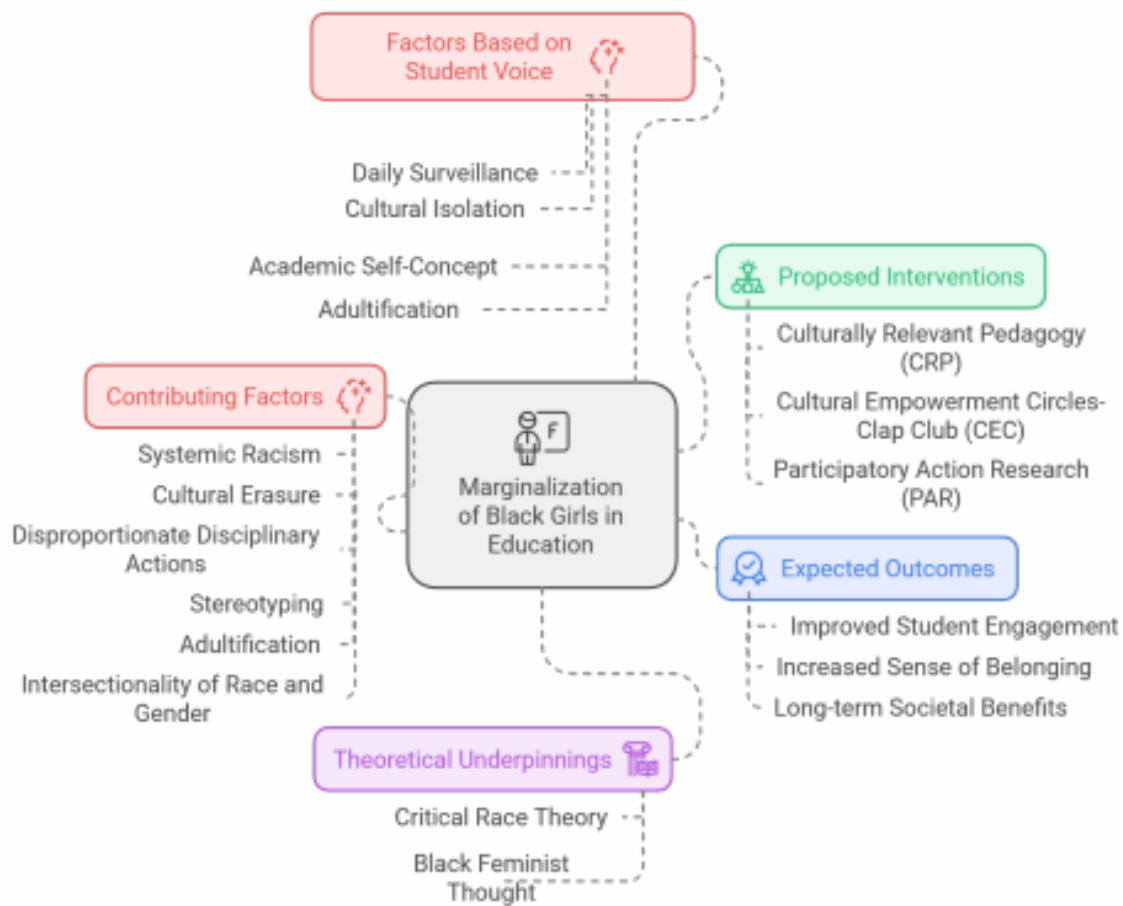
addressing marginalization. Together, these frameworks informed the development of this study's conceptual approach and intervention design.

Conceptual Framework

This research developed a framework centered on the marginalization of Black girls at Crescent Academy. The framework depicts the interconnected factors and proposed interventions, placing the problem of marginalization in the center, surrounded by contributing factors identified through the research: systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991), cultural erasure (Gay, 2018; Morris, 2016), and disproportionate disciplinary actions (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015). These factors were recognized as influenced by broader societal forces operating at macro, meso, and micro levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The framework outlines a planned intervention through the Clap Club Cultural intervention, informed by principles of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Through this intervention, the goal was to promote cultural affirmation, enhance student engagement, and foster inclusion (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015), with expected outcomes including improved academic performance and increased social efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Figure 2-4

Conceptual Framework



Note. Visual representation of interconnected factors, interventions, and expected outcomes

Evolution of Understanding

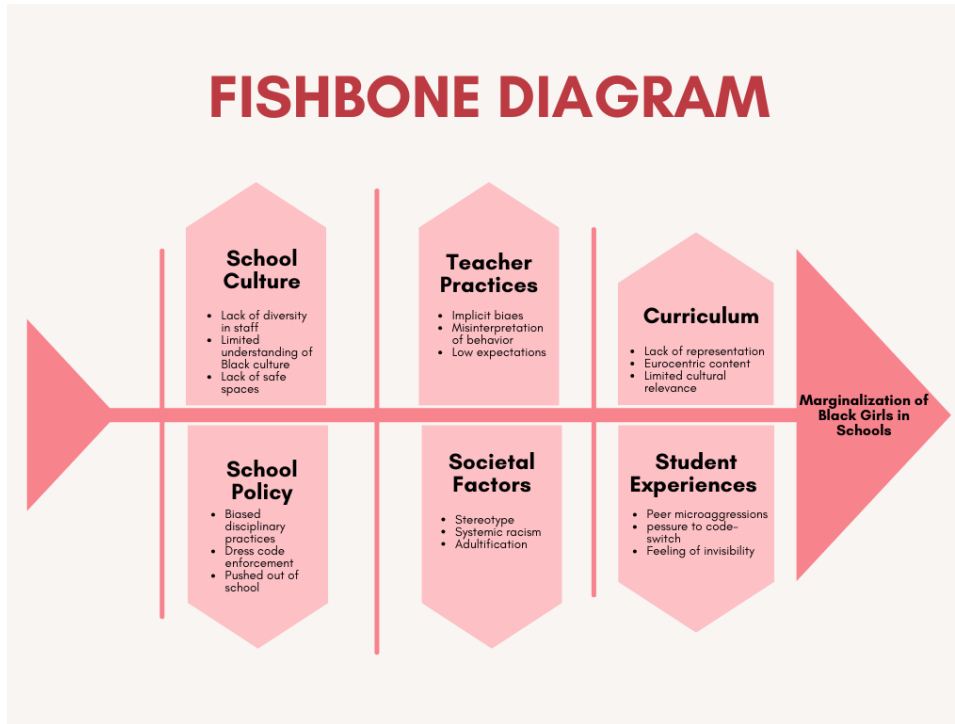
The researcher's understanding evolved from focusing on visible symptoms like disciplinary disparities and academic underperformance to recognizing complex systemic issues. This evolution transformed the approach from viewing problems as individual deficits to understanding systemic barriers requiring institutional change. The intervention design evolved from single-focus solutions to an integrated approach

combining CRP and CEC, based on feedback from the dissertation mentor and peers. The dissertation mentor's guidance clarified that CRP and CEC could not be approached separately. Initially, the plan included only professional development sessions; however, it became clear that sustainable change required engagement at all levels of the school community.

The fishbone diagram (Figure 2-5) provides a causal analysis of the problem of practice: Crescent Academy has not created the conditions that support Black girls' social efficacy development. At the macro level, the diagram identifies systemic racism, societal stereotypes, and adultification bias as the foundational root causes. At the meso level, institutional factors, including school culture, curriculum and pedagogy, and teacher attitudes, translate those macro forces into the daily environment Black girls must navigate. At the micro level, peer interactions, family and community dynamics, and the accumulated weight of racial microaggressions manifest these broader patterns in concrete, interpersonal harm. Taken together, these three levels reveal how the institution has failed to create the conditions Black girls need to develop social efficacy.

Figure 2-5

Fishbone Diagram



Note. Illustration of key categories contributing to the marginalization of Black girls in schools.

Understanding and Positionality

Through these analytical frameworks, I deepened my understanding of the problem's complex nature and identified key points for intervention and change. This enhanced comprehension revealed the need for comprehensive, student-centered approaches that addressed both immediate needs and systemic transformation. In addition, my personal identity and experiences as an educator deeply influenced how I approached this work. As an African American Muslim woman educator, I recognized how traditional research approaches often position marginalized communities as subjects rather than experts of their own

experiences. Combining theoretical perspectives, particularly Bandura's (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory as the outcome framework and the cultural-historical framework suggested by Muhammad and Haddix (2016). Bandura's emphasis on self-efficacy development through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and positive affective states provided the theoretical foundation for measuring and supporting Black girls' social efficacy growth, while Muhammad and Haddix's framework ensured the intervention honored Black girls' cultural practices as assets rather than deficits.

The cultural-historical framework resonated deeply with my own educational journey, where I navigated PWIs while maintaining my cultural identity. This personal connection, combined with Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional lens and Love's (2019) transformative vision, informed the research approach.

By centering Black girls' voices and perspectives, the research honored their cultural knowledge and lived experiences. This approach aligned with Cooper's (1893) historical call for Black women's leadership in educational transformation and responded to Morris's (2016) emphasis on centering Black girls' voices in developing solutions. The research created opportunities for what Muhammad and Haddix (2016) describe as "multiple ways of knowing," allowing Black girls' experiences, needs, and aspirations to authentically shape the resulting intervention.

These questions were designed to bridge theoretical understanding with practical implementation while centering student voices in the research process.

The focus on social efficacy confidence to navigate social situations, advocate for oneself and others, and build meaningful relationships while maintaining authentic identity emerged from preliminary conversations with Black girls at Crescent Academy who described feeling socially isolated, constantly monitored, and unable to be their full selves at school. These questions reflected a commitment to centering student voice and honoring their expertise about their own experiences, which insists that inquiry should be driven by the concerns of those most affected by the issues under investigation.

Data collection for this needs assessment involved multiple methods to capture diverse perspectives on Black girls' experiences at Crescent Academy. Key terms and concepts used throughout the study are operationally defined in Appendix A. Empathy interviews with individual Black female students (Appendix B) explored their personal experiences of marginalization, academic engagement, and identity navigation. Focus groups with multiple Black girls (Appendix C) facilitated collective reflection and shared meaning-making around common challenges and resistance strategies. An interview with the school's guidance counselor (Appendix D) provided an institutional perspective on support systems and barriers. An interview with one classroom teacher provided additional perspective on school culture, instructional climate, and the absence of targeted supports for Black students. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in Spring 2025, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The data analysis followed a systematic qualitative approach, beginning with verbatim transcription of all interviews and Clap Club discussions. Using MAXQDA software, multiple rounds of coding were conducted to identify emerging themes and patterns. The first round employed open coding to identify initial concepts and categories within the data. The second round used axial coding to establish relationships between categories and explore how they connected to the theoretical framework. Finally, selective coding helped integrate these categories into a coherent narrative about Black girls' experiences at Crescent Academy. Throughout the analysis process, particular attention was paid to in codes, using participants' own words to label concepts, ensuring that their voices remained central to the understanding of the data.

Systemic Patterns and Student Experiences

The needs assessment revealed five key findings, each supported by multiple data points from discussions and interviews. First, systemic surveillance and discriminatory discipline emerged as a dominant pattern, evidenced by powerful student testimonies: "They will definitely pick you as a problem" (Student Interview, Spring 2025) and "everything I do is like being monitored" (Student Interview, Spring 2025). Students consistently reported different standards for discipline, with one student noting, "If a white kid would do that, they wouldn't be in the office. They would just get sent back to class" (Student Interview, Spring 2025).

These findings aligned with national research documenting disproportionate discipline of Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016)

while providing specific local evidence of how such disparities manifested in daily interactions at Crescent Academy. The hypervisibility students described reflected broader patterns of surveillance that Black girls experience in predominantly white educational spaces (Blake et al., 2011).

Second, cultural isolation and identity navigation presented significant challenges. Students described being "the only Black girl in the class" (Student Interview, Spring 2025) and characterized their white peers as "clones" (Student Interview, Spring 2025), highlighting the cultural disconnect and pressure to assimilate. This code-switching burden imposed high psychological costs, as students constantly monitored their behavior, speech, and appearance to avoid triggering stereotypes or rejection (McCluney et al., 2019).

Third, academic disengagement and diminished self-perception manifested despite high aspirations. This was particularly evident in one student's career goal of becoming a neurosurgeon, followed by the self-defeating statement "I'm not really that smart" (Student Interview, Spring 2025). Students reported discouragement from taking advanced courses, with peers suggesting "you can't do that like you're not capable" (Focus Group, Spring 2025) or accusing them of "trying to be white" (Student Interview, Spring 2025). These experiences illustrated the double bind Black girls face: achieving academically risks accusations of racial inauthenticity from Black peers while still being perceived as less capable by white teachers and students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Carter, 2005).

Fourth, students demonstrated sophisticated resistance and coping strategies. Their advice to "keep your circle really small" (Student Interview, Spring 2025) and observations that "Black people just click with each other" (Student Interview, Spring 2025) revealed both protective mechanisms and the importance of cultural solidarity. These strategies represented what Collins (2000) identifies as Black women's resistant knowledge traditions, practical wisdom developed through generations of navigating hostile environments. The guidance counselor's perspective reinforced this, noting her intentional efforts to create a "safe space" (Guidance Counselor Interview, Spring 2025) through daily check-ins and cultural validation.

Fifth, institutional barriers to equity persisted despite surface-level inclusion efforts. Students noted the lack of Black teachers, with one stating, "They really need to have more Black people in this school" (Student Interview, Spring 2025). The guidance counselor acknowledged this need, advocating for increased cultural representation and community engagement while implementing intervention plans and career guidance support. However, the stark contrast between her optimistic view ("they're great students, they're amazing," (Guidance Counselor Interview, Spring 2025) and students' daily experiences "no days are good," (Student Interview, Spring 2025) highlighted the gap between institutional support efforts and lived realities (Castagno, 2014).

The guidance counselor's perspective provided crucial institutional context, particularly her emphasis on relationship-building and cultural empowerment. Her approach included three-week intervention plans, career

planning support, and efforts to validate students' cultural identities. While these individual efforts were valuable, they operated within and could not fully compensate for systemic barriers requiring institutional transformation.

These findings suggested the need for systemic changes, including increased Black teacher representation (Achinstein et al., 2010), fair and consistent disciplinary practices (Morris, 2016), cultural validation and celebration (Ladson-Billings, 1995), effective response to racial incidents (Sue et al., 2007), and enhanced academic support and encouragement (Steele, 1997).

Conceptualizing the Change Process

The research findings pointed to three critical areas requiring immediate intervention, each supported by compelling evidence from student interviews and Clap Club discussion circles. First, Cultural Empowerment and Safe Spaces emerged from students' expressed need for protective strategies, exemplified by advice like "Keep your circle really small...not everyone's going to like you" (Student Interview, Spring 2025). Students' observation that they feel comfortable when there are other Black students in class, highlighted the importance of culturally affirming spaces where they could be authentic without surveillance (Collins, 2000; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Second, Academic Support and Confidence Building were evident in the disconnect between students' aspirations and self-perception. The guidance counselor's intervention plans offered a model for "warm demander" pedagogy (Delpit, 2006), but focus groups revealed systematic discouragement from advanced courses requiring institutional addressing.

Third, Institutional Change and Representation stemmed from direct student advocacy. Students consistently reported feeling over-monitored and experiencing disparate disciplinary treatment. Research confirms that Black students benefit academically and socio-emotionally from having Black teachers who serve as cultural translators and advocates (Achinstein et al., 2010; Kohli, 2019).

Needs Assessment II: Identifying Possible Solutions

The first needs assessment established the problem and its causes. A second needs assessment examined possible solutions, drawing on two sources: participant voices gathered through empathy interviews and focus groups, and a review of evidence-based practices for Black girls in predominantly white institutional settings.

Participant data pointed clearly toward what was needed. Students described feeling most capable and comfortable when in the presence of other Black peers, noting "Black people just click with each other" and "I keep my circle really small" (Student Interview, Spring 2025). These statements were not simply expressions of social preference. They revealed that Black girls at Crescent Academy already understood, intuitively, that cultural solidarity was a protective and generative force. What they lacked was an institutionally sanctioned space where that solidarity could be cultivated deliberately. The guidance counselor similarly identified relationship-building and cultural validation as the most meaningful supports she could offer, though she acknowledged these efforts were individual and informal rather than structural.

Both data sources pointed toward the same solution: a dedicated, culturally affirming space designed specifically for Black girls, facilitated by someone who understood their experiences.

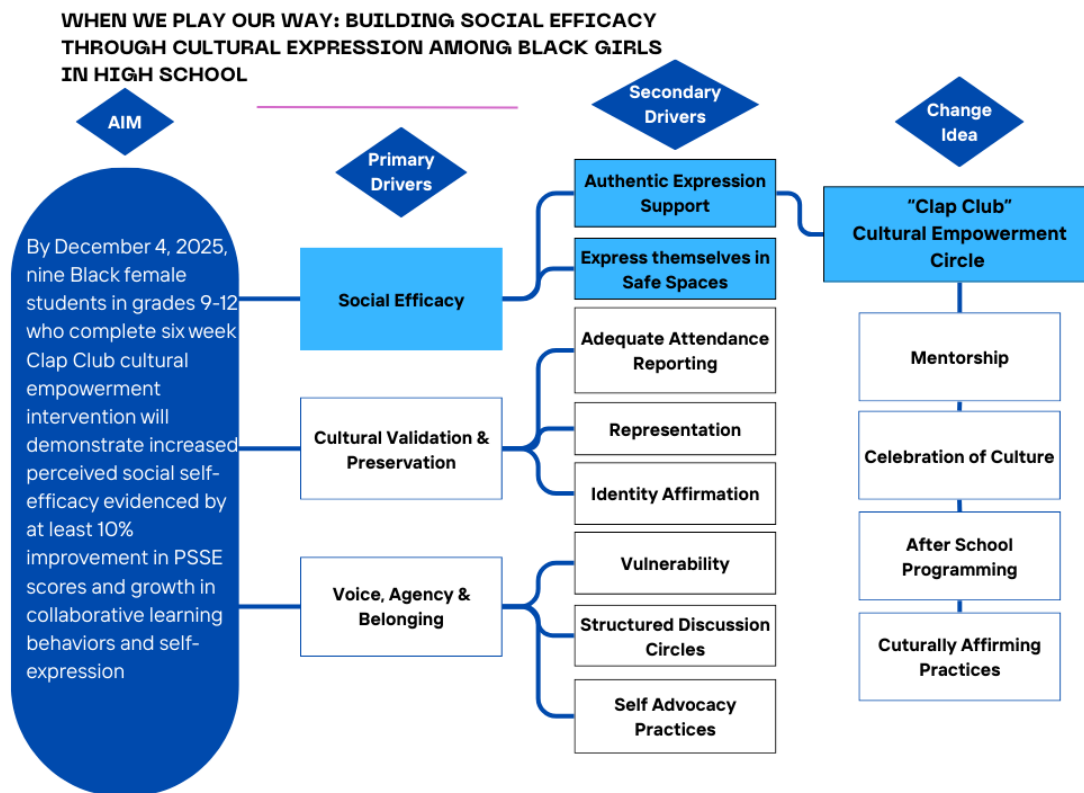
The literature confirmed and extended what participants described. Gaunt (2006) documented how traditional hand-clapping games function as intergenerational cultural transmission for Black girls, building social bonds, collective identity, and communicative competence through embodied cultural practice. Goodwin (2006) demonstrated that these games create structured opportunities for peer coordination, self-expression, and the negotiation of social dynamics in ways that develop the very skills participants indicated they needed. Muhammad and Haddix (2016) established that interventions grounded in Black girls' existing cultural knowledge and practices are more effective than those that ask them to assimilate to dominant frameworks. Taken together, this evidence identified culturally grounded peer programming, specifically programming centered on Black girls' own traditions, as the most promising avenue for building social efficacy in this context.

These two needs assessments, one focused on causes and one on solutions, directly informed the design of the Clap Club intervention and the construction of the driver diagram. The primary driver, building social efficacy through cultural affirmation, emerged from what participants said they needed. The secondary driver, developing critical consciousness, emerged from what the literature identified as essential for sustained efficacy development in the face of

systemic marginalization. The intervention was not designed in isolation from the problem. It was designed in response to it.

Figure 2-7

Driver Diagram



Note. Visual representation of primary and secondary drivers, change ideas, and expected outcomes for the Clap Club intervention.

Limitations and Implications

The study faced notable methodological limitations. The researcher's position as an external researcher impacted both access to the school community and the consent-gathering process (Milner, 2007). While the researcher's identity as a Black Muslim woman educator provided cultural insider status that

facilitated authentic connection with Black girl participants, the researcher's outsider status relative to the institution created barriers to broader participation.

Data collection included one in-depth individual student interview, a focus group with nine Black female students, and an interview with a guidance counselor. The richness of qualitative data and striking consistency in reported experiences provided compelling evidence of systemic patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The alignment between findings and established national research on Black girls' marginalization in PWIs (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016) suggested these experiences reflected broader patterns, strengthening validity despite limited sample size (Yin, 2018).

The timing and scope of data collection captured students' perceptions at a single point in time rather than longitudinally. The study did not include perspectives from white students, most teachers, or school administrators, limiting comprehensive institutional analysis (Mitra, 2018).

Several implementation unknowns persisted: long-term intervention sustainability, potential academic outcome improvements, depth of administrative support, and parent/community perspectives. Research demonstrates that initiatives focusing on marginalized students often face resistance from collaborators who perceive such efforts as preferential treatment (Castagno, 2014; Leonardo, 2009). The private, faith-based nature of Crescent Academy added complexity, as school leadership had autonomy but accountability to tuition-paying families.

The urgency of student needs, "Their eyes are like always on us... everything I do is like being monitored. When I do one bad thing and all of a sudden I'm in the office" (Student Interview, Spring 2025) demanded immediate action. However, sustainable change required building infrastructure and support systems outlasting initial interventions (Bryk et al., 2015). This tension shaped the implementation approach: a well-executed pilot intervention demonstrating value while building momentum for broader transformation.

Implications and Recommendations

Several essential actions were identified to transform Crescent Academy's educational environment:

Institutional Level

- Establish systematic data collection tracking disciplinary practices disaggregated by race and gender (Skiba et al., 2011).
- Implement sustained cultural competency professional development incorporating direct input from Black girls (Kohli, 2019; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018)
- Institutionalize mechanisms for student voice in decision-making through formal channels for reporting concerns, proposing changes, and participating in policy development (Mitra, 2018)
- Recruit and retain Black educators who bring culturally grounded pedagogical approaches (Achinstein et al., 2010; Kohli, 2019)

Policy Level

The implications extended beyond one institution. Because Black girls occupy the intersection of race and gender, they face compounded forms of marginalization that race-neutral or gender-neutral policies fail to address (Crenshaw, 1991). Massachusetts and other states should therefore consider policies requiring disaggregated discipline data reporting by both race and gender, mandatory cultural competency training for educator licensure that explicitly addresses the intersectional experiences of Black girls, and incentives for diversifying the teaching workforce. Private schools should be held accountable for equitable treatment through accreditation processes and public reporting that similarly disaggregate outcomes by race and gender.

Research Level

Future research should examine long-term impacts of Cultural Empowerment Circles on participants' academic outcomes and educational trajectories through longitudinal studies (Spencer et al., 2006). Comparative studies across different school contexts would deepen understanding of how institutional factors shape marginalization and resistance (Morris, 2016). Research should also explore intersectional differences among Black girls based on class, religion, immigration status, and language. Clap Club intervention represented a crucial first step, providing immediate support and cultural affirmation while building momentum for broader institutional transformation. Success would be measured not just in programmatic changes but in the lived experiences of Black girls at Crescent Academy, who deserved nothing less than

an education that validated their identities, nurtured their aspirations, and empowered them to reach their full potential.

Collective Responsibility

Transforming Crescent Academy required sustained commitment from all collaborators. The disconnect between career aspirations and academic self-perception, exemplified by the student who dreamed of becoming a neurosurgeon while believing "I'm not really that smart" (Student Interview, Spring 2025) demanded immediate attention to building academic confidence while addressing systemic barriers.

White students, teachers, and families needed to engage in their own education about racism and their role in perpetuating or challenging inequitable systems (DiAngelo, 2018). Black girls should not bear sole responsibility for fixing problems they did not create. Rather, transforming educational institutions required collective commitment to centering the most marginalized, redistributing resources and opportunities, and fundamentally reimagining what school could be when designed to honor rather than erase Black girls' brilliance.

The Clap Club intervention represents a crucial first step, providing immediate support and cultural affirmation while building momentum for broader institutional transformation. Success can be measured not just in programmatic changes but in the lived experiences of Black girls at Crescent Academy, who deserved nothing less than an education that validated their identities, nurtured their aspirations, and empowered them to reach their full potential.

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CHAPTER III: MANUSCRIPT II

Refined Theory of Improvement

Black girls in PWIs face significant barriers to developing the social skills needed for social competence and resilience in navigating social situations and building meaningful relationships within their communities (Carter et al., 2017). While representing only 15% of the female student population nationally, Black girls experienced disproportionate disciplinary action and cultural marginalization that undermined their ability to develop authentic peer connections and self-advocacy skills (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2024). The disciplinary disparity reflected the "misconstrued ideology that Black girls are less innocent and feminine and more adultlike than their white counterparts," which directly impacted their opportunities for natural social skill development (Scott & Collins, 2025, p. 237). According to publicly available demographic data (2024), Black girls represented approximately 8% of the student population at the Crescent Academy (pseudonym), with 61% white enrollment. In this environment, Black girls navigated cultural expressions that were often misunderstood, limiting opportunities for genuine social skill development and community building.

The systematic erasure of Black girls' experiences within educational institutions creates particular challenges for social efficacy development (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). When schools fail to recognize and affirm Black girls' cultural identities, these students have had to constantly navigate between authentic self-expression and

institutional expectations, expending cognitive and emotional energy that could otherwise have supported social confidence building (Morris, 2016). This cultural code-switching requirement, combined with hypervigilance about potential disciplinary consequences, constrain Black girls' ability to engage in the natural peer interactions and self-advocacy practice essential for developing social efficacy (McCluney et al., 2019). The intersection of racial and gender marginalization creates what scholars term "intersectional invisibility," where Black girls' specific needs for culturally affirming social skill development remain unaddressed by educational institutions (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Description of Collaborators

A collaborative team brought together diverse expertise and perspectives for addressing the complex challenges facing Black girls' social efficacy development in PWIs. The researcher provided theoretical grounding and cultural authenticity as an African American, Muslim woman and educator with lived experience navigating intersectional marginalization, while the school principal offered institutional support and an administrative perspective necessary for participant access. The guidance counselor served as a bridge between the intervention and participants' ongoing school experiences, bringing established trust relationships and a deep understanding of the academic and social challenges these students faced daily. The clinical researcher from Harbor Academy (a pseudonym) contributed specialized expertise in music therapy and culturally affirming programming, ensuring that the intervention employed evidence-based practices while maintaining the joy, healing, and authentic expression central to effective social efficacy development. Together, this team represented the

multi-level collaboration necessary for creating meaningful change that addressed individual participant needs, institutional contexts, and broader systemic factors affecting Black girls' educational experiences.

Table 3-1

Description of Collaborators

Name/Role	Expertise	Unique Perspective	Rationale for Inclusion
Lead Researcher/Project Leader	American-born African American, Muslim, female educator; culturally responsive student support	Ability to navigate both academic and community spaces; intersectional lived experience	Provides theoretical framework and research leadership while maintaining cultural authenticity
School Principal	Educational leadership; institutional policy and procedures; student support systems	Administrative oversight of school environment; understanding of institutional barriers and opportunities for Black girls	Provides institutional support and recommendations for student participants
School Guidance Counselor	Student mental health support, academic planning, and crisis intervention	Direct relationships with Black girls; insight into their academic and social challenges; understanding of family dynamics	Offers a trusted adult perspective on participant needs and serves as a liaison between intervention and school-based support systems

Name/Role	Expertise	Unique Perspective	Rationale for Inclusion
Researcher of Clinical and Community Services of Harbor Academy (pseudonym)	Music Therapist, curating spaces for joy, belonging, healing, and expression; clinical expertise in counseling and behavioral health	Creative approaches to student engagement through movement and cultural verbal/vocal traditions; evidence-based practice integration	Provides clinical oversight and innovative cultural programming expertise

Problem Diagnosis

This study's problem identification emerged from the alignment of needs assessment data, local context, and existing literature. Needs assessment conversations with Crescent Academy staff and student support personnel surfaced patterns of disengagement, isolation, and code-switching among Black girls navigating a PWI. These findings were consistent with local data reflecting disproportionate monitoring and punitive responses directed toward Black girl students, practices that positioned them as problems rather than individuals deserving support (Morris, 2016). The literature provided the theoretical grounding to name what the data revealed: that cultural gaps between predominantly white teaching staff and Black students undermine affirming identity foundations (Gay, 2010), that standardized curricula and non-diverse staffing compound cultural invisibility (McCluney et al., 2019), and that the resulting pressure to constantly self-monitor expends the cognitive and emotional energy that would otherwise support natural social skill development. The convergence of these three sources, practitioner observations, site-level patterns, and a robust body of scholarship, established a clear and evidence-based rationale for a targeted intervention designed to restore the conditions necessary for Black girls to develop confidence, advocacy abilities, and meaningful community connections within their educational environments.

To address these challenges, this study assembled a collaborative team (see Table 3-1) whose diverse expertise spans educational leadership, clinical services, student support systems, and culturally responsive pedagogy, ensuring both institutional support and cultural authenticity in intervention design and implementation. Participants were

recruited through informed consent processes, with parental consent (see Appendix A) and student assent (see Appendix B) obtained prior to intervention implementation.

Figure 3-1

Original Fishbone Diagram

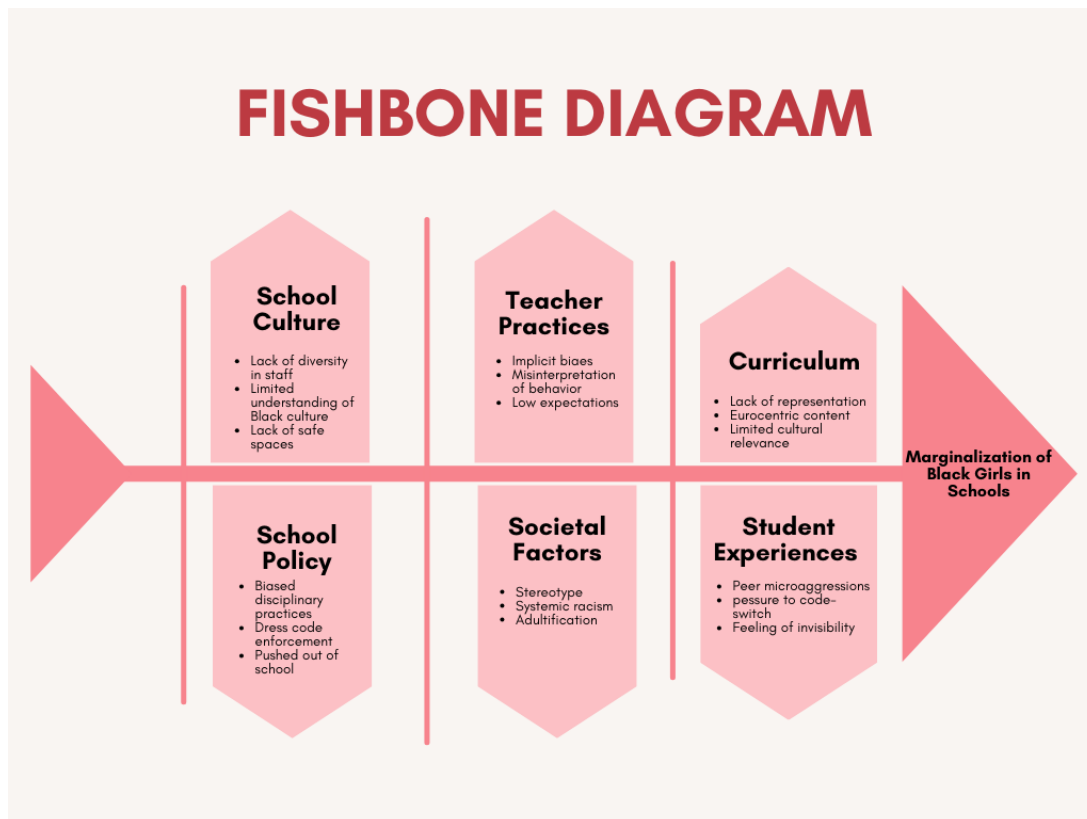
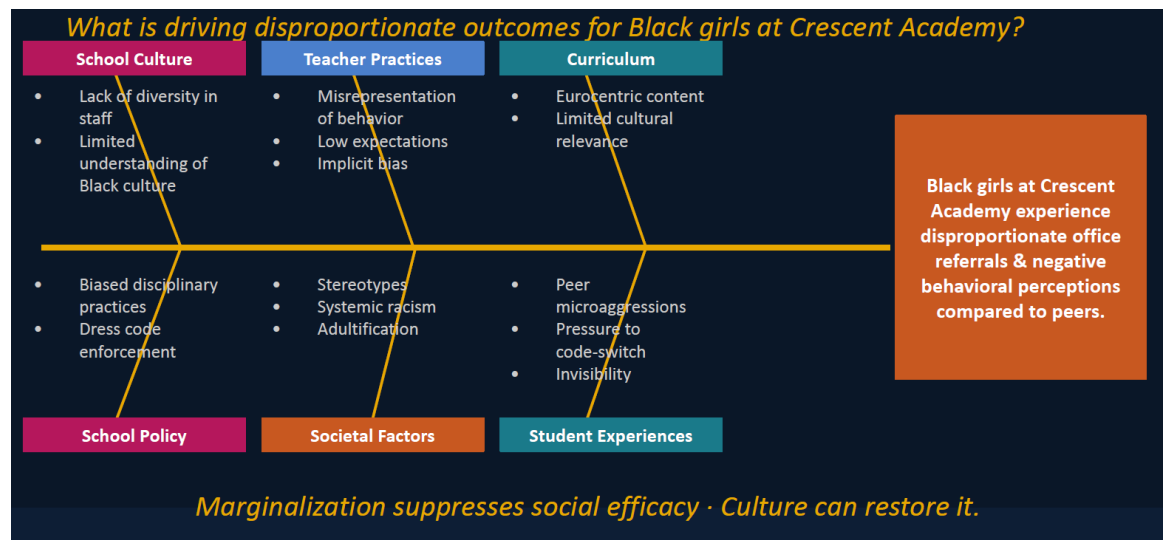


Figure 3-1 illustrates the original fishbone diagram that guided the initial problem analysis. The shift from this original fishbone diagram to the revised diagram (Figure 3-2) represents a fundamental change in understanding the barriers that Black girls face in developing social efficacy at predominantly white institutions. This evolutionary change came directly from the needs assessment that reflected a movement from school policy, practice, and critique to centering girls' lived experiences and agency.

Figure 3-2

Revised Fishbone Diagram



The original to revised fishbone diagram represented a critical theoretical shift from the emphasized external institutional factors: school culture, teacher practices, curriculum limitations, and policy structures reflecting a deficit-oriented approach that positioned Black girls as victims of systemic problems requiring institutional fixes. The needs assessment interviews revealed that Black girls possessed sophisticated awareness of institutional barriers and had developed complex strategies for navigating them. Rather than focusing on what institutions did to Black girls, the revised diagram (Figure 3-2) centered on how these systemic pressures manifested in their internal experiences and relational challenges: identity suppression, cultural disconnection, hypervigilance, fear of vulnerability, and difficulty trusting peers. This reframing positioned Black girls as agents capable of developing social efficacy when provided with culturally affirming spaces, rather than passive recipients of institutional intervention.

This theoretical evolution aligned with the intervention's focus on building social efficacy through peer connection and cultural practices rather than attempting to change

institutional structures during a six-week PDSA cycle. By targeting the interpersonal and psychological barriers that prevented authentic relationship-building (barriers created by systemic oppression but addressable through cultural empowerment), the Clap Club intervention worked within the team's sphere of influence while building capacity for future institutional change.

In order to move these theoretical foundations into an actionable intervention, the driver diagram shows the path from cultural empowerment activities to measurable improvements in social efficacy. This visual framework identified the primary drivers: cultural connections, peer solidarity, and critical consciousness, all of which serve as the vehicle through hand-clapping games and discussions that could build the confidence and skills that Black girls needed to navigate predominantly white spaces.

Figure 3-3

Original Driver Diagram

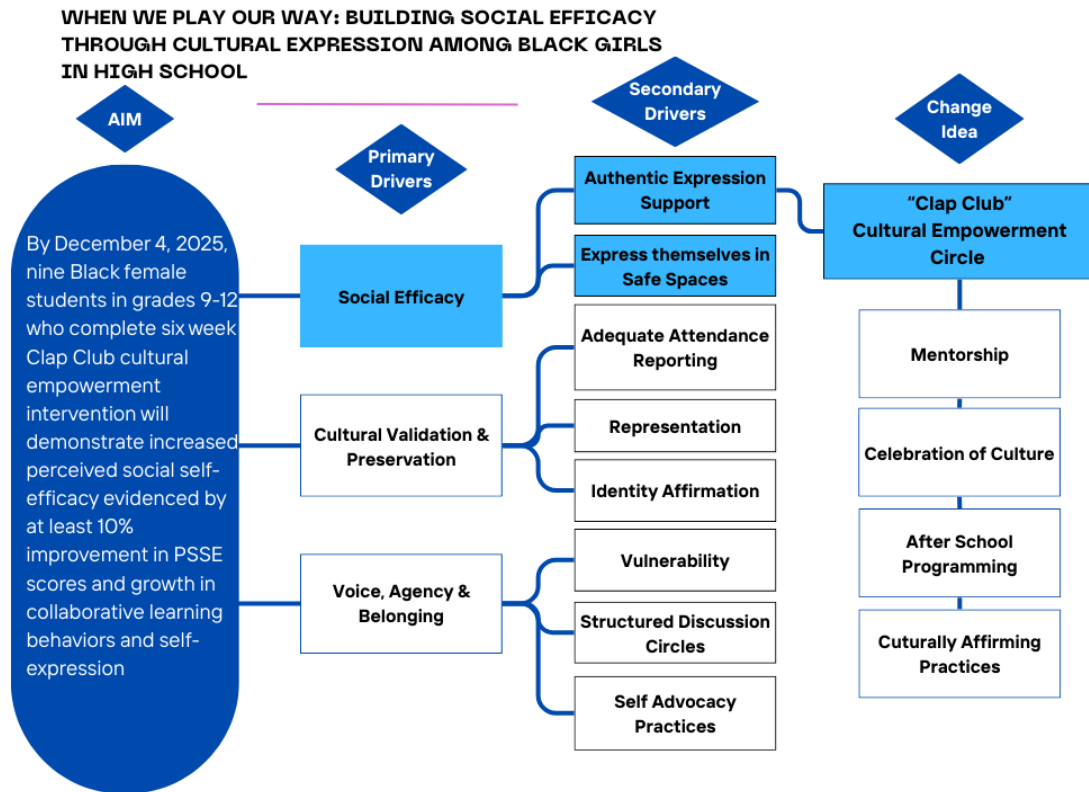
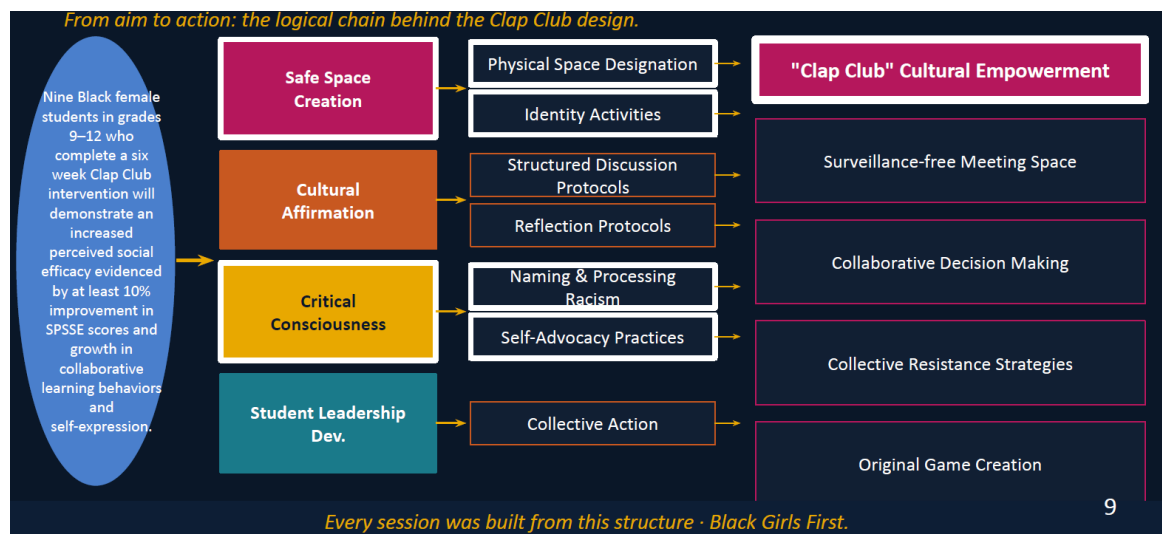


Figure 3-4

Refined Driver Diagram



Figures 3-3 and 3-4 illustrate the original and the revised driver diagrams showing an aim of nine Black female students in grades nine through twelve who complete a six-week Clap Club cultural empowerment intervention will demonstrate increased social efficacy. This increase is evidenced by at least 10% improvement in their scores on the Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy (SPSSE) and growth in collaborative learning behaviors and self-expression as documented through the surveys, interviews, and session observations (Appendices C, D, and E).

Scott and Collins (2025) operationalized social efficacy development as the acquisition of social skills needed for social competence and resilience, specifically recognizing that cultural context shapes how those skills are expressed and interpreted, noting that "what a Black girl perceives as being assertive in her culture may be perceived differently by her teachers or school staff members due to a lack of cultural synchrony" (p. 238). For the purposes of this study, social efficacy development focused on building social skills needed for social competence and resilience, particularly the

ability to navigate social situations while maintaining authentic self-expression in contexts where one's cultural identity might be marginalized or misunderstood (Bandura, 1997; Spencer et al., 2006). For Black girls in PWIs, social efficacy involves the ability to advocate for oneself and others, build meaningful relationships across and within cultural groups, resist assimilationist pressures while strategically code-switching when necessary, and maintain collective identity and solidarity in isolating environments (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2016). This conceptualization of social efficacy differed from general social skills training by explicitly acknowledging the racialized context in which Black girls had to develop interpersonal competence (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). While traditional social skills focused on universal behaviors like listening and cooperation, social skills needed for social competence and resilience among marginalized youth required additional capacities: cultural navigation skills, resistance to stereotype threat, collective action abilities, and the sophisticated balance between accommodation and authenticity that enabled survival and thriving in hostile institutional environments (Carter, 2005; Stinson, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

Authentic self-expression developed through autonomy-supportive environments that encouraged genuine voice without fear of judgment, while personal agency developed when individuals experienced competence in making meaningful choices about their social interactions and responses to challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The Clap Club intervention targeted social efficacy development specifically by creating spaces where Black girls could practice these complex social navigation skills without the surveillance and cultural policing they typically experienced at Crescent Academy, allowing for authentic skill development rather than performative compliance.

The primary driver, safe space creation, recognized that sustainable social efficacy required both advocacy skill development and supportive peer relationships that provided the emotional security and collective strength necessary for challenging isolation and building meaningful connections within their educational environments. This cultural mismatch highlighted why safe spaces for authentic skill development were essential. Scott and Collins (2025) found that this disconnect between Black girls' cultural expressions and institutional interpretations created barriers to genuine social efficacy development. Their research confirmed that 'interventions are more effective when the interventionist mirrors their salient intersecting identities' and that Black women facilitators "served as additional role models for the participants" (p. 249). This evidence directly supported the Clap Club's design featuring a Black female facilitator in a safe campus setting that reduced institutional surveillance and allowed for culturally authentic social skill development.

Explanation of Guiding Assumptions

The design team addressed several key areas that shaped both intervention possibilities and limitations. The first area addressed was the direct interaction with nine Black girls through intensive cultural programming, allowing for deep relationship building and meaningful engagement with individual participants while maintaining the intimate scale necessary for authentic cultural sharing and community development.

Theory of Improvement and Addressing Core Equity Issues

The Clap Club represented an innovative six-week intervention that leveraged traditional African American cultural practices to build social skills needed for competence and resilience among Black girls. This approach was grounded in ethnomusicological research demonstrating that hand-clapping games functioned as sophisticated cultural pedagogy, teaching "complex rhythmic patterns, social cooperation, and cultural knowledge transmission while building community bonds" (Gaunt, 2006, p. 98). Recent work by Scott and Collins (2025) supported this culturally responsive framework while revealing the complexity of cultural programming for Black girls. Their study demonstrated that "combining Afrocentric elements from Sisters of Nia into evidence-based SEL practices taught Black girls a variety of prosocial skills to reduce externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors while also increasing their racial identity and self-esteem" (p. 239). However, their mixed findings, showing improvements in inappropriate behavior but variable results for academic engagement, underscored the importance of setting realistic expectations and designing sustained, culturally authentic programming rather than quick fixes.

The intervention's foundation in cultural wealth theory recognized that Black girls possessed cultural assets, including linguistic flexibility, navigational skills, and resistance capital that could be leveraged for social efficacy development rather than deficit-focused interventions that ignored these strengths (Yosso, 2005). By creating intentionally safe spaces removed from institutional surveillance, the intervention addressed what Morris (2016) identified as the "pushout" phenomenon, where Black girls experienced hypervigilance that constrained authentic peer interactions and social skill

development. Research in developmental psychology confirmed that identity-affirming activities enhanced self-efficacy and resilience, particularly for marginalized youth who benefited from explicit connections between cultural heritage and personal empowerment (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

The peer connection component drew on social learning theory's emphasis that skill development occurred most effectively within "communities of practice" where individuals could engage in legitimate peripheral participation while gradually developing expertise through authentic social interaction (Bandura, 1977; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Furthermore, research on collective efficacy demonstrated that culturally affirming group activities built both individual confidence and community cohesion, creating protective factors that buffered against institutional racism (Sampson et al., 1997). By combining traditional cultural practices with structured skill-building in emotionally safe environments, the Clap Club intervention addressed systemic barriers to the development of social skills for competence and resilience while building on the cultural assets and community strengths that Black girls brought to their educational experiences.

Theory that Tackles Root Causes and Core Equity Issues

This intervention was grounded in an intersectional framework that positioned Black girls at the center of three interconnected theoretical perspectives (see Figure 3-5). Black Feminist Theory emphasized intersectionality and the unique experiences of Black girls navigating multiple marginalized identities within educational systems (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). This framework recognized that Black girls experience compounded marginalization based on the intersection of race and gender, creating

distinct educational challenges that cannot be understood through single-axis analyses (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Critical Race Theory provided the lens for challenging systemic racism and examining how institutional practices perpetuated educational inequities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This perspective centered the voices and experiential knowledge of Black girls while exposing how seemingly neutral school policies and practices reinforced racial hierarchies (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Critical Pedagogy positioned participants as agents of empowerment while addressing how traditional educational approaches failed to serve marginalized communities (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). This framework emphasized consciousness-raising, collective action, and the development of critical awareness as essential components of educational liberation (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Giroux, 1988).

Figure 3-5

Conceptual Framework

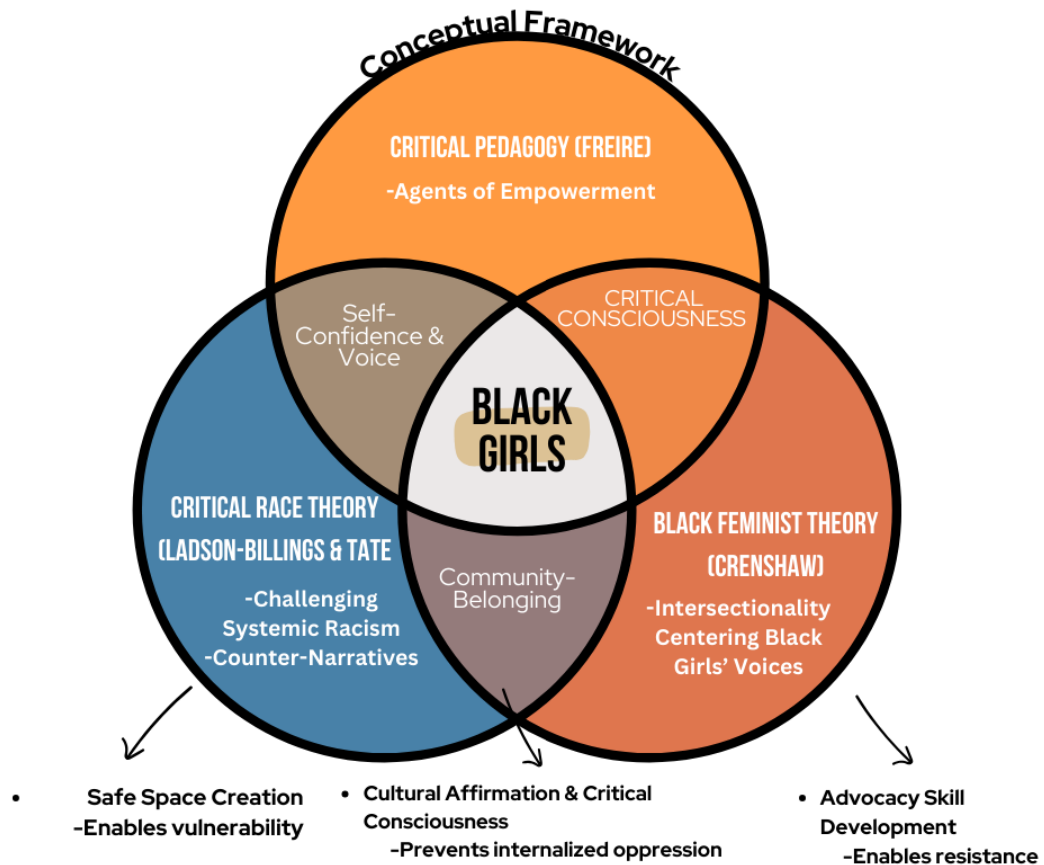


Figure 3-5 presents the conceptual framework guiding the Clap Club intervention study. This conceptual framework recognized that meaningful change for Black girls required simultaneous attention to individual empowerment (self-confidence and voice), community connection (belonging and mutual support), and systemic transformation (challenging oppressive structures) (Collins, 2000; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). These elements converged through culturally responsive programming that celebrated Black girls' identities while building their capacity for social navigation and self-advocacy within educational environments (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The framework drew on Black Feminist Theory's emphasis on intersectionality and centering

marginalized voices (Crenshaw, 1991; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010), Critical Race Theory's focus on challenging systemic racism through counter-narratives and institutional critique (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and Critical Pedagogy's commitment to consciousness-raising and collective action as pathways to liberation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988).

Bandura's (1977, 1997) Social Cognitive Theory provided the foundational architecture for understanding how social efficacy develops, identifying four sources, specifically mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states, as the mechanisms through which participants build belief in their capacity to navigate social situations, form relationships, and advocate for themselves. The Clap Club intervention was designed to activate all four sources: participants gained mastery through repeated cultural practice, witnessed vicarious experiences through peer modeling, received affirming social persuasion from the facilitator and each other, and developed awareness of their physiological and emotional responses within a surveillance-free space.

This integrated approach acknowledged that individual skill-building alone could not address the structural barriers Black girls faced, while systemic critique without individual empowerment left participants without tools for immediate self-protection (Love, 2019; Morris, 2016). Bandura's framework supplied the bridge between these two imperatives, explaining not just what needed to change, but how change in individual belief and capacity actually occurs.

Individual and Interpersonal Level

Building on the framework's emphasis on self-confidence and voice development, the intervention operated at the interpersonal level by intentionally building authentic relationships among Black girls to counter the isolation they experienced as minorities in their school (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Morris, 2016). Through cultural practices like hand-clapping games, participants developed coordination with others, practiced collaborative social skills, and built the kind of interpersonal confidence that transferred to other social contexts where they needed to navigate relationships and advocate for their needs (Gaunt, 2006; Love, 2012). The nature of hand-clapping games required synchronized movement and mutual attention, creating opportunities for what Spencer et al. (2006) described as relationally embedded learning, where social skills develop through authentic cultural engagement rather than explicit instruction.

Peer connections created mutual support networks that functioned as protective factors while serving as laboratories for developing social efficacy (Gaunt, 2006; Stinson, 2011). These peer relationships allowed Black girls to practice self-advocacy, experiment with authentic self-expression, and receive validation from others who understood their racialized and gendered experiences in predominantly white spaces (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). The framework's community-belonging component was actualized through structured opportunities for Black girls to connect with peers who shared similar experiences of marginalization while celebrating their cultural identities (Goodenow, 1993; Spencer et al., 2006). This alignment with what Yosso (2005) described as social capital within communities of color and recognized that marginalized students benefit

from peer networks that provide emotional support, share navigational strategies, and affirm cultural identities in ways that dominant institutions often fail to provide.

Institutional Level

Aligned with Crenshaw's Critical Race Theory's focus on challenging systemic systems, the intervention created alternative safe spaces for authentic cultural expression that operated independently of school surveillance systems, directly challenging the hypervisibility and constant monitoring that undermined Black girls' ability to develop genuine social confidence and advocacy skills (Morris, 2016). While these campus safe spaces could not immediately transform institutional policies or practices, the Clap Club modeled what intentional institutional support could look like: a dedicated time and place, free from surveillance and disciplinary oversight, where Black girls were led by a facilitator who shared their cultural identity, engaged their cultural practices, and centered their voices as the foundation for social efficacy development.

Core Equity Impact

Drawing from all four theoretical perspectives in the framework, the intervention directly addressed a core equity issue by creating intentional safe spaces where Black girls' cultural identities were celebrated rather than surveilled, fundamentally challenging the white supremacist norms that typically governed educational institutions (hooks, 1994; Love, 2019). Counter-spaces, defined as sites where deficit notions of marginalized groups are challenged and where positive and affirming narratives are constructed, provide essential refuge from oppressive institutional environments (Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). The intervention built social efficacy rather than perpetuating isolation by connecting participants with peers who shared similar experiences while

creating documentation that could inform broader community organizing and advocacy efforts (Freire, 1970; Ginwright, 2010). This alignment with healing-centered engagement recognized that marginalized youth need both individual support and collective action opportunities to address systemic harm (Ginwright, 2018). This approach embodied Critical Pedagogy's vision of participants as agents of empowerment while addressing the intersectional challenges identified through Black Feminist Theory and challenging the systemic barriers highlighted by Critical Race Theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). By centering Black girls' voices, honoring their cultural practices, and building their capacity for critical consciousness and collective resistance, the intervention operationalized a liberatory educational praxis that disrupted rather than reproduced existing power structures (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

PDSA Cycle 1: "Plan" Phase

Short-Term Goals and Planned Intervention

The short-term goal for this first PDSA cycle was to increase participants' social efficacy, build peer connections, and improve self-advocacy skills among Black girls at Crescent Academy over a six-week period. These goals were measured through pre- and post-intervention surveys and interviews, as well as documented observations by the researcher. Rather than attempting to address all aspects of social efficacy or tackle systemic institutional change, this initial PDSA cycle focused on outcomes that could be observed and measured within a limited timeframe while remaining sensitive to the exploratory nature of the intervention (Langley et al., 2009). The focus on social efficacy, peer connection, and self-advocacy reflected the research team's understanding that these basic elements would serve as building blocks for more complex social efficacy skills, and that evidence of progress in these areas would support future rounds and expansion of the program (Brown, 2013; Bryk et al., 2015).

Research on Black girls' experiences in PWIs consistently identifies isolation, limited peer support, and difficulty speaking up as central barriers to academic and social success (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). By focusing on social efficacy, the intervention addressed what Spencer et al. (2006) described as a critical need for marginalized youth to feel safe and valued within their school environments. Peer connections served as a way to build what Stinson (2011) identified as collective efficacy, the shared belief among group members that they can successfully handle difficult situations together. Self-advocacy skills development recognized Morris's

(2016) finding that Black girls often face punishment for speaking up, making it essential to practice these skills in supportive spaces.

The collaboration team recognized the need to show the intervention worked before seeking resources for broader implementation, broader systemic goals, or policy change. By examining whether participation in culturally grounded hand-clapping activities could produce measurable benefits for Black girls navigating predominantly white spaces, the intervention maintained realistic expectations aligned with improvement science principles of starting small and testing change ideas quickly (Bryk et al., 2015). This approach also honored what Ladson-Billings (1995) described as culturally relevant pedagogy, using students' cultural experiences to build bridges between their lives and educational goals. The choice of hand-clapping games as the intervention method is based on research showing how cultural practices rooted in the body create spaces for authentic connection and identity affirmation among Black girls (Gaunt, 2006; Love, 2012).

Table 3-2

Short-Term Goals

Short-Term Goal	Ideas for Change Activities	Data Collection Plan
Increased Sense of Belonging	Hand-clapping sessions centering Black culture Discussion circles (navigating pwi spaces) Group identity creation (developing rituals) Affirmations that celebrate participants' contributions	Pre-and post-surveys Post-session interviews Researcher field notes Optional journals Measuring connection, safety, inclusion, comfort and sense of belonging

Short-Term Goal	Ideas for Change Activities	Data Collection Plan
Build Peer Connections	Partner and small group hand games Structured discussions Collaborative creation of new hand games Group reflection activities Snacks and conversation opportunities	Pre and post surveys Post-session interviews Researcher field notes Optional journals Assessing peer relationships, interaction patterns, collaboration, and peer support
Improved Self-Advocacy Skills	Discussion Circles about experiences of marginalization Role-playing-practicing self-advocacy Story sharing Teaching self-advocacy language and strategies Reflection on code-switching and authentic voice	Pre-and post-surveys Post-session interviews Researcher field notes Optional journals Measuring self-confidence in speaking up, willingness to be vulnerable and ability to amplify voice and agency

Table 3-2 presents the short-term goals for the Clap Club intervention, including specific change activities and corresponding data collection plans for measuring outcomes related to belonging, peer connections, and self-advocacy skills.

Timeline for Implementation

The timeline began with a two-week pre-implementation phase focused on recruitment and baseline data collection to ensure that all participants entered the program with clear expectations. The guidance counselor contacted each girl to obtain consent and assent forms and confirmed with the girls that they would commit to the study for the entire six weeks. Baseline interviews were completed during the pre-implementation phase before Clap Club programming began.

The core intervention unfolded across six weekly sessions, each building systematically on previous learning while allowing flexibility for participant-driven

adaptation. While the data collection and analysis ran concurrently, the post-implementation allowed time to collect the post-surveys and post-interviews for a complete analysis, ensuring that participant voices and experiences were captured and meaningful reflection given for future program refinement.

Table 3-3

Timeline for Implementation with Specific Activities

Week	Focus	Key Activities	Collaborators
Pre-Implementation (2 weeks) 9/22/25 - 10/7/25	Setup & Recruitment	Recruit participants, collect baseline data, prepare materials, and confirm meeting space	Student participants, researcher, guidance counselor, principal, facilitator
Week 1: 10/9/25 Foundation	Community Building	Group norms, initial hand games, and begin journals	All nine student participants, researcher
Week 2: 10/30/25 Cultural Identity	Heritage Exploration	Story circles, cultural sharing, and document traditions	All student participants, researcher
Week 3: 11/6/25 Expression	Creative Activities	Art, movement, vocal expression, and group discussions	All student participants, researcher
Week 4: 11/13/25 Bridge Building	Cultural Demonstrations	Teaching moments, dialogue about school experiences	All student participants, researcher
Week 5: 11/20/25 Deepening	Self-Advocacy	Collaborative workshops, strategy development	All student participants, researcher
Week 6: 12/4/25 Celebration	Reflection & Planning	Presentations, final reflections, and future planning	All participants, researcher

Week	Focus	Key Activities	Collaborators
Post-Implementation (1 week) 12/8/25 - 12/12/25	Data Collection	Final surveys, interviews artifact collection, and analysis preparation	Sample of participants

Methodological Approach to Improvement

This study employed the Improvement Science methodology using a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to develop and test a Clap Club intervention. As detailed in Table 3-3, the intervention was structured across a six-week period from October through December 2025, with two weeks of pre-implementation setup and one week of post-implementation data collection. The PDSA approach was well-suited for this educational equity work because it emphasized rapid cycle learning, collaborator engagement, and iterative refinement based on real-world implementation data (Langley et al., 2009).

These research questions were informed by Scott and Collins' (2025) finding that traditional social-emotional learning curricula were often "color-evasive" and failed to consider cultural differences, necessitating qualitative approaches that centered Black girls' authentic experiences rather than standardized measures that may have misinterpreted culturally responsive behaviors as problematic.

Research Questions

1. How do Black girls experience and make meaning of their social efficacy development during a six-week culturally affirming intervention?
2. In what ways, if any, do participants describe Clap Club activities as influencing their social confidence and peer belonging?

Data Collection Methods

Process measures documented program engagement, session dynamics, and implementation quality through researcher observation notes and post-session reflections. Outcome measures captured changes in participants' social efficacy through both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the nine participants were collected through pre- and post-intervention surveys measuring social efficacy. Analysis of the survey data helped determine if participants experienced an improved social efficacy over the six-week intervention period. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured pre- and post-intervention interviews and researcher observation notes to examine improvements in confidence, peer connections, and advocacy skills. Data collected from interview transcripts and observation notes were coded into themes for detailed analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection allowed the researcher to observe overarching themes of the study and examine growth over the course of the intervention (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Session Observations

Structured student observations, which require predetermined observation protocols derived from research, were conducted weekly during the six intervention sessions throughout the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The observations provided a detailed lens into participant engagement and enabled the researcher to focus on refined social behaviors, including peer interaction, cultural expression, and self-advocacy. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) noted that observations not only help to advance the validity of a study but also provide vital information about the physical environment and "may be used to examine nonverbal expressions to determine who interacts with whom

and how to evaluate how participants interact with each other" (p. 392). The observation protocol involved participant observation, where the researcher facilitated the sessions while simultaneously observing and documenting interaction patterns, engagement levels, and evidence of belonging and connection (Patton, 2015). This dual role required careful attention to both process facilitation and data collection, with detailed field notes recorded immediately following each session to capture authentic participant behaviors and interactions (Emerson et al., 2011).

The session observation protocol aligned directly with the research questions, addressing how participants experience cultural affirmation and peer belonging through Clap Club activities. Observations included not only the number and quality of peer interactions but also the depth of cultural sharing, expressions of authentic identity, and instances of self-advocacy or mutual support (Morris, 2016). Confidence, belonging, and engagement in the hand-clapping activities could be displayed through participation levels, willingness to share personal experiences, physical and emotional comfort in the space, and collaborative behaviors with peers (Gaunt, 2006). These indicators were captured via the observation protocol and documented in detailed field notes after each session, following established qualitative research practices for documenting naturally occurring social interactions (Emerson et al., 2011; Patton, 2015). See Appendix F.

Artifact collection provided visual documentation of participant creativity, identity exploration, and cultural expression throughout the intervention. With participant permission, sessions were recorded of the hand clapping games. Photographs were taken of two-worlds maps comparing home and school cultures, journal entries voluntarily submitted by participants throughout the study, and final celebration cultural snacks were

photographed. Each photograph was accompanied by researcher notes describing the context and capturing participant explanations of their work when shared. These visual artifacts serve as tangible evidence of identity exploration and empowerment while also functioning as memory aids during analysis and member checking sessions.

Rationales for Specific Data Collection Methods

This mixed-methods approach prioritized understanding how participants experienced social efficacy development while incorporating validated quantitative measurement to document changes in social efficacy. With participant permission, audio and video recordings captured authentic participant voice, hand-clapping games, movement activities, and group energy for deeper analysis and documentation of cultural practices.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Pre- and post-intervention interviews provided the baseline and outcome data in participants' own voices, capturing nuances of experience that quantitative scales could not measure. The semi-structured format balanced consistency (ensuring key constructs were explored with all participants) with flexibility (allowing participants to share unexpected insights and guide conversations toward what mattered most to them). Referencing themes from validated instruments like the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale (PSSM) ensured that interviews explored theoretically grounded constructs while avoiding the limitations of standardized questionnaires that may have misinterpreted culturally responsive behaviors as problematic.

Session Observations and Audio Recordings

Systematic observation and audio recording of sessions captured group dynamics, participation patterns, and spontaneous interactions that revealed social efficacy development in action. These process data explained how the intervention worked (or didn't work), identifying which activities generated authentic engagement, where participants demonstrated emerging confidence, and what barriers arose during implementation. Audio recordings enabled detailed analysis of language, tone, and interaction patterns that field notes alone could not capture.

Artifact Collection

Photographs of participants' heritage maps, artwork, and group activities (taken with permission) provided visual documentation of creative expression and cultural exploration. These artifacts served as conversation starters during interviews, prompting participants to elaborate on the meaning behind their creations. Visual data also captured elements of the intervention experience that may have been difficult to articulate verbally, particularly regarding cultural identity and belonging.

The emphasis on authentic expression aligned with the intervention's core commitment to centering Black girls' voices and experiences as the primary source of knowledge about their own growth trajectories, while incorporating culturally relevant frameworks that recognized traditional practices like hand-clapping games as legitimate vehicles for social skill development and community building among Black girls (Gaunt, 2006). Recent research confirmed that developing social skills for competence and resilience among Black girls required attention to cultural authenticity, as Scott and Collins (2025) found that 'interventions were more effective when the interventionist

mirrored their salient intersecting identities' and that Black women facilitators "served as additional role models for the participants" (p. 249).

This comprehensive data collection approach addressed limitations inherent in standardized measurement tools. Although validated questionnaires for adolescent self-concept and self-perception existed (Palenzuela-Luis et al., 2022), these instruments often failed to capture the intersectional experiences of Black girls navigating PWI spaces, necessitating culturally responsive data collection methods that centered participant voice and authentic expression alongside validated quantitative measures.

Description of the Development of Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative Instrument: Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy (SPSSE)

The SPSSE provided a standardized, validated measurement of the intervention's primary outcome: social efficacy. Administering the scale at pre- and post-intervention allowed for documentation of individual change trajectories while minimizing participant assessment burden. The quantitative data from the SPSSE complemented qualitative findings by providing concrete numerical indicators of change that could inform future PDSA cycles and program refinement. Even with a small sample size, individual pre-post comparisons offered valuable preliminary evidence about whether participants increased confidence in their social abilities following the intervention.

The Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy (see Appendix C) served as the primary quantitative measure of participants' social efficacy development. This validated instrument assessed individuals' confidence in their ability to perform various social tasks and navigate social situations successfully. The SPSSE was administered at two time points: pre-intervention (baseline) and post-intervention (Week 6).

The SPSSE was selected because it directly measured social efficacy, the intervention's core outcome variable. The scale's focus on confidence in performing specific social behaviors aligned with the study's emphasis on building social skills for competence and resilience. The pre-post design allowed for examination of individual growth trajectories while maintaining the study's qualitative depth.

Culturally Responsive Qualitative Instruments

While the SPSSE provided quantitative measurements of social efficacy changes, standardized approaches may not adequately capture the culturally specific experiences of Black girls in predominantly white educational environments. Therefore, the study incorporated multiple qualitative data collection methods.

I Am Worthy Workbook

I Am Worthy: Self-Love & Self-Esteem Workbook for Black Teen Girls by Serena James (2025) served as the structured journaling tool throughout the intervention. This workbook was selected because it was specifically designed for Black teen girls, providing culturally relevant content that reflects participants' lived experiences and validated their intersectional identities. The workbook included guided journal prompts, stories from other Black girls that normalize their experiences, and self-care tools that supported emotional wellbeing. Using a published workbook created by a Black woman author models the representation and cultural affirmation that the intervention sought to build.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocols

Interview protocols incorporated themes from validated instruments like the PSSM and Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) as conversation starters.

Interviews are conducted at baseline and post-intervention, allowing participants to articulate their experiences in their own words while ensuring key constructs related to belonging, identity, and social navigation are explored.

Session Observations, Audio Recordings, and Artifacts

The study systematically documented sessions through observation notes, audio recordings, and photographs of participants' creative work (with permission). These multiple data sources provided comprehensive documentation of the intervention process and participants' experiences.

Description of Setting and Sample Selection Criteria

All Clap Club sessions were conducted on campus in a private meeting room designated specifically for the intervention. Sessions took place after school hours to minimize disruption to participants' academic schedules while providing a protected space for authentic engagement. The private room was reserved exclusively for program participants during session times, ensuring that teachers, administrators, and other non-participating students could not observe or interrupt the activities. This intentional separation from the general school environment allowed participants to engage freely in cultural activities, hand-clapping games, and discussion circles without the institutional surveillance or potential disciplinary scrutiny that characterized many Black girls' typical school experiences. While the physical location remained on campus, the dedicated private space created a boundary between the intervention and the regular school day, enabling participants to shed the hypervigilance often required in predominantly white educational settings and engage authentically with peers in developing social efficacy skills. The after-school timing also accommodated participants' academic commitments

while providing a consistent, accessible location that eliminated transportation barriers that could have impeded regular attendance.

Sample Selection Criteria

The target sample consisted of nine Black girls currently enrolled at Crescent Academy who met the following inclusion criteria:

1. Self-identification as Black/African American female students
2. Current enrollment in grades nine through twelve at Crescent Academy
3. Voluntary willingness to participate in a six-week cultural empowerment intervention
4. Parental/guardian consent for participants under 18 years of age
5. Ability to attend weekly 60-minute after-school sessions consistently
6. Willingness to participate in interviews, and reflection activities

Exclusion Criteria

1. Current participation in other intensive social-emotional interventions that might confound results
2. Inability to commit to the full six-week program duration

This intentionally small sample size aligned with improvement science principles that prioritized deep learning over broad generalization in initial PDSA cycles. With Black students comprising approximately 11% of total high school enrollment (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2024), nine participants represented a meaningful proportion of the available population while enabling the intensive relationship-building and cultural trust development essential for

authentic engagement with participants who had experienced educational marginalization and surveillance.

The recruitment strategy intentionally sought diverse representation across grade levels (9th through 12th grades), academic performance levels, and extracurricular involvement to capture varied perspectives within the small Black girl student population. Voluntary participation was essential, ensuring that engagement reflected genuine interest in developing social skills for competence and resilience rather than compliance with adult expectations.

Principles of Improvement Science

This research demonstrated strong alignment with improvement science principles through its systematic approach to testing change ideas while maintaining focus on learning and adaptation rather than proving predetermined outcomes.

Small-Scale Testing for Deep Learning

The commitment to small-scale testing reflected improvement science wisdom about starting with a manageable scope to generate specific, actionable learning rather than attempting large-scale systemic change through a single intervention. This PDSA Cycle deliberately limited participants to nine Black girls, focusing on deep engagement and relationship building rather than broad reach. To protect participant confidentiality, the following pseudonyms were used throughout this study: Power, Heaven, Reign, Legacy, Essence, Destiny, Harmony, Promise, and Miracle.

Evidence-Building and Documentation

Evidence-building occurred through systematic documentation of both implementation processes and participant outcomes, creating a comprehensive foundation

for future cycle refinement and potential scaling. Multiple data sources captured different dimensions of the intervention experience, from quantitative trends in belonging and cultural identity to rich qualitative narratives about peer connections and cultural empowerment.

Context-Specific Focus with Transferable Insights

The research maintained context-specific focus by directly addressing particular challenges identified at Crescent Academy, such as the documented experiences of surveillance, cultural isolation, and numerical minority status that Black girls faced in this PWI. Simultaneously, the systematic documentation and analysis approach generated insights that may have transferred to similar contexts.

Intended Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis began with data familiarization as the researcher immersed in the dataset of participant interviews, post-session reflections, and observation notes (Saldaña, 2016). Systematic thematic analysis followed a structured multi-phase process to identify patterns, relationships, and contradictions that inform PDSA cycle learning and future program refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher organized all data sources into the MAXQDA software, labeling each file with participant pseudonym, data type, and collection date. Initial readings without coding allowed the researcher to note striking patterns and potential themes before formal analysis began (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using Saldaña's (2016) two-cycle coding framework, first-round descriptive coding identified and labeled basic content related to social efficacy development, cultural affirmation, and participant experiences, creating an organizational structure that categorized raw data into

manageable, analyzable segments. Second-round focused coding developed more conceptual categories capturing the processes and mechanisms through which participants experienced change, specifically examining patterns of social navigation skill development, advocacy behavior emergence, relationships between cultural activities and confidence development, and mechanisms of peer connection building (Patton, 2015).

Following the two coding rounds, the researcher synthesized focused codes into broader themes that directly addressed the research questions using MAXQDA's visualization tools to map relationships between codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Cross-source analysis examined connections between different data sources for each participant, triangulating findings across pre- and post-intervention interviews, survey responses, observation notes, and post-session reflections to validate patterns (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The researcher identified both convergent experiences appearing across most participants and divergent experiences reflecting individual differences in responses to the intervention (Patton, 2015).

Validity and Trustworthiness

This qualitative study employed multiple strategies to ensure validity and trustworthiness, drawing from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement during the six-week intervention, triangulation of multiple data sources (participant interviews, reflection journals, and session observation notes), and member checking with participants to ensure accuracy and cultural authenticity. Transferability was enhanced through comprehensive documentation of the intervention context, participant characteristics, institutional setting, and implementation processes at Crescent Academy, while dependability and

confirmability were established through systematic documentation of all research procedures, decisions, and adaptations, creating an audit trail for external review of methodological consistency.

Member Checking

Member checking ensured authenticity by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation, correction, and additional insight generation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher prepared a summary document highlighting major themes and representative quotes with pseudonyms, then met individually with participants to review findings and provide feedback on whether interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. The researcher documented participants' responses and incorporated their corrections into the final analysis. Throughout all phases, the researcher maintained an audit trail documenting coding decisions, analytical memos, and methodological choices to ensure transparency and rigor (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Confirmability was pursued through reflexive practice that acknowledged and examined the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and potential biases throughout the research process (Patton, 2015). Comprehensive participant protection was prioritized through informed assent procedures that included both student assent and parental consent, ensuring that all participants and their families understood the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their rights throughout the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Ethics

This study adhered to comprehensive ethical standards designed to protect the wellbeing and rights of Black girl participants while maintaining research integrity

throughout the PDSA cycle. As an improvement science project focused on testing programming interventions rather than generalizable research, this work followed the ethical guidelines established in the Human Subjects Assurance Form for Improvement Science Projects. Informed consent procedures included both parental consent and student assent, with age-appropriate language that clearly explained the project purpose, voluntary nature of participation, potential risks and benefits, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality protection employed multiple safeguards, including pseudonym assignment, secure data storage with password protection and two-factor authentication, and restricted access limited to essential research team members.

Given the sensitive nature of discussions about marginalization and racism, additional ethical considerations required comprehensive emotional safety protocols. Participants were informed that discussions may have evoked difficult emotions related to experiences of discrimination, isolation, or cultural invalidation. The facilitator monitored for signs of emotional distress during sessions and provided immediate support through grounding techniques, affirming statements, and if necessary, individual check-ins outside the group setting. The private on-campus after-school setting further protected participants from potential surveillance or negative consequences related to their project participation, while regular check-ins throughout the intervention ensured ongoing comfort and voluntary continued participation.

To prevent re-traumatization, the intervention employed several protective strategies: participants retained control over their level of disclosure about painful experiences, with no pressure to share beyond their comfort level; sessions included

structured transition times between difficult topics and affirming activities; and the facilitator maintained awareness of trauma-informed practices, including recognizing dissociation, emotional overwhelm, or other distress signals. Should a participant have become significantly distressed, protocols included immediate de-escalation, private support, connection with school counseling resources, and parental notification if appropriate under mandatory reporting guidelines.

Recognizing that processing racial trauma and identity development extended beyond session time, participants received ongoing support through multiple channels: weekly individual check-ins via secure messaging, access to a crisis contact protocol for after-hours concerns, and clear pathways to school-based mental health resources. The facilitator, an educator with trauma-informed training, provided clinical oversight while maintaining appropriate boundaries between research and therapeutic relationships.

Each session concluded with affirming cultural activities and positive identity reinforcement to ensure participants left feeling empowered rather than depleted by difficult discussions. This structure acknowledged that exploring systemic oppression required careful balance between authentic engagement with challenging realities and maintaining psychological safety and wellbeing.

Positionality Statement

As an African American Muslim woman educator, my positionality significantly informed this research in ways that both enhanced and potentially complicated the study's authenticity and objectivity. My personal experiences navigating intersectional marginalization provided unique insights into the challenges faced by Black girls in PWIs, enabling me to recognize subtle forms of discrimination and cultural erasure that

might have been invisible to researchers from different backgrounds. However, these same experiences potentially introduced biases that could have influenced data collection, interpretation, and analysis in ways that favored certain perspectives or conclusions over others.

To address these potential biases while leveraging the authentic insights my positionality provided, I maintained regular reflective practice through detailed research journaling that examined my assumptions, emotional responses, and interpretive choices throughout the research process. I actively sought feedback from colleagues and participants to challenge my assumptions and ensure that my interpretations accurately reflected participant experiences rather than projecting my own experiences onto their narratives.

Limitations of the Study

This study faced several significant limitations related to sample size, contextual specificity, and temporal scope that restricted the generalizability and broader applicability of findings. The small sample size of nine participants, while appropriate for the intensive relationship-building and cultural work required by this intervention, fundamentally limited the generalizability of findings to broader populations of Black girls in PWIs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Small sample qualitative studies prioritize depth over breadth, allowing for rich, detailed exploration of participant experiences but limiting statistical power and the ability to make claims beyond the specific study context (Patton, 2015). This limitation was especially significant given the diversity of experiences within Black communities and the varying institutional contexts across different PWIs (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Morris, 2016).

The single school context of Crescent Academy further restricted comparison across different institutional environments, preventing analysis of how varying school cultures, demographics, policies, and contexts might influence intervention effectiveness (Yin, 2018). Single-site case studies provide limited external validity, as findings may be highly dependent on the unique characteristics and conditions of the specific setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Crescent Academy's specific characteristics as a suburban Massachusetts high school with 62% White enrollment and relatively affluent demographics may not represent the experiences of Black girls in other predominantly white contexts with different socioeconomic profiles, academic cultures, or institutional climates (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). The intersection of race and class creates distinct experiences for Black students, and interventions effective in affluent settings may not translate to contexts where students face compounded marginalization based on both race and socioeconomic status (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). The intervention's effectiveness at Crescent Academy cannot be assumed to transfer directly to other predominantly white institutions with different student populations, resources, or approaches to diversity and inclusion.

The six-week timeframe of the intervention presented additional limitations that affected the depth and sustainability of observed changes. Research on identity development and social efficacy building demonstrates that meaningful cultural transformation and identity development often require sustained effort over extended periods, as participants need time to integrate new perspectives, develop deeper relationships, and apply cultural knowledge in various contexts beyond the intervention setting (Erikson, 1968; Spencer et al., 2006). Short-term interventions may produce initial

enthusiasm or temporary behavioral changes that do not persist without ongoing support and reinforcement (Bryk et al., 2015). The brief duration of this initial PDSA cycle limited the ability to assess long-term impacts on participants' social efficacy, sustained peer connections, or enduring changes in their navigation of predominantly white spaces. Longitudinal research would be necessary to determine whether observed improvements in belonging, peer connection, and self-advocacy persisted beyond the immediate intervention period (Patton, 2015).

Furthermore, the intervention's reliance on hand-clapping games as cultural vehicles assumed participants had familiarity with or openness to these specific African American cultural traditions. Black girls from different cultural backgrounds within the African diaspora, including those with Caribbean, African immigrant, or multiracial backgrounds, or those with varying levels of connection to traditional African American cultural practices, might respond differently to this particular form of cultural programming, limiting the intervention's applicability across the diverse experiences within Black communities (Gaunt, 2006; Tatum, 2017). The cultural specificity of the intervention, while a strength in terms of grounding the work in authentic Black girlhood traditions, simultaneously limited its universality. Research on culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the importance of understanding students' specific cultural backgrounds rather than assuming homogeneity within racial groups (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The heterogeneity of Black students' cultural experiences, shaped by factors including immigration status, regional background, family structure, and socioeconomic status, means that interventions must remain responsive to diverse cultural orientations within Black communities (Carter, 2005).

Finally, voluntary participation, while ethically necessary and aligned with participatory research principles, introduced potential selection bias that could have skewed findings toward participants who were already motivated, engaged, or possessing characteristics that made them more likely to benefit from cultural empowerment programming (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015;). Self-selection in intervention research creates samples that may not represent the full range of the target population, as students who volunteer often differ systematically from those who do not in terms of motivation, self-efficacy, social skills, or other relevant characteristics (Shadish et al., 2002). Students who chose to participate may have already possessed stronger cultural identity foundations, greater comfort with peer interaction, or higher levels of agency than Black girls at Crescent Academy who did not volunteer, potentially limiting the intervention's demonstrated effectiveness to a self-selected subset of the target population. Black girls experiencing the most severe isolation, lowest self-efficacy, or greatest disconnection from cultural identity may have been the least likely to self-select into a program focused on cultural connection and peer support, creating a "preaching to the choir" effect where those most in need of intervention were least likely to access it (Morris, 2016).

Possible Barriers to the Study

Several barriers threatened both the implementation quality and research validity of this intervention. Recruitment and retention posed significant risks, as voluntary participation in a six-week commitment during the school year competed with academic demands, extracurricular activities, and family obligations. The potential for inconsistent attendance threatened the intervention's relational foundation, as hand-clapping games

and trust-building through discussions required regular participation to develop the peer connections and cultural affirmation central to the program's theory of change (Gaunt, 2006). Additionally, recruiting nine Black girls from a predominantly white school with limited Black student enrollment risked creating too small or too homogeneous a group to generate the peer diversity and collective energy necessary for meaningful social efficacy development (Morris, 2016).

Institutional and relational barriers also threatened implementation fidelity and data quality. Securing administrator support, appropriate meeting space, and consistent scheduling within the constraints of the school calendar and competing institutional priorities required ongoing negotiation and adaptation (Bryk et al., 2015).

The researcher's dual role as both facilitator and observer created methodological tensions, as active engagement in building relationships and facilitating culturally grounded activities necessarily limited the ability to maintain researcher distance and objectivity in documenting participant interactions and outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These competing demands required careful attention to field notes, systematic observation protocols, and reflexive journaling to maintain research quality while honoring the relational commitments essential to culturally responsive work with Black girls.

Finally, the sensitive nature of discussing experiences of racial marginalization within a predominantly white institution created risks to both participant wellbeing and data authenticity. Participants might have self-censored their experiences or responses due to concerns about confidentiality, fear of retaliation from peers or adults, or discomfort discussing painful experiences even within a culturally affirming space

(Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). The researcher's positionality as an adult authority figure, despite shared racial identity with participants, potentially constrained the depth and authenticity of participant disclosures, particularly regarding experiences with specific teachers, administrators, or peers (Patton, 2015). These dynamics threatened to limit the richness and validity of qualitative data while potentially replicating the very power imbalances the intervention sought to address.

Methodological Complexity and Research Validity

The methodological complexity of this exploratory qualitative research presented several barriers that could have affected data quality and analysis validity. Managing large amounts of qualitative data efficiently required sophisticated organizational systems and adequate time for thorough analysis, particularly given the rich, multi-modal data collection approach that generated extensive transcripts, observation notes, reflection journals, and video recordings.

These proactive planning measures acknowledged that implementation barriers were likely rather than possible, requiring systematic preparation and flexible adaptation while maintaining core intervention integrity and research rigor throughout the PDSA cycle.

PDSA Cycle 1: “DO” Phase

Implementation Narrative

The six-week Clap Club intervention was implemented using a structured progression that moved participants from foundation-building to critical consciousness and action planning. Each session followed a consistent 60-minute plan structure that included seven components delivered in the same sequence.

Table 3-4

Clap Club Implementation Structure

Session Component	Time
Welcome & Arrival	8-10 minutes
Opening Ritual	10 minutes
Primary Activity/Discussion	15-20 minutes
Hand-Clapping Game	15-20 minutes
Secondary Activity	5 minutes
Journal Reflection	6-10 minutes
Closing Ritual	1-2 minutes

Session Setting and Format

Each session was held on campus after school in a classroom setting with nine Black female participants in grades nine through twelve. At the beginning of each session, participants were greeted by the facilitator individually while culturally relevant music by Black singers and songwriters played in the background. Snacks and beverages were provided at the beginning of each session. Table four outlines the implementation structure that guided each Clap Club session.

Session Progression

Every opening ritual asked participants to rate how they felt on a scale of one to ten and state why. The primary activities changed each week, building one upon another. During the first session, the discussion topic was “Why are we here?” The facilitator introduced herself and informed participants about the inspiration for Clap Club. The discussion continued as participants introduced themselves and the group developed norms and agreements for each session.

The primary activity for session two required each student to bring an artifact from their culture and explain the significance of that artifact in their culture and what it meant to them personally. Session three's primary activity was a discussion about what it is like to be a Black girl at Crescent Academy. Session four's discussion focused on navigating predominantly white spaces and code-switching. In session five, students were taught strategies for dealing with some of the challenges that emerged in the week three and four discussions. The final sixth session was celebratory and the primary activity was the distribution of completion certificates and a brief discussion about how participants could continue the program in some capacity. The fourth component of every Clap Club session was hand-clapping games.

The secondary activity centered on hand games. During session one, the facilitator discussed the history of hand-games, pointing out that remnants of the games that Black girls created can still be found in hip hop culture. Students listened to a rap song that mimicked the traditional hand-game lyrics of 'Down Down Baby,' a song rapped by a male artist. The facilitator introduced and taught the girls the hand-clapping game, Miss Mary Mack (See Appendix G for the original version). During the second

session, students practiced Miss Mary Mack with a partner and were asked to think about the words and what they might mean to a Black girl in the 1950s or even 1980s. In session three, the girls were asked to change the lyrics to Miss Mary Mack and imagine that Miss Mary Mack lived in 2025. Participants worked in groups to change just one or two lines. During session four, participants combined their work from week three to change all of the lyrics to the song. In session five, students made last-minute changes to the lyrics and created their own movements, claps, and snaps to the updated version of Miss Mary Mack (See Appendix H for the revised version).

Each session included preprinted journal reflections taken from the *I Am Worthy* book. Participants were given the option to share their reflections (See Appendix I for journal prompts). Each session ended with the closing chant created by the girls during session one.

Change 1: Shift to Solo Facilitation

The initial intervention design included co-facilitation with a member of the collaboration team. Since the co-facilitator's schedule did not align with the study's sessions. This scheduling conflict prevented the team member from attending sessions, requiring the researcher to serve as the sole facilitator for sessions two through six.

Change 2: Journal as Gift Rather Than Ongoing Data Source

Originally, the intervention design included weekly journal prompts with students writing reflections throughout the six-week period, which the researcher would collect and analyze as data. However, the researcher made the decision to reframe the journals as gifts to the participants rather than required data collection tools. Instead of collecting journals for analysis, the researcher invited students to voluntarily share pages if they

chose. This change honored students' autonomy and privacy, recognizing that the vulnerable work of discussing code-switching, racism, and identity required a space where students controlled what they shared. The journals became personal keepsakes and tools for self-reflection rather than artifacts of surveillance, aligning with the program's core commitment to creating a no-surveillance space. While this reduced one planned data source, it strengthened trust and reinforced that Clap Club existed primarily for students' benefit, not for adult research agendas. Students' optional sharing of journal pages, combined with rich discussion data from session observations and interviews, provided sufficient insight into their experiences while preserving the integrity of the space the group had collectively created.

Change 3: Restructuring Session Five to Prioritize Advocacy Skills

Originally, Session Five was designed to focus primarily on finalizing the Miss Miracool hand-clapping game and celebrating the group's work together. However, the depth of Session Four's disclosures indicated that advocacy skills development required more focused attention. The researcher restructured session five to prioritize role-playing scenarios for reporting racist incidents, developing language for self-advocacy, and creating strategies for following up to ensure something is done about harmful behavior. This change reflected the improvement science principle of responsive iteration, using data from one cycle to inform the next (Bryk et al., 2015). While the session still celebrated collaborative work and finalized the hand-clapping game, the primary focus shifted to equipping students with practical tools for navigating predominantly white institutional environments. This adjustment acknowledged both the reality that students

will continue encountering such spaces in college and careers, and their right to resist having to constantly modify themselves.

A Report on PDSA Cycle 1: The “Study” Phase

This study employed quantitative and qualitative data analysis conducted concurrently with data collection. Following principles of improvement science methodology, the researcher analyzed data iteratively throughout the six-week intervention period (October 10 - December 4, 2025). This concurrent analysis allowed for real-time responsiveness to participant needs, enabling adjustments to subsequent session plans based on insights from previous sessions.

Overall, the results and findings from the Clap Club intervention suggest meaningful improvement in social efficacy in participating students' social efficacy. The intervention achieved a 19.3% increase in social efficacy relative to participants' baseline scores, exceeding typical expectations for a six-week culturally grounded intervention. The greatest improvement was shown in participants' confidence in attending unfamiliar social events (86% improvement) and sharing feelings with others (69% improvement); skills requiring vulnerability and authentic connection. The quantitative results indicated strong positive growth for eight of nine participants, with individual improvements ranging from 12% to 111% using the SPSSE survey. Additionally, while participants showed substantial growth in emotionally risky social interactions, minimal change occurred in skills where baseline confidence was already high. These findings are further explored with supporting qualitative data.

Primary data sources included pre- and post-survey responses measuring social efficacy, video recordings of all six sessions, researcher field notes, pre- and post-intervention individual interviews with each participant, and student artifacts (two-worlds mapping diagrams and the collaboratively created Miss Miracool

hand-clapping game). Quantitative analysis of survey data documented changes in social efficacy scores from baseline to post-intervention, with individual and group-level improvements calculated as both absolute change and percent improvement relative to baseline.

Qualitative analysis began with open coding of session transcripts and interview data to identify recurring patterns, including instances of participants sharing experiences of racism, expressing cultural pride, demonstrating vulnerability, practicing advocacy, and describing their sense of belonging. This initial descriptive coding informed the development of focused codes that examined processes and mechanisms of change, such as how safe space norms enabled authentic disclosure, how cultural practices connected to identity development, and how peer solidarity functioned as a protective factor. Through iterative analysis and code synthesis, six major themes emerged: safe space creation and group cohesion, cultural connection and identity affirmation, critical consciousness development, experiences of racism and microaggressions, social efficacy and collective action, and advocacy and resistance strategies.

Quantitative Analysis

The Clap Club intervention achieved a mean improvement of 0.88 points on the Social Efficacy Scale, representing a 30.6% increase relative to baseline ($M_{pre} = 2.88$, $SD = 1.20$; $M_{post} = 3.76$, $SD = 1.07$). Table five summarizes the social efficacy outcomes for the intervention. This exceeded the predetermined improvement target of 10% by 20.6 percentage points. All eight participants with valid pre-post data (100%) demonstrated positive growth, with individual improvements ranging from 12.1% to 111.1%.

Table 3-5

Social Efficacy Outcomes Summary

Measure	Value
Pre-intervention group mean	2.88 (SD = 1.20)
Post-intervention group mean	3.76 (SD = 1.07)
Absolute change	+0.88 points
Percent improvement (relative baseline)	+30.6%
Success Rate	100% (8 of 8 participants showed positive growth)

Table 3-6*Individual Participant Results*

Participant	Pre-score	Post-Score	Change	% Improvement (vs Baseline)
Miracle	2.12	4.47	+2.35	+111.1%
Heaven	2.94	3.94	+1.00	+34.0%
Destiny	3.00	3.94	+0.94	+31.4%
Reign	3.06	3.88	+0.82	+26.9%
Promise	2.47	3.06	+0.59	+23.9%
Essence	3.71	4.35	+0.64	+17.5%
Legacy	2.35	2.65	+0.30	+12.5%
Power	3.41	3.82	+0.41	+12.1%
Harmony	Invalid	2.76	N/A	Cannot calculate

Note. Percent improvement calculated as: $((Post - Pre) / Pre) \times 100$, representing growth relative to each participant's starting point. Harmony's preintervention survey was invalid due to technical difficulties, so her data were excluded from the quantitative data analysis; only her postintervention score is reported descriptively.

Table six presents individual participant results showing pre-intervention and post-intervention social efficacy scores, absolute change, and percent improvement for each participant. The Clap Club's overall impact demonstrated a 30.6% improvement in

social efficacy relative to participants' baseline scores, exceeding the 10% aim. All eight participants with valid pre-post surveys demonstrated positive growth ranging from 12.1% to 111.1%, representing a 100% success rate. The highest gains occurred in skills requiring emotional risk, with attending unfamiliar social events showing 86% improvement relative to baseline and sharing feelings with others showing 69% improvement. This validated the driver diagram's primary drivers: that cultural validation and the creation of safe spaces work collectively to build voice, agency, and belonging, with vulnerability practices in surveillance-free environments serving as the foundation for social efficacy development.

Individual participant outcomes revealed the intervention's transformational potential. Miracle's social efficacy score increased by 111.1% relative to baseline, rising from 2.12 to 4.47, a 2.35 point improvement that moved her from "Little Confidence" to "Complete Confidence/Much Confidence" range. Even participants with modest absolute changes experienced meaningful improvements when measured relative to their starting points. Legacy's +0.30 absolute change represented 12.5% growth from her baseline, and Power's +0.41 change represented 12.1% growth, demonstrating that the intervention supported development regardless of starting confidence level. The 100% positive growth rate provided strong evidence that the intervention was universally beneficial, with no participants experiencing decline or stagnation, suggesting robust intervention design and implementation.

Despite this measurement challenge, the findings strongly confirmed that the Clap Club intervention successfully built social efficacy through culturally grounded practices, with a particularly powerful impact on skills requiring vulnerability and authentic

self-expression. The 30.6% improvement and 100% success rate demonstrated that culturally responsive, joy-centered spaces enabled Black girls to develop confidence in navigating predominantly white educational institutions. The absence of any decline among valid participants indicated that increased critical consciousness development did not decrease confidence when paired with cultural affirmation and community support. This validates Freire's (1970) assertion that critical consciousness, paired with collective action builds agency rather than despair. Participants learned to name racism (Sessions three and four) while simultaneously claiming cultural strength (Session two) and practicing advocacy strategies (Session five), ensuring that awareness of oppression did not translate to internalized defeat but rather to empowered resistance.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data gathered across six sessions revealed how a culturally grounded intervention using traditional hand-clapping games created conditions for Black girls to build social efficacy and practice advocacy strategies within a predominantly white school space. Through thematic analysis, six major themes were identified that converged with quantitative findings and directly addressed both research questions regarding how participants experienced social efficacy development and in what ways they experienced authentic connection, peer belonging, and cultural identity through Clap Club activities.

Theme One: Safe Space Creation as Foundational Mechanism for Vulnerability and Authentic Disclosure

Safe space creation functioned as the foundational mechanism enabling all other intervention outcomes, establishing the necessary conditions for participants to share experiences of racism, express vulnerability, and practice advocacy without fear of

surveillance or judgment. The "no surveillance" norm, co-created with participants in session one, was honored consistently throughout all sessions and operationalized through concrete protective measures: the facilitator moved the group to a private room with a locked door in session two specifically in response to participants' explicit concerns about being watched by school personnel. This physical and relational boundary construction proved essential, as participants explicitly contrasted Clap Club's surveillance-free environment with the school's pervasive monitoring culture in session three. Multiple students named how school cameras captured them for "fake diversity" marketing purposes and described how administrators "follow us around" (Session Three, November 6, 2025), revealing their acute awareness of racialized hypervisibility. The deliberate creation of a space exempt from this institutional gaze enabled authentic disclosure that would have been impossible under surveillance conditions, validating Morris's (2016) finding that Black girls' social efficacy development requires freedom from the constant monitoring that characterizes their typical school experiences.

The emotional check-in progression across sessions revealed not just increasing comfort but willingness to express struggle simultaneously with joy, with session three demonstrating trust that vulnerability would be held safely rather than requiring performance of constant positivity. Legacy's statement in her post-interview captured the extraordinary trust created:

I felt like I was heard there like some of the things that like I told you guys I never told anyone else like not even my mom and stuff like that so I just felt really comfortable there and I felt at peace, even though I'm sometimes loud.

(Post-Interview, November 29, 2025)

Power described similar feelings of safety: "Black girls find each other... I felt safe with the group" (Session Two, October 30, 2025). The consistency of these safety indicators across all six sessions, maintained through facilitator practices of confidentiality, respect, and responsiveness to participant needs, demonstrated that a safe space was not incidental but deliberately constructed and carefully maintained. This finding directly addresses research question two regarding how participants experienced authentic connection and peer belonging through Clap Club activities.

Theme Two: Cultural Connection and Identity Affirmation Built Pride and Positioned Participants as Cultural Producers

Cultural connection and identity affirmation built participants' pride in their Black identities while positioning them as both inheritors and producers of cultural traditions, creating conditions for authentic self-expression that extended beyond Clap Club into their broader school experiences. This theme emerged as the highest-coded across all five analyzed session transcripts, appearing in 87 coded segments including traditional game instruction, heritage exploration, contemporary adaptation, and collective creation. The progression from receiving traditional hand-clapping games to exploring personal heritage, to creating original cultural products, demonstrated how cultural affirmation functioned not as passive consumption but as active identity construction and collective empowerment.

Session one introduced traditional hand-clapping games including Miss Mary Mack, Down Down Baby, and Rockin' Robin, with participants learning rhythms and lyrics that connected them to multigenerational Black cultural practices. Session two's heritage artifact sharing involved eight of nine participants presenting cultural objects

representing Puerto Rican (coqui symbol and Bible), Kenyan, Ghanaian, Nigerian, and Haitian backgrounds, revealing the Pan-African and Caribbean diversity within the group and creating 45 minutes of sustained cultural sharing. By Session five, the group completed "Miss Miracool," a fully original hand-clapping game with choreographed movements performed collectively, featuring empowering lyrics including "Unashamed and proud, proud, proud, Unashamed and brown, brown, brown, Miss Mira-cool, cool, cool, All dressed in jewels, jewels, jewels, Confident at school, school, school" (Session five, November 20, 2025).

Post-intervention interviews revealed strong cultural impact, with Destiny reporting she "never used to talk about where my mom is from but lately I've really been sharing about my culture because I've been bringing foods from my culture" (Post-Interview, December 1, 2025) and Reign describing how culture day made her feel "proud of like my background like I'm proud of it now and I feel like I could share that with everyone" (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025).

The cultural connection work progressed strategically from receiving traditional culture to exploring personal heritage to creating new cultural products, positioning participants as both inheritors and producers of Black cultural traditions. The hand-clapping games served multiple simultaneous functions: connecting participants to ancestors and Black women who played the same games, creating joyful experiences through rhythm and coordination, providing an entry point for discussing cultural practices' historical significance, and offering templates for contemporary adaptation and innovation. The Miss Miracool lyrics represented powerful counter-narrative to deficit framings of Black girls, with "Unashamed and brown" directly rejecting shame about

racial identity, "All dressed in jewels" positioning Black girls as valuable and adorned with worth, and "Confident at school" claiming space in the predominantly white institution rather than shrinking or hiding. Heaven's post-interview reflection revealed deep understanding of cultural practices as living traditions:

Learning the actual meaning, how like girls used it like hand clapping to just like kind of disguise it in a way that only meant something to them. I think I would like carry that on because like I don't have to like sing Miss Mary Mac, I can change it into like my own lyrics and doing as a handshake with other people even teaching with other people. (Post-Interview, December 1, 2025)

Miracle identified creating Miss Miracool as her favorite part of Clap Club, explaining, "That, like, me and my friends able to come up with something like unique with like our own ideas" (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025), showing how cultural production enabled both creative expression and identity affirmation. These findings demonstrate convergence between cultural identity affirmation and social efficacy development, addressing Research Question one's focus on how participants made meaning of their social efficacy growth.

Theme Three: Critical Consciousness Development Reframed Marginalization from Personal Failure to Systemic Oppression, Protecting Against Internalized Racism

Critical consciousness development reframed participants' experiences of marginalization from personal failure to systemic oppression, serving as a protective factor against internalized racism while building capacity for collective resistance. This cognitive transformation showed clear progression across sessions, with 43 coded segments documenting movement from individual incident description to systemic

pattern recognition to institutional critique. Following Freire's (1970) framework, participants developed the capacity to recognize systemic oppression rather than internalizing marginalization as individual failure, a process that protected mental health by relocating blame from self to system. While critical consciousness was not a formally measured construct in this study, it emerged as a significant theme illuminating the mechanisms by which participants experienced social efficacy development and made meaning of their marginalization.

Sessions one and two showed minimal explicit critical consciousness language, with participants building trust and establishing relationships before engaging deeply. Session three marked a turning point, with participants explicitly naming surveillance as institutional control rather than benign monitoring. Session four represented peak development, with 23 coded segments documenting sophisticated institutional analysis including recognition that "this school talks about diversity but doesn't embody what they preach" (Session 4, November 13, 2025). Code-switching emerged as a significant subcategory, with participants quantifying their authenticity levels, such as Reign stating she felt "70% myself at school" pre-intervention (Pre-Interview, September 2025).

Post-intervention interviews documented sustained awareness. Miracle reframed her understanding from individual problem to institutional pattern: "I wasn't alone, because I felt like I was constantly getting targeted, but I didn't know like that there was like somebody older than me who was going through like, the exact same thing as me" (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025). The critical consciousness development documented across sessions revealed that participants already possessed sophisticated analytical frameworks for understanding their oppression but lacked a collective space to

articulate, validate, and build upon these analyses together. When participants in Session three stated that the school used their images to "capture fake diversity" (Session 3, November 6, 2025), they demonstrated an understanding of performative inclusion that exploits Black students' presence for marketing while failing to address their actual needs. Reign's post-intervention shift in authentic self-expression from "70% myself" to "90% myself at school" (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025) demonstrated how critical consciousness, when paired with cultural affirmation and peer support, enabled greater environmental navigation capacity rather than producing despair, a finding that directly addresses Research Question one regarding how participants experienced and made meaning of their social efficacy development.

Theme Four: Documented Experiences of Pervasive Racism and Institutional Failure Validated the Necessity of Culturally Affirming Counterspaces

Documented experiences of pervasive racism and institutional failure validated the necessity of culturally affirming counterspaces by revealing the hostile environment that made safe, collective processing essential for Black girls' wellbeing and social efficacy development. This theme captured 67 coded segments documenting racist incidents, microaggressions, and inadequate institutional responses across three distinct time periods: pre-intervention (historical traumas participants had carried for years), during-intervention (ongoing incidents disclosed as trust deepened), and post-intervention (continued racism met with newly acquired advocacy strategies). The breadth and specificity of incidents demonstrated that these were not isolated events but pervasive patterns requiring collective response (Morris, 2016), contextualizing both research questions by documenting the environmental challenges participants navigated while

developing social efficacy and making clear why surveillance-free spaces for cultural affirmation were not luxuries but necessities.

Pre-intervention interviews revealed historical traumas participants carried for years: a seventh-grade teacher publicly dumping a student's desk contents, a biology teacher yelling at a student for not finishing a test when English wasn't their first language, deliberate exclusion during hide-and-seek where friends ignored a Black girl's hiding spot, and fourth-grade spelling bee mockery where white boys called a Black girl "dumb" despite her winning.

During intervention sessions, disclosure followed a strategic pattern as trust built. Sessions one and two contained minimal racism disclosure (four combined segments) as participants established safety. Session three marked initial naming (eight coded segments) focused on surveillance as racialized control, with Essence articulating the exhausting self-modification required: "I change my behavior to get break from their lurking" (Session Three, November 6, 2025), the word "lurking" capturing the predatory quality of constant monitoring.

Session four represented peak disclosure (38 coded segments), with participants reporting: white students using the N-word "multiple times" while "giggling" and claiming "it wasn't the n-word" (Session four, November 13, 2025), capturing not just the slur but the mockery and gaslighting that accompanied it; being called "ghetto"; experiencing "go back to your country" xenophobia; enduring hair mockery such as being called "pom-pom" or asked "why is it literally like cotton"; and encountering tone policing.

Institutional failure (18 coded segments)² documented administrative responses that demonstrated victim-blaming: minimal consequences for perpetrators, acceptance of "just a joke" defenses, telling Black girls they were "too sensitive," and siding with white students in discipline situations, positioning Black students as problems for noticing racism rather than addressing the racism itself..

Post-intervention interviews revealed racism continued (recent N-word use at lunch tables, ongoing hair comments, and continued differential discipline) but now included documentation of participants deploying intervention-learned advocacy strategies to respond. The specificity and frequency of incidents across all three time periods validated that these were not isolated events but pervasive patterns requiring collective response (Morris, 2016), contextualizing both research questions by documenting the environmental challenges participants navigated while developing social efficacy.

Theme Five: Social Efficacy Growth Enabled by Cultural Affirmation and Peer Solidarity Manifested as Individual Confidence and Collective Action Capacity

Social efficacy growth manifested through measurable quantitative gains and observable qualitative transformations, demonstrating how cultural affirmation and peer solidarity enabled participants to develop both individual confidence and collective action capacity. This theme directly addresses both research questions by showing convergence between the 30.6% improvement in social efficacy scale scores and participants' documented increases in authentic self-expression, peer collaboration quality, sustained

² These incidents were documented across Session 4 (November 13, 2025), pre-interviews (September 2025), and post-interviews (November-December 2025).

relationships, and collective advocacy. The mechanisms behind these gains were clear: participants who received cultural affirmation (Theme Two) and developed critical consciousness (Theme Three) within safe spaces (Theme One) gained confidence not just for individual social navigation but for collective resistance, with Heaven articulating this sophisticated understanding: "I don't only have to stand up for myself, but I can also stand up for another group of people if they don't have that voice" (Post-Interview, December 1, 2025).

Qualitative data revealed the mechanisms behind these quantitative gains. Participants reported increased authentic self-expression in school environments, with measurable shifts in how comfortable they felt being themselves (documented in Theme Three). Coordination in hand-clapping games showed observable improvement across sessions, progressing from initial difficulty with rhythm and timing to successful collective performance of Miss Miracool with choreography by Session five. Collaboration quality evolved from individual parallel participation in early sessions to true interdependence in later sessions, evidenced by Miss Miracool's creation requiring each participant's contribution and group consensus.

Destiny's data documented sustained social efficacy beyond the formal program period. Destiny described expanded social comfort:

I have girls who are my friends even if we don't have a whole block or same classes together or we're not in the same grade. I know we still have like a person I can always talk to and it helps me, like open up more to other people.

(Post-Interview, December 1, 2025)

All eight participants with complete post-interview data expected Clap Club relationships to continue, with Legacy responding "Years" (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025) when asked about sustainability. Heaven's statement about collective advocacy captured sophisticated social efficacy understanding:

I realize that maybe other people don't have a voice, but I can gain a voice and I can use it for other people... I don't only have to stand up for myself, but I can also stand up for another group of people if they don't have that voice.

(Post-Interview, December 1, 2025)

Her statement showed recognition of how individual voices could amplify collective power and protect more vulnerable peers, demonstrating that social efficacy extended beyond individual confidence to include collective action capacity, directly addressing Research Question two's focus on how peer belonging experiences related to developing social competence and resilience.

Theme Six: Advocacy Strategy Acquisition and Real-World Application Translated Critical Consciousness into Concrete Resistance Practices

Advocacy strategy acquisition and real-world application translated participants' critical consciousness into concrete resistance practices, demonstrating that awareness of oppression paired with actionable strategies enabled effective response to ongoing racism. This theme documents systematic progression from introduction (Sessions four to five) to practice (role-playing scenarios) to real-world application (post-intervention incidents), with 52 coded segments capturing strategy learning and deployment. Six of eight participants with complete post-interview data provided specific examples of using intervention-learned strategies in authentic situations: direct confrontation of N-word use,

assertive responses to hair comments, questioning techniques that exposed racist assumptions, and strategic exit to maintain safety. The variety of strategies deployed across different participants and situations demonstrated successful adaptive learning rather than rigid script-following, directly addressing Research Question 1 by showing how participants made meaning of their developing competence through applying learned strategies in authentic situations where they could assess effectiveness and refine their approaches

Post-intervention documentation revealed widespread real-world application, with six of eight participants providing specific examples of using intervention-learned strategies. Legacy confronted a classmate about N-word use, explicitly stating "like a few months ago I wouldn't have been able to do that" (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025). Essence asserted to hair comments "this is just how my hair is, like, there's nothing to change about that" (Post-Interview, December 1, 2025). Harmony told a friend who was being mean "that's not cool" (Post-Interview, December 1, 2025), with the friend understanding and stopping the behavior.

Miracle's explanation captured how concrete resources enabled action: "After you gave us that pamphlet thing, I was able to understand things I can say that won't seem mean because you're just stating an opinion or fact" (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025). This distinction between advocacy as fact-stating versus aggression helped participants conceptualize speaking up as reasonable and legitimate. Her additional statement revealed a sophisticated understanding of reciprocal accountability:

I'm able to like use my voice and that I'm allowed to speak on things that like feel uncomfortable. Because if I'm feeling uncomfortable about the situation, then

they should feel like the same level of being uncomfortable because they made me feel that way. (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025)

Promise's deployment of exit strategy demonstrated nuanced tactical thinking:

Walking away exiting is a strategy too you know you keep yourself safe... I think mainly for most situations I probably walk away because like usually like after they say it they usually like try to come to you and like try to be like oh no it's good it's good... I feel like I'd probably like speak up if it was a really bad situation but I'd probably just walk them because like the most times they're just looking for a reaction. (Post-Interview, November 29, 2025)

Her analysis of perpetrator motivation and recognition of gaslighting attempts showed a sophisticated understanding informing strategic response selection. The variety of strategies deployed across different participants and situations demonstrated successful adaptive learning rather than rigid script-following, directly addressing Research Question 1 by showing how participants made meaning of their developing competence through applying learned strategies in authentic situations where they could assess effectiveness and refine their approaches.

Report on PDSA Cycle 1: The “Act” Phase

In the act phase of the PDSA cycle, the researcher uses insights gained from the study phase to determine next steps for intervention refinement and scaling (Langley et al., 2009). Based on cycle one’s findings, the research team has decided to adapt the Clap Club intervention for cycle two, retaining its core components while making strategic modifications to address identified limitations and deepen impact.

Adapt the Intervention

The decision to adapt aligns with the improvement science principles of iterative refinement based on evidence, maintaining what works while systemically addressing what could work better (Bryk et al., 2015; Langley et al., 2009). The Clap Club intervention exceeded its ten percent improvement goal by achieving 30.6% mean improvement in social efficacy with 100% of participants demonstrating positive growth. Qualitative findings showed that six major themes and outcomes from the intervention’s core implications of improvement were sound and its primary components were effective.

However, three significant gaps warrant adaptation as opposed to replication. First, critical consciousness development emerged as a powerful theme linking cultural affirmation to social efficacy, but this was not included in the original driver diagram and was not explicitly structured in the session design. Participants already demonstrated that they possessed a sophisticated understanding of oppression, but lacked a collective space to articulate and build upon their own understanding of their analysis of how oppression affects them. Second, the intervention focused exclusively on individual and peer capacity building without addressing institutional accountability, risking what Love (2019) terms helping students “survive rather than thrive” in hostile environments. Third,

implementation also revealed methodological opportunities including earlier advocacy instruction, enhanced data collection at multiple time points, and expansion of the collaboration team to include co-facilitation and parent engagement. These gaps do not indicate fundamental flaws but they do reveal refinement opportunities that adaptation can address while preserving proven effective components of the program.

Revised Fishbone Diagram

The cycle two fishbone diagram integrates insights from both the original institution critique and the revised participant-centered framing. Instead of choosing between external institutional factors and internal lived experiences, the refined diagram shows explicit connections between institutional root causes (lack of diverse staff, Eurocentric curricula, biased discipline policies, inadequate cultural responsiveness) and how these manifest in participants' interpersonal and psychological experiences (identity suppression, cultural disconnection and hypervigilance, fear of vulnerability, difficulty trusting peers). This integrated approach makes visible that individual and peer capacity building addresses root causes, and positions them as complementary rather than competing strategies (Bryk et al., 2015; Langley et al., 2009). The refined diagram clarifies the team's sphere of influence: direct intervention with students, collaboration with willing administrators and teachers, and advocacy for policy change. Collaborators including the school principal and guidance counselor will review the refined fishbone diagram to identify which institutional factors fall within their authority to address how cycle one data supports specific policy recommendations.

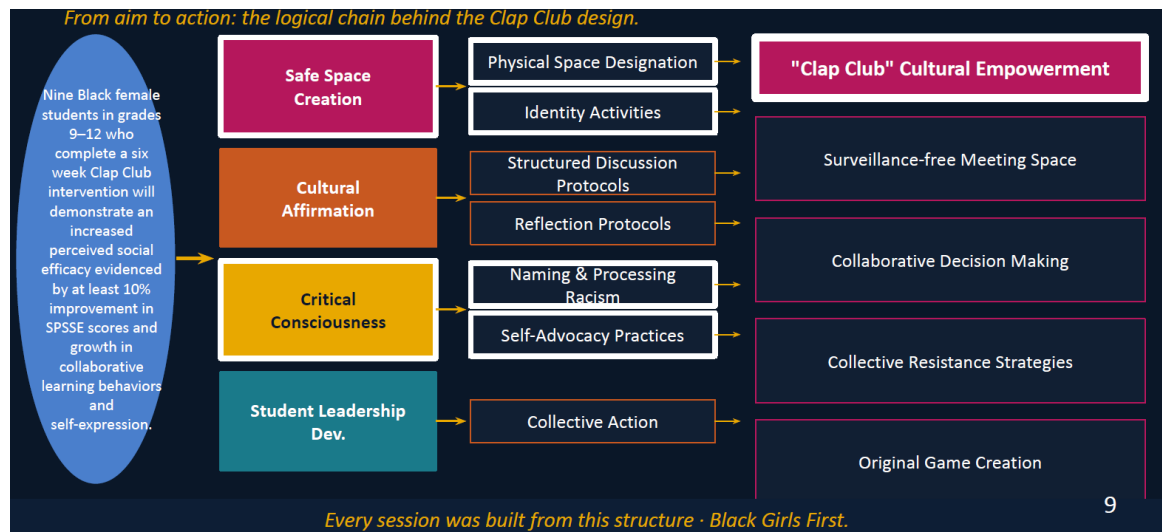
Revised Driver Diagram with Critical Consciousness

The cycle two driver diagram adds critical consciousness as a fourth primary driver, positioned as the mechanism connecting cultural validation and preservation to social efficacy. The original three drivers (social efficacy, cultural validation and preservation, voice agency, and belonging) remain, but with a refined understanding of their relationships. The revised theory recognizes that cultural affirmation alone does not automatically produce social efficacy; participants must also develop critical consciousness that helps them interpret marginalization as systemic rather than personal, which then enables advocacy and navigation skills. This addition operationalizes Freire's (1970) *conscientizacao*, critical consciousness that combines awareness with agency. Critical consciousness also addresses Ginwright's (2010) warning that exposing youth to oppression analysis without cultural resources and collective support risks retraumatization.

Secondary drivers under critical consciousness include structured institutional analysis activities, historical contextualization of Black resistance, problem-solving discussions, and naming of systemic patterns. The clinical researcher from Harbor Academy will review this revision to ensure critical consciousness development balances with trauma-informed practices, while school administrators will be consulted on framing that maintains transformative intent without triggering resistance.

Figure 3-6

Revised Driver Diagram



Note. Critical Consciousness was added as the third primary driver, positioned as a mechanism connecting Cultural Validation to Social Efficacy. New secondary drivers and change ideas support explicit critical consciousness development.

Revised Theory of Improvement

Figure six presents the revised driver diagram that emerged from Cycle One findings and informed the Cycle Two intervention design. The theory of improvement for Cycle Two posits that culturally grounded programming producing four conditions, surveillance-free safe spaces, cultural identity affirmation, critical consciousness development, and adaptive advocacy skill building, will yield increased social efficacy, stronger peer belonging, authentic self-expression, and enhanced capacity for individual and collective resistance among Black girls navigating predominantly white institutions.

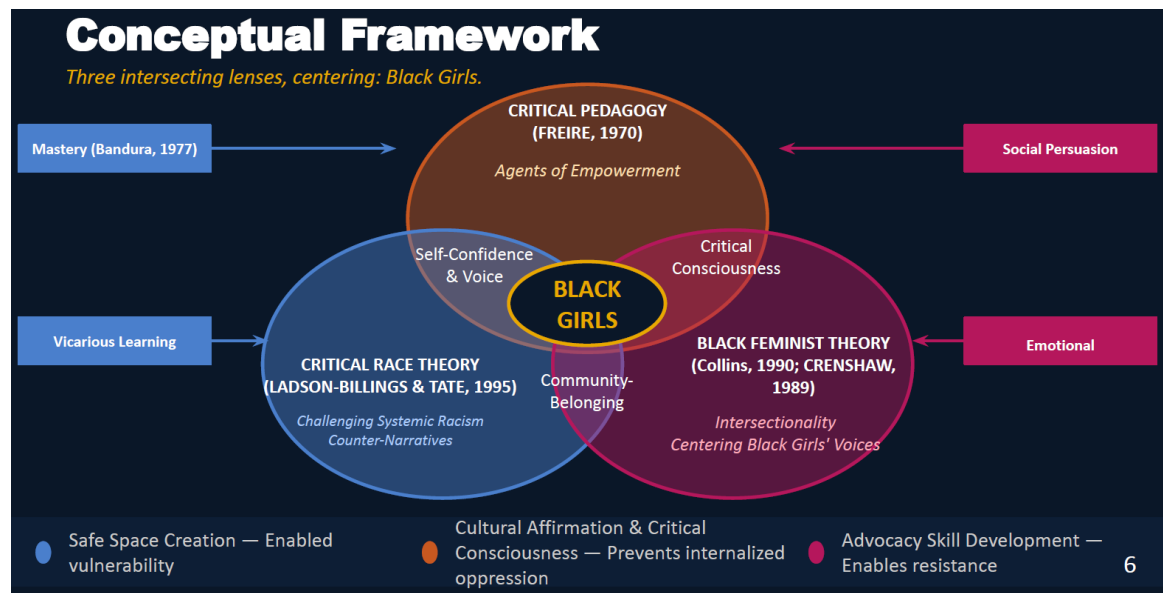
Bandura's (1977, 1997) Social Cognitive Theory provides the explanatory mechanism connecting these conditions to these outcomes through four sources of efficacy. Mastery experiences were cultivated through role-play and advocacy practice.

Vicarious learning occurred as participants observed peers successfully naming and reframing marginalization. Social persuasion was embedded in the intervention's affirmation structures, consistently validating participants' voices and cultural practices. Affective states were addressed by removing surveillance and creating emotional safety, conditions that allowed positive experiences to reinforce rather than undermine efficacy beliefs.

Three interconnected mechanisms operationalize this framework: safe space creation enables vulnerability by addressing hypervigilance and fear (Morris, 2016); cultural affirmation and critical consciousness work in tandem to build pride and systemic awareness, preventing internalized oppression (Freire, 1970; Ginwright, 2018); and advocacy skill development translates consciousness and pride into actionable strategies across contexts (hooks, 1994; Love, 2019). Bandura's four sources of efficacy are not separate from these mechanisms but embedded within them, each mechanism activates one or more conditions through which efficacy is constructed.

Figure 3-7

Revised Conceptual Framework



Note. The revised conceptual framework explicitly integrates critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) as the theory connecting cultural affirmation to social efficacy, working synergistically with safe space creation and advocacy skill development. This framework draws on Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

Reflexivity and Positionality

Cycle one highlighted how my positionality as an African American Muslim woman educator shaped outcomes through both assets and limitations. Cycle two incorporates three specific adjustments based on these reflexivity insights. First, I will conduct earlier member checking after sessions three and five to verify that my interpretations align with participants' intended meanings rather than waiting until post-analysis when corrections are difficult to integrate, addressing my potential for assumed understanding without adequately probing diverse perspectives. Second, I will

maintain explicit attention to within-group diversity including religious identity, immigration history, and specific diasporic backgrounds to guard against privileging African American cultural expressions or projecting my own experiences onto participants with different realities. I recognize that while my shared racial and gender identity with participants creates important cultural authenticity and insider knowledge, it also carries risks of assuming homogeneity within Black girlhood or overlooking differences shaped by immigration status, regional background, and specific diasporic connections. Third, my external institutional position continues to enable trust-building by remaining outside the surveillance apparatus, while an expanded collaborator team, including internal collaborators (teachers, principal, guidance counselor), provides capacity for translating findings into institutional policy change that I alone cannot achieve as an external researcher. These adjustments reflect my commitment to rigorous reflexivity while honoring the cultural trust and authentic connection that my positionality enables.

Duration & Timeline

Cycle two will extend from six to ten weeks to allow deeper cultural knowledge transmission, more sophisticated advocacy practice, and space for sustained reflection and institutional accountability work. The ten-week structure includes the core six-week curriculum (trust-building, heritage exploration, critical consciousness development, advocacy instruction, cultural production) followed by four additional weeks for deepening advocacy practice with complex scenario role-plays, reflecting on learning and growth, sustainability planning to ensure peer connections continue beyond the formal intervention, and presenting findings with policy recommendations to school leadership.

This extension addresses Spencer et al.'s (2006) research showing that meaningful cultural transformation requires sustained engagement, and Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework indicating that progression from peripheral participation to full participation requires time for skill mastery. Sessions will continue as sixty-minute after-school meetings in a private space with no surveillance, maintaining the safety conditions essential for authentic engagement.

Session-by-Session Modifications

Cycle two extends the intervention from six to ten weeks and incorporates co-facilitation throughout all sessions to provide complementary expertise, ensure adequate emotional support capacity, and model collaborative leadership for participants. Session one maintains community-building, norm development, and introduction to hand-clapping games with both facilitators present to establish safety protocols and group norms.

Session two continues heritage artifact sharing with co-facilitators supporting participants' cultural exploration and identity affirmation work. Session three introduces Freire's (1970) concept of critical consciousness with explicit discussion of differences between internalizing oppression versus analyzing systemic patterns, followed by a structured root cause analysis activity where participants collectively map root causes of their experiences, engaging them as critical analysts of systemic patterns or positioning them as experts on their own experience. Session four provides historical contextualization teaching about Black girls' resistance throughout history, from enslaved women using hand-clapping games and songs to encode messages, to Civil Rights youth activists, to contemporary movements, connecting participants to the legacy of resistance

while continuing hand-clapping game practice and beginning a new hand game creation. Session five focuses on disclosure of racism and microaggression experiences with explicit connection to critical consciousness frameworks, followed by intensive advocacy strategy instruction including direct confrontation, questioning, reporting to trusted adults, and exiting for safety, with role-playing practice using participants' actual experiences and co-facilitators providing individualized support and modeling response strategies. Session six deepens advocacy practice with complex scenario role-plays and refinement of a hand-clapping game that was started in session one, culminating in polished performance with both facilitators offering feedback and encouragement. Sessions seven and eight extend beyond the original six-week structure to provide additional time for advanced advocacy practice, deeper critical consciousness application, and sustained peer connection building, with co-facilitators creating opportunities for participants to practice increasingly sophisticated response strategies and reflect on their growth trajectories. Sessions nine and ten focus on sustainability planning including identifying faculty advisors for continued meetings, developing group norms for independent continuation, and preparing a presentation for school administrators with policy recommendations based on cycle one data and participants' expertise, with co-facilitators supporting participants in translating their experiential knowledge into institutional advocacy.

Participant Recruitment

Cycle two will recruit a new cohort of eight to twelve Black girls in grades nine through twelve to test whether the refined intervention produces similar outcomes with different participants. Cycle one participants will not be eligible to participate in cycle

two sessions but will be invited to serve as peer ambassadors during recruitment, sharing their experiences with potential participants and helping identify isolated peers who might benefit from the program. This approach maintains research integrity by testing intervention refinements with a new cohort while honoring cycle one participants' expertise through meaningful involvement in the recruitment process.

The recruitment strategy implements a multi-tiered approach to address the selection bias identified in cycle one. The first tier continues voluntary enrollment, with the guidance counselor distributing information to all eligible Black girls at Crescent Academy. The second tier leverages cycle one participants as peer recruiters, who personally invite isolated peers they identify as potentially benefiting from the program through trust relationships that adults cannot access. The third tier involves the guidance counselor identifying students experiencing severe isolation, low social efficacy, or disconnection from cultural identity who are unlikely to self-select, with the researcher offering individual conversations explaining the program before expecting commitment. This multi-tiered approach addresses research showing voluntary participation creates selection bias toward more engaged participants (Shadish et al., 2002) and that Black girls experiencing the greatest marginalization may distrust adult-led programming (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Target enrollment remains eight to twelve participants to preserve the intimacy enabling deep relationship-building and ensure every voice is heard.

While cycle one participants will not participate in cycle two intervention sessions, they will remain engaged through three mechanisms. First, they will conduct 3-month and 6-month follow-up surveys and interviews to document sustained social

efficacy and relationship outcomes, contributing longitudinal data essential for assessing intervention durability. Second, they will serve as peer ambassadors during recruitment, sharing testimonials and identifying isolated peers who might benefit. Third, they will be invited to attend the cycle two celebration and final presentation to school administrators, providing intergenerational solidarity and modeling continued advocacy for institutional change. This approach balances research integrity with relational ethics, ensuring cycle one participants remain valued while testing whether intervention refinements transfer to new cohorts.

Expanded Collaborator Team

Cycle two expands the collaborator team by adding a co-facilitator with a clinical or counseling background, specifically a Black woman therapist, social worker, or counselor recruited through partnerships with community mental health organizations serving Black families. This co-facilitator will attend all ten sessions to provide complementary expertise for emotional processing and trauma-informed responses, offer individual check-ins for students experiencing distress, consult on session design for emotional safety, and model collaborative leadership alongside the primary researcher. Research confirms emotionally intensive work benefits from co-facilitation to prevent facilitator burnout and ensure adequate support capacity (Ginwright, 2018; Scott & Collins, 2025). The existing collaborator team including the school principal, guidance counselor, and clinical researcher from Harbor Academy will continue in their cycle one roles, providing institutional support, student liaison functions, and clinical oversight respectively.

Methodological Refinements for Cycle 2 Data Collection

Cycle two implements three methodological refinements to capture critical consciousness development and intervention processes with greater nuance while honoring the no-surveillance norm that proved essential for trust-building. First, mid-intervention data collection after session five includes a ten-minute survey with a subset of SPSSE items and a fifteen-minute focus group asking how participants' experience has been so far, what is working, and what they would change, capturing the shift from trust-building to vulnerability and illuminating whether changes occur gradually or concentrate in specific sessions. Second, structured post-session reflections replace journals as a data source while maintaining journals as personal gifts; participants complete three to five minute written responses to two questions on index cards ("What's one thing you're taking with you from today?" and "What's one question you still have?") and decide whether to submit anonymously or take home, preserving agency while providing optional data. Third, an enhanced observation protocol includes a systematic rubric tracking specific behaviors across sessions including "participant initiates support for peer," "participant names systemic pattern," and "participant practices advocacy strategy," providing more rigorous documentation of skill development progression with particular attention to evidence of critical consciousness development through participants' ability to connect individual incidents to institutional patterns.

Expected Outcomes and Success Metrics for Cycle 2

Cycle two maintains the aim of 10% percent improvement in social efficacy measured through the Perceived Social Efficacy Scale, with success defined as at least 75% of participants demonstrating positive growth. The primary focus of cycle two is

assessing whether earlier, more structured introduction of critical consciousness development enhances outcomes beyond cycle one's 30.6% improvement. This focus aligns with Freire's (1970) assertion that conscientização (critical consciousness) must be deliberately cultivated through structured dialogue and problem-posing rather than expected to emerge spontaneously. Additional quantitative metrics include mid-intervention SPSSE scores showing progression and qualitative self-assessment of "What percentage of yourself do you feel at school?" at pre/mid/post capturing authentic self-expression dimensions. Qualitative success indicators focus specifically on evidence of critical consciousness development through participants' ability to analyze institutional patterns, connect individual experiences to systemic oppression, and articulate how this reframing protects against internalized racism (Ginwright, 2010, 2018). There are additional mechanisms including institutional accountability, youth-led advocacy to administrators, and parent engagement components that are intentionally deferred to subsequent PDSA cycles to isolate the impact of structured critical consciousness work, following improvement science principles of testing one change at a time to clearly attribute outcomes (Langley et al., 2009). Success in cycle two is defined by individual social efficacy gains comparable to or exceeding cycle one while demonstrating earlier and more explicit critical consciousness development as evidenced through observation data, post-session reflections, and mid-intervention focus group discussions.

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CHAPTER IV: MANUSCRIPT 3

Executive Summary

Imagine a circle of Black girls, moving in perfect rhythm, singing and chanting together: "Miss Miracool, cool, cool, All dressed in jewels, jewels, jewels, Confident at school, school, school." Nine Black girls practice the hand-clapping game they collaboratively created during the Clap Club intervention, a contemporary reimagining of "Miss Mary Mack" that celebrates their identities rather than suppresses them. "Unashamed and proud, proud, proud, Unashamed and brown, brown, brown," they chant, their voices carrying decades of resistance encoded in rhythm and rhyme. This scene represents what becomes possible when Black girls access culturally affirming educational spaces where they develop social efficacy and self-advocacy while maintaining authentic identities. This executive summary presents findings from a six-week intervention addressing the systematic barriers that undermine Black girls' social efficacy development and offers evidence-based recommendations for institutional transformation.

Root Causes of the Problem

Through an extensive needs assessment involving interviews, literature review, and collaborative analysis, this study identified interconnected root causes operating at multiple levels that systematically undermined Black girls' social efficacy development at a PWI. At the societal level, pervasive stereotypes and controlling images of Black femininity (Collins, 2000), adultification bias that denies Black girls the protections of

childhood (Epstein et al., 2017), and structural racism embedded in educational policies (Ladson-Billings, 2006) create macro-level barriers to equity. However, this study focused specifically on two interpersonal-level root causes manifesting in daily experiences at Crescent Academy: cultural isolation from peers who don't share or value their cultural experiences (Morris, 2016), and code-switching demands that require suppressing authentic selves to navigate white-dominated spaces (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; McCluney et al., 2019). These interpersonal barriers operate through daily classroom interactions and peer relationships, creating cumulative harm that erodes Black girls' confidence to navigate social situations, advocate for themselves, and maintain authentic identities while building meaningful peer connections (Spencer et al., 2006).

Theoretical Framework and Intervention Design

The Clap Club intervention draws on four theoretical frameworks to address cultural isolation and code-switching among Black girls. Collins's (2000) Black Feminist Thought informed the creation of culturally affirming "safe spaces" where Black girls resist controlling images through collective cultural practices like hand-clapping games. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) Intersectionality framework centered Black girls' unique experiences at the intersection of race and gender, recognizing that their marginalization differs from both Black boys and white girls. Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy guided consciousness-raising activities where participants named systemic patterns of isolation and code-switching through dialogue and collective analysis. Smith and Betz's (2000) Social Efficacy Theory provided the measurable outcome framework, focusing on building confidence to navigate social situations and advocate for oneself while maintaining authentic identity.

PDSA Cycle 1 focused on two primary drivers: Cultural Validation and Preservation, and Voice, Agency, and Belonging. Cultural Validation and Preservation addresses cultural isolation by creating spaces where Black girls' cultural practices, language (AAVE), and aesthetics are centered and celebrated rather than suppressed. Voice, Agency and Belonging addresses code-switching demands by enabling Black girls to express themselves authentically without fear of surveillance or judgment, building their confidence to advocate for their needs. Together, these drivers create conditions for Black girls to develop social efficacy, defined by Smith and Betz (2000) as one's perceived ability to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships, make friends, engage in social activities, and effectively advocate for oneself, while maintaining their authentic identities.

The six-week intervention consisted of structured 60-minute weekly sessions implemented from September through December 2025 with nine Black girls at Crescent Academy. Each session included: welcome with culturally relevant music, opening ritual with emotional check-ins, primary activities addressing cultural identity and institutional critique, hand-clapping games connecting to traditional Black girl practices, journal reflection, and closing ritual with a participant-created chant. Pre- and post-intervention administration of the Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy measured changes in social confidence.

Methodology and Research Approach

This study employed improvement science methodology using the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle as the primary framework for developing and testing the intervention. Improvement science emphasizes rapid cycle learning, collaborator

engagement, and iterative refinement based on real-world implementation data (Langley et al., 2009).

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the inquiry:

1. How do Black girls experience and make meaning of their social efficacy development during a six-week culturally affirming intervention?
2. In what ways, if any, do participants describe Clap Club activities as influencing their social confidence and peer belonging?

The mixed-methods approach balanced quantitative outcome measurement with rich qualitative understanding of processes and mechanisms. Quantitative data were collected through the Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy (SPSSE) administered pre- and post-intervention. Qualitative data included semi-structured interviews, video recordings of sessions, detailed field notes, and Clap Club artifacts. Social efficacy scale scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate pre- to post-intervention changes. Qualitative data from journals and interviews were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in participants' experiences of social confidence and belonging.

Findings

Quantitative Outcomes: Exceeding Expectations

The intervention exceeded its 10% target, achieving 30.6% improvement in mean social efficacy scores from pre- to post-intervention. All participants (8 out of 8, completing both assessments) showed positive growth.

Qualitative Themes: Six Pathways to Transformation

The first theme, safe space creation as a foundational mechanism, emerged as essential to all other outcomes. The surveillance-free norm was honored throughout all sessions, creating both physical space (private, secure room) and relational boundaries, enabling vulnerability without fear. As Legacy reflected: "I felt like I was heard there... some of the things I told you guys I never told anyone else... I just felt really comfortable there, and I felt at peace" (Legacy, Post-intervention Interview, November 29, 2025).

The second theme, cultural connection and identity affirmation, built participants' pride in their Black identities while positioning them as both inheritors and producers of cultural traditions. Participants progressed from receiving traditional hand-clapping games to exploring their heritage to creating new cultural artifacts. The collaborative creation of "Miss Miracool" epitomized participants' transformation from cultural consumers to cultural producers.

The third theme, critical consciousness development, showed participants reframing marginalization from personal failure to systemic oppression. Code-switching awareness shifted dramatically, with Reign moving from feeling "70% myself" at school to "90% myself" post-intervention.

The fourth theme, documented experiences of pervasive racism, validated the necessity of culturally affirming counterspaces by revealing the hostile environment participants navigated daily. Participants reported repeated N-word use, hair mockery, xenophobia, and inadequate institutional responses that demonstrated victim-blaming rather than addressing racism.

The fifth theme, social efficacy growth enabled by cultural affirmation and peer solidarity, demonstrated convergence of quantitative gains with qualitative transformation through increased authentic self-expression, reduced code-switching burden, and sustained peer relationships beyond the intervention period.

The sixth theme, advocacy strategy acquisition and real-world application, showed participants translating critical consciousness into concrete resistance practices. Six of eight participants provided specific examples of using intervention-learned strategies in authentic situations post-intervention, including direct confrontation of N-word use, assertive responses to hair comments, and strategic exits to maintain safety.

Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations (Immediate)

Recommendation 1: Expand and Sustain Black Identity-Affirming Programming

The Clap Club intervention should be opened to all Black girls in grades seven through twelve at Crescent Academy and implemented as permanent programming rather than a temporary intervention. With demonstrated 30.6% improvement in social efficacy and 100% participant success rate, the intervention addresses a documented need for surveillance-free spaces where Black girls can develop confidence without code-switching or cultural erasure. Research confirms that culturally grounded interventions are more effective when facilitators mirror participants' identities, yet such programming remains rare in predominantly white institutions (Scott & Collins, 2025). Implementation can begin immediately with existing resources by recruiting additional cohorts, training Black women facilitators, and securing sustainable funding through school budget reallocation and external grants.

Recommendation 2: Establish Youth-Led Accountability Mechanisms

The school should create formal structures for students to report racism and drive policy change, including a Student Equity Council with decision-making authority and a transparent incident reporting system. Theme four findings documented pervasive institutional failure to address racism despite repeated student reports. Participants developed advocacy skills through the intervention but lacked systemic channels for collective action. Current reporting mechanisms perpetuate victim-blaming and retaliation fears, deterring students from seeking help. A Student Equity Council should be established with actual decision-making authority over policy recommendations, not

merely an advisory role. An anonymous reporting system should be implemented with mandatory administrator response timelines and public accountability. The school should publish quarterly reports on incident patterns and institutional responses. Cycle One participants should be included as founding council members, recognizing their expertise and ensuring an authentic youth voice in design. This recommendation requires limited financial investment and can be implemented within one academic year.

Medium-Term Recommendations (1-3 years)

Recommendation 3: Implement Structural Changes to Reduce Surveillance

Crescent Academy must establish protected cultural affinity spaces institution-wide and revise to address adultification bias and disproportionate surveillance of Black girls. Safe space creation was foundational to all intervention outcomes, yet current surveillance culture undermines Black girls' wellbeing. Participants explicitly named hypervisibility as a barrier to authentic engagement, quantifying that they feel only 70-80% themselves at school due to constant monitoring. Institutional changes are necessary because temporary interventions cannot address systemic oppression (Love, 2019). The school should designate physical spaces for cultural affinity groups that are not subject to administrative monitoring, with clear institutional support and protection from backlash. Discipline policies should be revised using equity audits to identify and eliminate practices perpetuating adultification bias. All staff should receive mandatory training on cultural responsiveness and implicit bias, with accountability measures tied to performance evaluations. Finally, the school should create a student advisory board including founding Clap Club participants to guide implementation and monitor progress.

Long-Term Recommendations (3-5 years)

Recommendation 4: Invest in Diversifying Staff

Crescent Academy should recruit Black educators through targeted partnerships and provide sustained cultural competency training for all staff with accountability measures. Participants identified the lack of Black staff as a root cause of their marginalization, noting they could not identify a single Black woman teacher or administrator who could serve as a role model or cultural mentor. Research confirms that interventions are more effective when interventionists mirror participants' identities (Scott & Collins, 2025), yet the school currently employs no Black women educators. As a long-term strategy, recruitment efforts should include partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and "Grow Your Own" programs to develop a sustainable pipeline over multiple years. The school should offer competitive incentives for Black educators, including housing support and loan forgiveness, to address financial barriers. All staff should be required to complete annual training on anti-racism and culturally responsive pedagogy, with participation evaluated in performance reviews. The school should also create mentorship and affinity groups for Black staff to support retention in a predominantly white environment, recognizing that recruitment alone is insufficient without creating a welcoming climate for both Black students and Black educators.

Recommendation 5: Integrate Critical Consciousness Development into Curricula

Critical consciousness development should be integrated into existing advisory or social-emotional learning curricula for all students in grades nine through twelve as a long-term institutional transformation goal. While PDSA Cycle 1 demonstrated that

critical consciousness protected against internalized racism by helping participants interpret marginalization as systemic rather than personal, scaling this work across the entire school requires sustained commitment, structural changes, and broad collaborator buy-in that extend far beyond the initial six-week intervention. Participants already possessed sophisticated institutional analysis but lacked a collective space to articulate and build upon their understanding. The benefits extend beyond Black girls to all marginalized students while also developing ally capacity among privileged students. This recommendation requires multi-year implementation, including curriculum development, comprehensive faculty training, pilot testing, and iterative refinement based on feedback from diverse collaborators.

Challenges to Implementation

Financial Barriers

Financial constraints pose a significant challenge to implementation. Limited school resources and competing budget priorities (Baker et al., 2016) may constrain implementation of equity-focused recommendations requiring substantial investment, particularly culturally responsive staff recruitment, facilitator compensation, and curriculum development (Gay, 2018; Horsford et al., 2011). However, several mitigation strategies can address these barriers in both the short-term and long-term.

Short-term actions requiring fewer resources and collaborators include: pursuing external grants through federal equity funds and foundation support to supplement institutional resources, examining existing budget allocations critically to redirect funds from ineffective programs lacking outcome evidence, and implementing a phased approach starting with recommendation one, while building toward comprehensive transformation.

Long-term strategies include: demonstrating cost-effectiveness by documenting reduced disciplinary incidents, improved attendance, and enhanced student outcomes following initial implementation to make the case for sustained investment, and developing partnerships with HBCUs and "Grow Your Own" programs to create sustainable pipelines for Black educator recruitment.

Ideological Resistance

Ideological resistance represents another substantial barrier. Political backlash to critical frameworks, particularly in the current climate of anti-CRT legislation and policies (Ladson-Billings, 2021), cultural affinity spaces (Tatum, 2017), and student

decision-making power (Mitra, 2018) may generate opposition from community members, board members, or staff who perceive these changes through a colorblind lens as divisive or preferential treatment (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). To address this resistance, recommendations should be grounded in research evidence and student outcomes data rather than ideological positions. Interventions can be framed using broadly acceptable language, such as social-emotional learning and student voice, while maintaining fidelity to transformative goals. Conservative collaborators should be included in design conversations to address concerns proactively rather than reactively. Starting with pilot programs that demonstrate measurable success before school-wide expansion can help build buy-in by letting data counter ideological opposition with empirical evidence.

Capacity Constraints

Capacity constraints may impede implementation even when financial resources and ideological support exist (Coburn, 2003; Fullan, 2016). Staff time limitations, ongoing professional development needs for culturally responsive practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), and difficulty recruiting qualified facilitators from diverse backgrounds (Achinstein et al., 2010) represent real challenges that cannot be dismissed. Several strategies informed by implementation science can address capacity issues (Bryk et al., 2015; Fixsen et al., 2005). The school should leverage external partners, including community organizations and university partnerships, to supplement staff capacity rather than relying solely on existing personnel. Adequate compensation must be provided for additional responsibilities rather than expecting volunteer labor, which disproportionately burdens teachers of color and is neither sustainable nor equitable (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2019). Capacity should be built gradually

through train-the-trainer models where an initial cohort of trained facilitators mentors subsequent cohorts. Most importantly, collaborators must recognize that capacity building requires sustained investment over multiple years, not one-time professional development workshops (Bryk et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Deeply Rooted Systems Mindsets

Perhaps most challenging are the deeply rooted systems and mindsets that pervade predominantly white institutions. Surveillance culture (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016), deficit narratives about Black girls (Epstein et al., 2017), and white supremacist institutional norms (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Leonardo, 2009) operate at subconscious levels, generating resistance even among well-intentioned educators who profess commitment to equity (Castagno, 2014; Picower, 2009). Addressing these requires sustained effort across multiple fronts. Student voice must be centered throughout the implementation process, using participants' own words and experiences to counter deficit narratives. Finally, all collaborators must accept that deep institutional change requires long-term commitment measured in years, not months, while simultaneously maintaining urgency about addressing the documented harm that Black girls experience daily.

Action Plan

This action plan provides Crescent Academy with a roadmap for sustaining and scaling the successful Clap Club intervention independently. The plan assumes leadership commitment based on demonstrated pilot outcomes (30.6% improvement in social efficacy, 100% participant success rate, and strong qualitative evidence of transformation) and focuses on building internal capacity to implement and maintain these equity initiatives without ongoing external support.

The five recommendations are presented in implementation order from short-term to long-term. Each recommendation includes a detailed table specifying action steps, internal responsible parties, realistic timelines, required resources, and measurable success indicators. The plan emphasizes developing internal expertise, establishing sustainable structures, and creating systems that can be maintained by school staff and leadership.

Following the recommendation-specific tables, the plan addresses common implementation barriers and provides strategies for long-term sustainability that do not depend on external consultants or researchers.

Recommendation 1: Expand and Sustain Black Identity-Affirming Programming

The Clap Club pilot demonstrated significant impact with a relatively modest investment of time and resources. Expanding to serve all Black girls in grades 7-12 requires building internal capacity to sustain the program without ongoing external support. The primary implementation focus involves:

1. Documenting all pilot protocols and materials in a transferable facilitator guide

2. Training internal facilitators who can independently lead sessions and train future facilitators
3. Establishing peer support structures among facilitators for ongoing collaboration
4. Securing permanent budget allocation to ensure sustainability beyond pilot funding

Table 4-1

Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 1

Action Steps	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Recruit 2-3 Black women facilitators from school staff or local community	Dean of Students, Guidance Counselor	Month 1-2	Position descriptions, outreach to local Black professional networks, facilitator stipends (\$3,000-5,000 annually per facilitator)	Facilitators recruited and contracts signed
Create comprehensive facilitator guide documenting all pilot protocols, session plans, materials, and facilitation techniques	Pilot Facilitator, Guidance Counselor	Month 2	Guide development time (20 hours), printing/binding costs (\$100)	Facilitator guide complete, duplicated, and ready for use

Conduct internal facilitator training led by pilot facilitator using documented protocols and session videos	Pilot Facilitator, New Facilitators	Month 3	2 full training days, facilitator guide, pilot session recordings	New facilitators trained and confident to lead sessions independently
Launch expanded programming with 2-3 cohorts serving grades 7-12	Dean of Students, All Facilitators	Months 4-12	1-hour monthly meeting time, shared documentation system (Google Drive)	Monthly meetings held, facilitators collaborating and problem-solving
Administer post-intervention on SPSSE and analyze outcomes to demonstrate impact	Facilitators, School Data Analyst	Months 8-9	Assessment administration time, SPSSE scoring guide, data analysis time	Outcome data collected, analyzed, showing measurable improvement
Secure permanent funding in annual school budget	School Board, Principal	Months 11-12	Board presentation with participant testimonies and outcome data, \$15,000-20,000 annual budget allocation	Permanent budget line item approved for ongoing program

Barriers and Alternatives

Budget Constraints

Limited funding may delay facilitator recruitment or reduce the number of cohorts that can be launched simultaneously. If the full stipend funding (\$3,000-5,000 per facilitator) is unavailable, start with one additional cohort instead of three, using existing staff members who can incorporate facilitation into their current roles with modest compensation (\$1,500). Pursue external grants specifically targeting youth empowerment or girls' leadership programming to supplement institutional funding. If no budget allocation is possible in Year One, continue the pilot with the original facilitator while rigorously documenting outcomes and participant testimonies to strengthen future budget requests.

Facilitator Recruitment Challenges

Difficulty identifying qualified Black women facilitators within existing school staff or the immediate local community may limit program expansion. If the internal recruitment is unsuccessful, expand the search radius to nearby communities and offer a remote facilitation option for one cohort using video conferencing. Partner with local Black professional organizations, sororities (Delta Sigma Theta, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Zeta Phi Beta), or community centers to identify potential facilitators. If no external facilitators are available after exhaustive search, train interested non-Black staff members who demonstrate strong cultural humility and commit to ongoing cultural competency development, while maintaining the pilot facilitator as lead coordinator and cultural consultant to ensure program fidelity.

Recommendation 2: Establish Youth-Led Accountability Mechanisms

Creating formal structures for authentic student voice in addressing racism requires careful design to ensure genuine decision-making authority while integrating with existing governance structures. The school can build these systems using internal expertise and freely available resources. Implementation priorities include:

1. Researching and adapting existing Student Equity Council models rather than creating from scratch
2. Designing the council structure collaboratively with students to ensure relevance and authenticity
3. Using low-cost or free technology platforms the school can manage independently
4. Developing internal training capacity so current students can train future council members, ensuring sustainability.

Table 4-2

Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 2

Action Steps	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Convene design team including administrators, faculty, and students to collaboratively develop council structure	Principal, Dean of Students, Faculty Representatives, Student Representatives	Month 1	4-6 design team meetings, note-taking and documentation system	Design team established and meeting regularly with clear timeline

Action Steps	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Draft council charter specifying decision-making authority, membership structure, meeting protocols, and administrator response requirements	Design Team	Month 1-2	Drafting time, charter template from peer school, legal review if needed	Charter drafted, reviewed by all collaborators, and approved by design team
Select and configure anonymous incident reporting technology platform	IT Director, Technology Committee, Student Representatives	Month 3	Platform costs (\$1,000 setup, \$500/year maintenance if commercial; \$0 if using Google Forms)	Platform selected, configured, tested, and ready for launch
Recruit founding council members (8-12 students, including Clap Club participants) through transparent application process	Dean of Students, Student Representatives	Month 2-3	Application materials, selection rubric emphasizing diverse representation	Council members recruited, notified, and committed to participation
Conduct Student Equity Council training on advocacy, and meeting facilitation	Dean of Students,, Student Council Alumni if available	Month 4	1 full day training, training materials and resources, meeting space	Council members trained, confident in their roles, and ready to launch

Action Steps	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Launch reporting system with comprehensive communication to students and staff	Principal, IT Director, Student Equity Council	Month 5	Communication materials (emails, posters, student/faculty presentations)	System operational, school community informed and aware
Implement administrator response protocol requiring written responses to all council recommendations within 30 days	Principal, Administrative Team	Month 5	Response tracking system (shared spreadsheet or calendar), protocol documentation	Protocol documented, operational, and administrators adhering to 30-day timeline

Barriers and Alternatives

Technology Platform Selection

Uncertainty about which reporting system will best balance student accessibility, administrator manageability, and IT sustainability. If commercial platforms prove too expensive or technologically complex for IT staff to maintain, start with a simple Google Form linked to a monitored email inbox, which costs nothing and can be implemented immediately. While less sophisticated than commercial options, this allows the system to launch quickly while the school evaluates more robust long-term solutions. If Google Forms yields too many spam or inappropriate submissions, transition to a basic form embedded on the school website requiring school email verification. Pilot the chosen

system with Student Equity Council members for one month before full school launch to identify and address usability issues.

Student Skepticism About Administrator Response

Students may doubt that administrators will take their reports and recommendations seriously based on past experiences where student voice was solicited but not genuinely valued. If initial participation is low due to skepticism, have the Student Equity Council submit test reports on hypothetical scenarios and publicly share administrator responses through school newsletter or assembly, demonstrating that the 30-day response protocol actually works. Ensure the first responses to real reports are exemplary in quality and thoroughness, with the Student Equity Council evaluating response quality and holding administrators publicly accountable. If distrust remains high despite demonstrated responsiveness, implement a graduated approach where the council addresses minor incidents directly through peer mediation while escalating serious issues to administration with council oversight of response quality.

Time Commitment

Student Equity Council members may struggle to balance monthly one and a half hour meetings with demanding academic schedules and extensive extracurricular commitments. If time constraints limit student participation or cause high turnover, reduce meeting frequency to every 6 weeks instead of monthly, with brief email updates and asynchronous work between meetings. Offer course credit, leadership designation on transcripts, or community service hours, making participation count toward graduation requirements and college applications. If workload proves overwhelming even with reduced frequency, divide the council into sub-committees (reporting system oversight,

policy review, communications) that meet separately and report to the full council quarterly. Whenever possible, schedule meetings during the school day (advisory period or study hall time) rather than after school.

Recommendation 3: Implement Structural Changes to Reduce Surveillance

Reducing the surveillance culture that disproportionately targets Black girls requires systematic examination of existing disciplinary practices through an equity lens and implementing evidence-based policy changes. The school possesses the internal expertise and resources to conduct this work independently using freely available frameworks. Implementation priorities include:

1. Using freely available equity audit frameworks from organizations like EdTrust rather than hiring external consultants
2. Building internal data analysis capacity using existing school data staff
3. Leveraging free professional development resources and peer school models for faculty training
4. Training internal facilitators who can lead ongoing equity-focused professional development, ensuring sustainability beyond one-time workshops.

Table 4-3*Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 3*

Key Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Conduct comprehensive discipline equity audit analyzing 3 years of data disaggregated by race, gender, and infraction type	Dean of Students, School Data Analyst	Months 1-2	Data analysis time, free equity audit framework from EdTrust or similar organization, data visualization tools (Excel or free options)	Audit completed with detailed findings report identifying specific disparities
Form policy revision committee with diverse representation including administrators, faculty, students, and parents	Principal, Committee Members	Month 2	Monthly committee meeting time allocation (1.5 hours), clear committee charge and timeline	Committee formed with representative membership and established meeting schedule
Review and revise discipline policies using equity lens to eliminate subjective language and establish objective criteria	Policy Committee, School Legal Counsel	Months 2-4	Policy review time, legal consultation, sample revised policies from peer schools	Revised policies drafted with objective, measurable criteria replacing subjective terms

Key Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Identify and designate 2-3 existing spaces as protected affinity group rooms where cultural groups can meet without administrative monitoring	Facilities Director, Student Equity Council, Diversity Coordinator	Months 4-5	Space assessment, modest furniture and setup (\$2,000), clear signage designating spaces	Spaces designated, prepared, communicated to school community, and in use
Pilot revised policies with one grade level before full implementation	Dean of Students, Grade-Level Team	Months 6-11	Training for grade-level staff (4 hours, led internally), monitoring system (shared tracking spreadsheet)	Pilot implemented, weekly discipline data collected showing reduced disparities
Conduct comprehensive professional development on adultification bias and culturally responsive discipline for all faculty	Principal, Dean of Students, Faculty Leaders	Months 6-8 (summer)	2 full professional development days, reading materials (articles/book chapters available free online), structured discussion protocols	All faculty trained with demonstrated understanding of adultification bias

Key Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Scale revised discipline policies to full school based on pilot results and faculty feedback	Principal, Dean of Students	Year 2	Full faculty training (2 additional professional development sessions), implementation monitoring system	Revised policies implemented school-wide with ongoing monitoring

Barriers and Alternatives

Professional Development Scheduling Constraints

Finding adequate time for comprehensive adultification bias training without significantly disrupting classroom instruction or overburdening faculty schedules. If two full professional development days cannot be scheduled during the school year, divide the training into four half-day sessions spread strategically across the year during existing early release days or faculty meeting time. If no professional development time is available during the contract year, offer the training during summer with stipend compensation (\$300 per participating teacher) to acknowledge the additional time commitment. If budget constraints prevent offering stipends, make the training voluntary for Year 1 while prominently highlighting the pilot grade-level's positive outcomes to encourage broader voluntary participation in Year 2. Supplement in-person training with asynchronous online modules covering foundational content (readings, videos), reserving precious in-person time for facilitated discussion, case study analysis, and practice applying concepts to real scenarios.

Physical Space Allocation for Affinity Groups

Limited available classroom and meeting space may prevent designating permanent protected rooms specifically for cultural affinity groups to meet without administrative presence. If dedicated permanent spaces are unavailable due to scheduling constraints, create a rotating priority reservation system ensuring affinity groups have guaranteed access to specific rooms during their designated meeting times without competition from other activities. If physical space remains severely constrained, establish designated "affinity hours" where existing multi-purpose spaces (library conference room, student center lounge) are reserved exclusively for affinity groups and explicitly protected from administrative drop-ins or monitoring during those specific time blocks. If resistance to truly protected spaces emerges from administration, start with one pilot protected space specifically for the Black student affinity group, thoroughly document positive outcomes and student feedback, then use that evidence to advocate for expanding the model to other cultural affinity groups.

Recommendation 4: Invest in Diversifying Staff

Recruiting and retaining Black educators requires sustained long-term strategic effort through authentic partnerships and robust internal support systems. While qualified candidates are highly sought across many institutions, the school can compete effectively by building genuine partnerships with HBCUs, creating compelling incentive packages, and establishing strong support structures before recruiting begins. Implementation priorities include:

1. Establishing HBCU partnerships that provide ongoing candidate pipelines rather than one-time recruitment efforts

2. Creating staff affinity groups and mentorship programs before hiring to demonstrate authentic institutional commitment
3. Empowering internal staff to lead recruitment and retention efforts
4. Building sustainable systems that future hires will inherit, strengthen, and benefit from.

Table 4-4

Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 4

Kye Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Analyze recent hiring data to identify specific recruitment and retention barriers preventing Black educator candidates	Principal, Diversity Committee	Months 1-2	Hiring data analysis time, climate survey tools if additional data needed	Analysis completed with specific, documented barriers and root causes identified
Identify 2-3 HBCU education departments for partnership outreach based on geographic proximity and program strength in relevant subject areas	Principal	Month 2	Research time, initial outreach emails and phone calls	Target institutions identified, initial contact established, interest confirmed

Kye Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Develop proposal for competitive incentive package within realistic budget constraints including housing support, loan forgiveness, signing bonuses	Principal, Business Manager	Months 3-4	Proposal development time, financial modeling, benchmarking data from peer schools	Detailed proposal drafted with budget justification and Board-ready presentation
Develop formal partnership agreements (MOUs) with interested HBCUs outlining mutual commitments, candidate pipelines, and ongoing collaboration	Principal, HBCU Department Chairs, School Legal Counsel	Months 6-8	Agreement drafting time, legal review, MOU templates	Formal agreements signed with 1-2 institutions establishing ongoing partnerships
Establish Black staff affinity group structure BEFORE recruiting to demonstrate authentic institutional commitment to supporting educators of color	Principal, Interested Current Staff of Color	Months 8-9	Meeting time, affinity group annual operating budget (\$1,000), facilitation resources and guidelines	Affinity group formed, meeting regularly, documented structure ready to share with candidates

Kye Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Design comprehensive mentorship program structure with clear roles, protected time allocation, and appropriate compensation for mentors	Principal, Volunteer Mentors	Months 9-10	Mentorship program design time, mentor training materials, stipends (\$2,000 annually total)	Mentorship program fully designed, mentors identified, trained, and ready
Launch targeted recruitment through HBCU partnerships, diversity-focused job fairs, and professional networks serving Black educators	Principal, Recruitment Team	Months 10-12 and ongoing	Job fair attendance costs (\$2,000), targeted advertising on diversity platforms (\$3,000)	Measurable increase in Black candidates in applicant pool (target: 25-30% of applicants)
Interview and hire 1-3 Black educators through standard hiring process enhanced with equity-focused practices	Principal, Hiring Committees trained on equity-focused hiring	Year 2 (aligned with hiring cycle)	Competitive salary packages, relocation support if needed, approved incentive funding	Black educators hired and contracts signed

Barriers and Alternative

HBCU Partnership Development Timeline

Building authentic relationships with HBCU education departments may take significantly longer than anticipated, potentially delaying the candidate pipeline

development. If HBCU partnerships develop slowly due to distance, scheduling conflicts, or institutional bureaucracy, simultaneously pursue relationships with regional teaching organizations like the National Association of Black Teachers or local chapters of Black educator professional networks. Post open positions on diversity-focused job boards (Teachers of Color, Minority Teacher Recruitment) immediately while partnership development continues in parallel. If formal MOUs with HBCUs stall due to legal or institutional barriers, maintain productive informal relationships through individual education department chairs and alumni networks who can refer strong candidates. If no substantive HBCU partnerships materialize by the Year 2 hiring cycle, focus recruitment efforts intensively on competitive compensation packages, showcasing the affinity group and mentorship structures already in place, and attracting candidates through traditional channels enhanced with explicit equity messaging.

Limited Candidate Pool Despite Recruitment Efforts

Despite comprehensive recruitment efforts, the applicant pool may include very few or no Black candidates for available positions in a given hiring cycle. If recruitment yields insufficient Black candidates, conduct an honest assessment of whether the school's reputation in communities of color or geographic location creates insurmountable barriers. Facilitate focus groups with Black educators currently working in the region to understand candidly why they would or would not consider positions at the school. If compensation emerges as the primary barrier, use this evidence to advocate forcefully with the Board for substantially larger incentive packages that truly compete with other schools. If concerns about school culture and climate emerge as barriers, prioritize addressing those fundamental issues through full implementation of

Recommendations 1-3 before continuing recruitment, as hiring Black educators into a demonstrably hostile environment causes harm and is ethically problematic. If genuinely no Black candidates emerge for immediate openings despite good-faith efforts, maintain the position vacancy rather than filling it and continue sustained outreach. Alternatively, consider hiring highly experienced educators of color from other racial/ethnic backgrounds who can meaningfully contribute to faculty diversity while continuing to recruit Black educators specifically.

Recommendation 5: Integrate Critical Consciousness Development into Curricula

Integrating critical consciousness development across grades 9-12 represents the most complex recommendation, requiring careful curriculum development, comprehensive faculty preparation, and sustained alignment with school values. The school can accomplish this primarily through internal capacity while using strategic, time-limited external consultation for initial framework design only. Implementation priorities include:

1. Building permanent internal curriculum development expertise through intensive task force participation
2. Implementing a train-the-trainer model where pilot teachers become the professional development leaders for colleagues
3. Minimizing ongoing external consultant costs by front-loading expert input during the design phase then transitioning fully to internal leadership
4. Creating professional learning communities led exclusively by internal facilitators for sustained implementation support.

Table 4-5*Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 4*

Key Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
Form curriculum development task force with diverse collaborator representation and engage time-limited external consultant for framework design only	Curriculum Director, Task Force Members	Month 1	Monthly task force meetings (2 hours), consultant retainer for initial framework design phase only (\$4,000)	Task force formed with clear charge and consultant engaged with defined limited scope
Research existing critical consciousness curricula using free resources and peer school examples to adapt rather than creating entirely from scratch	Task Force, Curriculum Director	Months 1-3	Research time, access to free online resources, virtual meetings with peer schools implementing similar curricula	Research completed with 3-5 adaptable curriculum models identified and evaluated
Develop curriculum framework aligned with existing advisory time, informed by consultant but designed by internal task force	Task Force, Faculty Representatives, Time-Limited Curriculum Consultant	Months 4-6	Curriculum development time during summer (teacher task force member stipends \$3,000 total), consultant fees for framework	Complete curriculum framework drafted and approved by full task force

Key Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
			phase only (\$3,000)	
Create detailed lesson plans and materials for 12-week pilot using internal curriculum writing team	Internal Curriculum Writing Team (volunteer teachers), Task Force	Months 7-9	Curriculum writing time with summer stipends (\$2,000 total), materials development, adaptation of free online resources	Complete pilot curriculum with detailed 12-week lesson sequence ready for implementation
Recruit 4-6 volunteer teachers for pilot and conduct intensive professional development led by internal task force leaders	Task Force Teacher Leaders, Curriculum Director, Pilot Teachers	Months 9-11	3 full days training time using existing professional development days, readings and discussion materials (\$500)	Pilot teachers trained thoroughly, confident in facilitation skills, and fully prepared to implement
Pilot curriculum implementation in grades 9-10 advisory with regular peer observation and collaborative support	Pilot Teachers	Months 12-18	Instructional time within existing advisory periods, curriculum materials (\$300), protected peer observation time	Pilot successfully implemented with teachers engaging in regular peer observation and support
Conduct professional development for all grade 9-12 faculty using internal train-the-trainer	Pilot Teachers as PD Facilitators, Task Force Teacher Leaders, Curriculum Director	Months 22-24 (summer)	4 full days training using existing professional development time, training materials	All grade 9-12 faculty trained exclusively by internal experts who piloted curriculum

Key Action Step	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Critical Resources	Success Indicator
ner model with pilot teachers as facilitators			developed internally (\$1,000)	
Scale implementation to all grades 9-12 advisory with ongoing support through professional learning communities	All Faculty, Curriculum Director	Year 3	Curriculum materials for all sections (\$1,500), regular implementation support meetings	Curriculum implemented school-wide with continuous improvement processes

Essential Implementation Steps for Recommendation 5

Barriers and Alternatives

Parent Community Concerns

Some parent community members may object to the critical consciousness curriculum based on misconceptions about critical pedagogy, political concerns, or fear of controversial discussions. Hold multiple transparent information sessions explaining the curriculum with specific lesson examples and directly addressing common misconceptions and concerns. Frame curriculum consistently using accessible language like "critical thinking about social systems," "civic engagement skills," and "perspective-taking across differences." Share all curriculum materials transparently, allowing parents to review detailed lesson plans. If significant organized resistance persists despite communication efforts, make participation opt-in rather than mandatory for the Year 1 pilot, allowing supportive families to participate while skeptical families observe documented outcomes.

Volunteer Teacher Recruitment Challenges

Fewer than four teachers may volunteer for the pilot due to well-founded apprehension about facilitating potentially difficult conversations about race, privilege, and systemic oppression. Start with two to three highly committed teachers rather than expanding to include reluctant participants who may undermine program quality. Compensate pilot teachers appropriately with course release or a substantial stipend to acknowledge the significant additional labor and professional risk. If no volunteers emerge, delay implementation one full year while conducting foundational professional development building all faculty comfort with discussing race and equity. Alternatively, implement curriculum in existing courses taught by social studies or English teachers already addressing these themes, rather than creating an entirely new advisory curriculum requiring universal faculty participation.

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CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Conclusion to the Dissertation-in-Practice

Conclusion

This dissertation examined the impact of a culturally grounded intervention on Black high school girls' social efficacy at a PWI. Nine participants in grades nine through twelve engaged in six weekly Clap Club sessions where they learned traditional hand-clapping games, created original games, engaged in critical dialogue about marginalization, and developed advocacy strategies.

Quantitatively, participants' scores on the Scale of Perceived School Self-Efficacy (SPSSE) survey increased by 30.6% from pre-test to post-test, with 100% of participants showing improvement. This far exceeded the target of 10% increase and provided strong evidence that the intervention positively affected participants' belief in their ability to navigate social situations and advocate for themselves despite facing marginalization.

Four major themes emerged from qualitative data. First, creating a counter-space free from white institutional surveillance was foundational. Second, cultural affirmation through hand-clapping games provided powerful validation of Black cultural practices typically marginalized by the school. Creating original games, particularly "Miss Miracool" with its lyrics asserting "She's a miracool, not a problem" and "Confident at school, she's making the rules," allowed participants to articulate their experiences and aspirations in culturally familiar forms. Third, critical consciousness development

occurred through structured dialogue. Participants moved from tentative sharing of individual incidents to collective analysis of patterns, naming how the school's "diversity initiatives" felt performative without addressing actual inequities. Fourth, advocacy skill development occurred both within and beyond sessions. Participants role-played scenarios, practiced assertiveness strategies, and reported using these skills in real situations when facing racial insensitivity.

Analysis of participant language revealed a shift from individualized deficit framing to collective systemic analysis. This linguistic shift reflected a fundamental transformation in how participants understood both the problems they faced and their capacity to address them collectively.

Linkage Among the Manuscripts

The three manuscripts represent an intellectual journey from problem diagnosis to intervention implementation to organizational change planning, demonstrating the iterative process characteristic of improvement science.

Manuscript one established the problem of practice by synthesizing national research with local data from Crescent Academy, documenting Black girls' disproportionate discipline, surveillance experiences, and desire for authentic spaces. Critically, it reframed the problem from individual student deficits to institutional failure to create affirming conditions.

Manuscript two detailed the intervention's design and implementation across six sessions, documenting adaptations based on participant feedback. Most notably, shifting from a visible classroom to a private secured space proved transformative. This

manuscript presented both quantitative SPSS data and rich qualitative data highlighting mechanisms of change.

Manuscript three synthesizes findings into five institutional recommendations grounded in evidence from the intervention. The first recommendation calls for expanding culturally affirming programming by institutionalizing Clap Club as a permanent program facilitated by trained Black women educators. The second recommendation establishes youth-led accountability mechanisms, including a Student Equity Council with genuine decision-making authority and an anonymous reporting system for students to document inequitable treatment. The third recommendation targets the reduction of surveillance through policy reform, beginning with a discipline equity audit and the revision of school policies that disproportionately impact Black girls. The fourth recommendation calls for the intentional diversification of staff through targeted recruitment of Black women educators, affinity group support, and retention-focused mentorship. The fifth recommendation integrates critical consciousness development into the curriculum through faculty professional development on Black feminist pedagogy and culturally sustaining instructional practices across disciplines. Each recommendation includes detailed implementation timelines, responsible parties, and resource allocation plans designed to move the institution from performative equity commitments to structural transformation.

Lessons Learned

This doctoral journey yielded several profound lessons. First, Black girls already possess critical consciousness; they do not need interventions to develop awareness of racism and sexism. What they need are spaces where they can name, analyze, and resist

oppression collectively. As one participant stated, "We live this every day. We just never had space to say it out loud with other people who get it" (Clap Club Session, Fall 2025).

Second, cultural practices are sites of resistance and knowledge production. Hand-clapping games, dismissed by school personnel as trivial, functioned as sophisticated vehicles for cultural preservation, identity affirmation, and community building. When participants created "Miss Miracool," they were producing knowledge, asserting their worth, and claiming space in an institution designed to marginalize them.

Third, researcher positionality profoundly shapes every aspect of a study. My shared identity with participants created trust and facilitated authentic dialogue, but also risked projection. Maintaining reflexivity through journaling, member checking, and consultation was essential to honoring participants' distinct voices.

Fourth, meaningful change requires both individual empowerment and collective action. The shift from "I can advocate for myself" to "We can change things at this school" represented a qualitative leap (Clap Club Session, Fall 2025). True empowerment requires community.

Finally, research with marginalized communities demands constant ethical vigilance. I grappled throughout with tensions between academic requirements and honoring participants' voices, and worried about extracting knowledge to advance my career while participants remained in an oppressive context. Ethical research is not a box to check but an ongoing commitment requiring humility and accountability.

Future Directions

This dissertation marks the beginning of the researcher's commitment to centering Black girls' voices in educational research, policy, and practice. Immediately, the

researcher will work with Crescent Academy to implement the five recommendations detailed in Manuscript three, beginning with the institutionalization of Clap Club and the formation of the Student Equity Council, both of which can be initiated within the first semester following this defense. More broadly, the researcher aims to contribute to scholarship on Black girlhood through publications reaching both academic and practitioner audiences, ensuring findings influence broader conversations about serving Black girls in predominantly white institutions.

At the policy level, the researcher will advocate for educational policies requiring cultural competence training, particularly in predominantly white institutions. The researcher will push for policies mandating student voice in school climate assessment, culturally sustaining curriculum, and accountability for equitable discipline practices. Within my role at UMass Lowell, the researcher will I will develop workshops on Black feminist pedagogy and ensure that teacher preparation programs attend to Black girls' specific experiences and needs, so that the educators entering our schools are better prepared to create the conditions these students deserve.

Finally, the researcher remains committed to continued growth as a scholar-practitioner who centers equity and justice. This requires ongoing learning from Black feminist scholars, maintaining accountability to community by using institutional power to amplify marginalized voices.

This work matters profoundly. Black girls at Crescent Academy and countless other PWIs deserve education that affirms rather than erases their identities, builds their power rather than undermines their confidence, and prepares them not merely to survive in oppressive systems but to transform them.

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Appendix 1-A

Glossary of Terms

1. **Adultification Bias:** The tendency to perceive Black girls as older, less innocent, and more adult-like than their white peers of the same age, resulting in their being held to higher behavioral expectations and afforded less protection, nurturing, and grace in educational and institutional settings. Adultification bias strips Black girls of the childhood experiences and developmental support they are entitled to and contributes to harsher disciplinary responses and a diminished sense of belonging in schools (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017).
2. **African American Vernacular English (AAVE):** A systemic and rule-governed variety of English with its own consistent grammatical, phonological, and lexical patterns, spoken by many African Americans.
3. **Black and African American:** We use the identifiers Black and African American interchangeably throughout this writing to mean individuals who are descendants of US slaves and socially constructed as
 - a. Black based on an African phenotype. However, Black is usually used to identify people worldwide who are of African descent and phenotype, whereas African American refers to Black people born in the USA.
4. **Code-Switching:** The practice of alternating between different languages, dialects, or behaviors depending on the social context. For

- Black girls in schools, this often involves modifying their speech or behavior to fit into the dominant culture, often at the cost of suppressing their authentic selves (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).
5. **Cultural Empowerment Circle (Clap Club):** Structured group initiative designed to provide Black girls with a safe, affirming space to celebrate their cultural identities, share their experiences, and foster personal and academic growth. The Clap Club will focus on empowering Black girls by encouraging self-expression, cultural pride, and community support through guided discussions, mentorship, and culturally relevant activities.
 6. **Cultural Erasure:** The process by which the cultural identities, traditions, and histories of a group are ignored, suppressed, or marginalized, often leading to a sense of invisibility, disengagement, and a disconnection from one's heritage (Jones, 2000).
 7. **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP):** A teaching framework that incorporates students' cultural references into all aspects of learning, aimed at promoting academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. CRP encourages students to maintain their cultural identities while developing the skills needed to succeed in school (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
 8. **Cultural Wealth:** The array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks possessed by marginalized communities that are often unrecognized or undervalued by dominant institutions. Cultural wealth includes aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and

- resistant capital that communities of color draw upon to survive and thrive (Yosso, 2005).
9. **Deficit Thinking:** A perspective that views students from marginalized groups as inherently lacking or deficient, attributing their academic struggles to their personal or cultural backgrounds, rather than to systemic inequities or school-related factors.
 10. **Eurocentric Curriculum:** Educational content and practices that prioritize European or Western perspectives, often excluding or marginalizing the cultural histories (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
 11. **Gender and Racial Inequality:** Overlapping disadvantages, limited opportunities, and unequal treatment of women of color. Gender and Racial inequities lead to social injustices that impact women of color and other marginalized groups in education, work, healthcare, and leadership positions (Crenshaw, 1989).
 12. **Intersectionality:** A theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (e.g., gender, race, class, sexuality, disability) combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989).
 13. **Invisibility:** A feeling that African Americans describe when feeling unnoticed, ignored, or invalidated regarding their identities. It is a term coined by AJ Franklin (1999) who states that African Americans' mental health is affected, especially when their contributions are overlooked,

they are stereotyped or undervalued in environments, leading to marginalization, frustration, and a lowered sense of self-worth.

14. **Microaggressions:** Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.
15. **Ratchet:** A term that originated in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and has evolved over time. In its original context, it was a slang term used to describe someone behaving in a way considered loud, brash, or "uncouth." However, it has also been reclaimed by some as a form of empowerment, representing unapologetic confidence and authenticity, particularly among Black women (Harris-Perry, 2011).
 - a. Operationally defined as a term used to describe behaviors or attitudes that deviate from socially constructed norms of respectability, often perceived as unrefined or overly expressive. It may also reflect the reclaiming of such
 - b. behaviors as a source of empowerment, wherein Black girls assert their identities without conforming to dominant cultural expectations of decorum or behavior.
16. **Self-awareness:** Defined as “having a consciousness of self in terms of who you are and your purpose in terms of the rest of the world” (Nyachae & Ohito, 2023).

17. **Social-efficacy:** An individual's belief in their ability to navigate social situations, build meaningful relationships, and contribute effectively within a group or community. Rooted in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977), social efficacy develops through direct experience, observation of others, social encouragement, and emotional regulation. For Black girls, social efficacy is closely tied to having affirming spaces where their identities are recognized and their voices are valued.
18. **Stereotype Threats:** A psychological phenomenon introduced by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson in the 1990s where people feel a risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group. Their research discusses how stereotype threats impact a person's academic performance and lead to anxiety and stress in environments where an individual is aware of stereotypes against their group (Stereotype Threat: A Conversation with Claude Steele | Not in Our Town, n.d.).
19. **Systemic Racism:** Structural and institutionalized policies, practices, and norms that perpetuate racial inequalities and limit access to opportunities and resources for marginalized communities, particularly Black and African American individuals.

Appendix 1-B

Empathy Interview Protocol for Black Girls at Crescent Academy

Introduction:

- My name is Zakkiyya Witherspoon. This data collection is intended for research purposes as part of my graduate studies. The information gathered will be used to complete an academic research project, which may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. The goal of this research is to better understand and address the educational experiences of Black girls in K-12 settings. Your participation will contribute to important knowledge in this field and may help inform future educational practices and policies.
- Assure confidentiality and obtain informed consent

Opening Questions:

1. Can you tell me about a typical day for you at Crescent Academy?
2. What do you enjoy most about school? What do you find challenging?

School Experience:

3. How would you describe your sense of belonging at Crescent Academy?
4. Can you share an experience when you felt particularly proud or happy at school?
5. Can you tell me about a time when you felt

misunderstood or unfairly treated at school? Cultural Identity and Representation:

6. How do you see your culture and experiences represented in your classes and school activities?

7. Can you describe a time when you felt your cultural background was valued or celebrated at school?

8. Have you ever felt pressure to change aspects of yourself to fit in at school? Can you describe that?

Relationships and Interactions:

9. How would you describe your relationships with your teachers?

10. How do you feel about your interactions with your classmates?

11. Have you experienced any microaggressions or discrimination at school? If comfortable, can you share an example?

Academic Engagement:

12. How do you feel about the opportunities available to you at Crescent Academy, such as advanced classes or leadership roles?

13. Have you ever felt discouraged from taking certain classes or participating in certain activities? If so, can you tell me about that?

Disciplinary Experiences:

14. Can you describe your experience with the school's disciplinary policies?

15. Have you ever felt unfairly disciplined? If comfortable, can you share that experience? Empowerment and Change:

16. If you could change three things about your school experience, what would they be and why? 17. What kind of support or programs do you think would be helpful for Black girls at Crescent Academy?

18. How do you think we could make Crescent Academy a more inclusive and affirming place for Black girls?

Closing:

19. Is there anything else about your experience as a Black girl at Crescent Academy that you'd like to share?

20. What questions do you wish I had asked you about your experiences?

Thank you. I will be in touch with you regarding the next steps in this research.

Appendix 1-C

Focus Group Protocol and Questions for Black Girls at Crescent Academy

Introduction Script (5-7 minutes)

"Thank you for participating in this focus group. Your experiences and insights are valuable in understanding and improving the educational experiences of Black girls at Crescent Academy. This conversation will be recorded to ensure accuracy, but your identities will remain confidential. You can skip any questions or leave at any time. There are no right or wrong answers - we want to hear your honest thoughts and experiences."

Ground Rules

1. One person speaks at a time
2. Respect different opinions
3. What's shared here stays here
4. Everyone's voice matters
5. Take space, make space

Focus Group Questions

1. "Let's start by going around the circle. Could you share one word that describes your experience as a Black girl at this school?"
2. "Think about a typical day at school. What moments make you feel most comfortable or uncomfortable? Can you share specific examples?"

3. "How do you feel about your academic opportunities here? What encourages or discourages you from taking certain classes or participating in activities?"
4. "Who do you go to when you need support at school? What makes these people helpful or trustworthy?"
5. "In what ways does the school acknowledge or ignore your cultural identity? How does this affect your school experience?"
6. "If you could change three things about this school to make it better for Black girls, what would they be and why?"
7. "What advice would you give to a new Black girl starting
at this school?"

Appendix 1-D

Guidance Counselor Protocol and Questions

Introduction Script

"Thank you for participating in this empathy interview. As a guidance counselor, your insights are valuable in understanding the experiences of Black girls at Crescent Academy. This interview will take approximately 45 minutes. You may skip any questions or end the interview at any time. With your permission, I will audio record this conversation for accuracy." Core Interview Questions

1. Experience & Background

"Could you describe your experience working with Black female students at Crescent Academy?"

Follow-up: "What unique challenges or opportunities have you observed?" 2. Academic Support

"How do you approach academic counseling and course selection with Black female students?" Follow-up: "What factors influence these conversations?"

3. Social-Emotional Support

"What common social or emotional concerns do Black female students bring to you?" Follow-up: "How do these concerns differ from those of other student populations?" 4. Systemic Barriers

"What institutional barriers do you observe that specifically impact Black

female students?" Follow-up: "How do these barriers affect their educational journey?"

5. Support Systems

"What support systems currently exist for Black female students at Crescent Academy?" Follow-up: "What additional supports do you think would be beneficial?" 6. Recommendations

"Based on your experience, what changes would you recommend to better support Black female students?"

Follow-up: "What resources would be needed to implement these changes?" Closing Script

"Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences working with Black female students? Thank you for your time and insights."

Appendix 2-A

Informed Consent Form

Research Study: When we play our way: Building social efficacy through cultural expression among Black high school girls

Principal Investigator: Zakkiyya Witherspoon

Institution: University of Massachusetts Lowell, School of Education

Contact Information: 857-526-3499 | zakkiyya_witherspoon@uml.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Linda Riley

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Your daughter is being invited to participate in a research study exploring how culturally affirming programming can strengthen Black girls' confidence, voice, and sense of belonging. This study recognizes and celebrates the unique strengths, wisdom, and cultural heritage that Black girls bring to their educational experiences. Please take time to read this information carefully and ask any questions you may have.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to understand how participation in "Clap Club," a Cultural Empowerment Circle, supports Black girls in developing stronger self-advocacy skills, cultural pride, and peer connections. Through traditional hand-clapping games, storytelling circles, music, movement, and identity exploration activities, we seek to

create a safe and joyful space where Black girls can celebrate their culture, share their experiences, and build lasting friendships.

Our program is designed to honor the rich cultural traditions that have historically strengthened Black communities while providing participants with tools and confidence to navigate various social environments authentically and powerfully.

STUDY PROCEDURES

What will happen if my daughter participates?

If you agree to allow your daughter to participate, she will:

Pre-Study (2 weeks):

- Participate in an initial interview (approximately 30 minutes)
- Will take a short survey to measure self confidence

During the Study (6 weeks):

- Attend 6 weekly 60-minute Clap Club session
- Participate in hand-clapping games, discussion circles, art activities, and cultural exploration
- Keep a reflection journal documenting her experiences
- Participate in discussions during sessions

- Be audio/video recorded during sessions (with permission)

Post-Study (1 week):

- Participate in discussions
- Participate in an exit interview (approximately 30 minutes)
- Attend a celebration session with families

Total Time Commitment: Approximately 7 hours over 9 weeks

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Potential Risks:

- **Emotional discomfort:** Discussions about identity and experiences in school may bring up difficult emotions or memories
- **Time commitment:** Participation requires consistent attendance and time for reflection activities
- **Social dynamics:** Group interactions may occasionally involve interpersonal challenges

Risk Mitigation:

- Clear group norms will be established for respectful communication
- Facilitators will monitor emotional well-being throughout sessions

- Participants may take breaks or step away from activities as needed
 - Mental health resources will be available if participants need additional support
 - Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty
-

BENEFITS

Potential Benefits to Your Daughter:

- Development of self-advocacy skills
- Improved sense of self and cultural affirmation
- Connection with peers who share similar experiences
- Tools for maintaining cultural identity in challenging environments
- Leadership development opportunities
- Experience participating in meaningful research

Potential Benefits to Others:

- Contributions to research that may help other Black girls in similar situations
 - Development of programming models that can be implemented in other schools
 - Advancement of knowledge about culturally responsive educational practices
-

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

How will my daughter's information be protected?

- All data will be stored on encrypted, password-protected devices
- Audio/video recordings will be transcribed and then securely deleted
- Your daughter will be assigned a pseudonym for all research materials
- The school's identity will be protected in all publications
- Only the research team will have access to identifiable information
- A master list linking names to pseudonyms will be kept separately and securely
- All physical documents will be stored in locked filing cabinets
- Data will be permanently destroyed 3 years after study completion

Publications and Presentations:

- Results may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences
- Only de-identified information will be used
- Neither your daughter's name nor the school's name will appear in any publications

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Is participation required?

- Participation is completely voluntary
- Your daughter may choose not to participate without any negative consequences
- She may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty
- Withdrawal will not affect her standing at school or any services she receives
- If she withdraws, you may choose whether data collected up to that point can be used

What if my daughter wants to stop participating?

- She may stop at any time by informing the researcher or her parent/guardian
- There are no penalties for stopping participation
- We will discuss with you whether to retain or destroy data collected prior to withdrawal

COMPENSATION

Participants will receive:

- Light refreshments during each session
- A small token of appreciation at the completion of the study
- Copies of any group-created materials (with permission from all participants)
- Letter of recommendation from the researcher

- Experience of participating in much-needed research that will help make things better for other girls
-

CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions about the study:

- Principal Investigator: Zakkiyya Witherspoon, 857-526-3499 | zakkiyya_witherspoon@uml.edu
 - Faculty Advisor: Dr. Linda Riley, Linda_Riley@uml.edu
-

CONSENT

I have read and understood the information provided about this research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my daughter's participation is voluntary and that she may withdraw at any time without penalty.

I give permission for my daughter to participate in this research study:

Parent or guardian Information:

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Relationship to Participant: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Mailing Address:

Participant Information:

Student Name: _____

Grade: _____ **Age:** _____ **School:** _____

Researcher Signature:

I have explained the research study to the parent/guardian and answered all questions. I believe they understand the information and are making an informed decision about their daughter's participation.

Researcher Name: Zakkiyya Witherspoon

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please keep one copy of this form for your records and return one signed copy to the researcher.

Appendix 2-B

Assent Form for Participation in Research Project

Hello! We're inviting you to be part of a special project called the Clap Club. Before you decide, we want to explain what it's all about.

What will I do in the Clap Club?

- Play hand-clapping games and bonding through sisterhood
- Talk about your experiences at school
- Write in a journal about your thoughts and feelings
- Maybe be interviewed about your experiences
- Help create ideas to make our school better for Black girls

Is it okay to say no?

Absolutely! You don't have to join if you don't want to. If you do join, you can stop coming at any time. Nothing bad will happen if you say no or decide to stop.

Will people know what I say?

We'll keep your information private. When we write about what we learn, we'll use fake names so no one will know who said what.

Could anything uncomfortable happen?

Sometimes we might talk about things that make you feel sad or upset. If that happens, you can always take a break or talk to the guidance counselor.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask us anything about the Clap Club at any time.

If you want to be part of the Clap Club, please sign below:

I, _____, want to be part of the Clap Club

research project. Student's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent's name _____ Parent's preferred method of contact:

Parent's Email Address _____ Parent's Phone Number

Remember, even if you sign now, you can change your mind later. Thank you for considering being part of our project!

Note: Complete the form, take a picture of it, and text me Zakkiyya Witherspoon (Primary Researcher at UMass Lowell) 857-526-3499.

Appendix 2-C

Scale of Perceived Social Self-Efficacy

Instructions: Please read each statement carefully. Then decide how much confidence you have that you could perform each of these activities successfully. Mark the appropriate number for your level of confidence.

No Confidence at all	Little Confidence	Moderate Confidence	Much Confidence	Complete Confidence
1	2	3	4	5

1. Start a conversation with someone you don't know well.
2. Share your opinion when a group of people is talking about something you're interested in.
3. Work on a school, work, or community project with people you don't know well.
4. Help someone you just met feel comfortable around your friend group.
5. Share an interesting experience with a group of people.
6. Put yourself in a new social situation.
7. Volunteer to help plan an event.
8. Ask to join a group of people who are planning to do something social (like go to a movie).
9. Get invited to a party given by a popular person.
10. Volunteer to help lead a group or club.
11. Keep a conversation going.
12. Take part in group activities.
13. Find someone to hang out with on a weekend afternoon.
14. Share your feelings with another person.
15. Find someone to eat lunch with.
16. Go to a party or social function where you probably won't know anyone.
17. Ask someone for help when you need it.

Appendix 2-D

Pre-Intervention Interview

Time:

Where: Virtually on Zoom

Why: To understand your experiences and stories

Thanks for talking with me today! I want to hear your stories and learn about your experiences at school and in your life. There's no right or wrong way to answer. I just want to know what you think and more about your experiences.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a story about a time when you felt really proud of who you are.
2. Can you tell me about a day at school that really stood out to you; either really good or really challenging?
3. Tell me about a time when you had to stand up for yourself or someone else.
What happened?
4. Describe a friendship that's important to you. What makes it special?
5. Can you tell me about a time when an adult at school really "got" you or understood you?
6. Tell me about a moment when you felt like you didn't quite fit in somewhere.
What was that like?

7. Can you share a story about your family or your background that means something to you?
8. Tell me about a time when you felt confident speaking up or sharing your thoughts.
9. Describe a situation where you wished things had gone differently at school.
What would you have wanted to happen instead?
10. Tell me about something you do or a place you go where you feel completely like yourself.

Appendix 2-E

Post-Intervention Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in Clap Club over these past [number] weeks. I want to hear about your experience and how it may have affected you. There are no right or wrong answers—I just want to know what you think and how you experienced the program.

1. Has participating in Clap Club changed how you feel about belonging at school in any way? Can you tell me more about that?
2. Before Clap Club started, how connected did you feel to other [participant group] at school? Has that changed after these [number] weeks? In what ways?
3. Did the cultural activities and discussions in Clap Club affect how you think about or express your cultural identity at school? How so?
4. After participating in Clap Club, have you noticed any changes in your willingness or confidence to speak up at school? Can you give me an example?
5. Did anything in Clap Club help you think differently about challenges you face at school or give you strategies for handling difficult situations?
6. Tell me about your relationships with the other participants in Clap Club. Did you form any new friendships or strengthen connections with people you already knew?

7. What did participating in the Clap Club mean to you? How did those activities make you feel?
8. Did Clap Club give you any new ways to think about or practice standing up for yourself or others? What does that look like?
9. What was the most valuable or meaningful part of Clap Club for you? What will you remember most?
10. Now that Clap Club is ending, do you think your experience in the program will affect how you navigate school going forward? In what ways?

Appendix 2-F

Clap Club Engagement Observation Rubric

Objective

To measure changes in Black female students' engagement, cultural expression, and social-efficacy during the Clap Club intervention.

Scoring Scale

1 = Minimal Evidence 2 = Some Evidence 3 = Not Observed 4 = Moderate Evidence 5 = Strong Evidence

1. Student Participation in Cultural Discussions

- a. Students are disengaged and offer minimal input in cultural discussions
- b. Student participation is only in response to facilitator prompting
- c. Not Observed
- d. Students frequently engage in discussions and ask questions about cultural topics
- e. Students lead discussions, initiate questions, and demonstrate excitement about cultural sharing

2. Confidence in Cultural Expression

- a. Students do not demonstrate confidence in cultural expression and avoid participation

- b. Some students attempt cultural expression but require frequent reassurance
- c. Not Observed
- d. Students demonstrate persistence in cultural activities and seek clarification when needed
- e. Students confidently engage in cultural practices, explain their significance, and encourage peers

3. Engagement in Group Activities

- a. Students are disengaged and require consistent redirection
- b. Student engagement is sparse and in response to facilitator-assigned roles
- c. Not Observed
- d. Students are engaged, collaborate, and remain focused on cultural activities
- e. Students take on leadership roles, facilitate cultural sharing, and offer peer support

4. Interest in Connecting Cultural Practices to Personal Experiences

- a. Students are completely disinterested in relating cultural practices to their lives
- b. Some students acknowledge connections but are disinterested in exploring deeper meanings

c. Not Observed

d. Students are interested in personal connections and ask frequent clarifying questions

5. Students demonstrate strong interest, make connections independently, and share personal insights

a. Persistence in Challenging Conversations

b. Students disengage when facing challenging topics in discussions c. Some students attempt to engage but only after seeking immediate support

d. Not Observed

e. Students show persistence in difficult conversations and encourage peers to participate

f. Students embrace challenging topics, demonstrate resilience, and seek deeper understanding

6. Open-Ended Observation Notes:

a. Notable student behaviors and interactions

b. Facilitator strategies that enhance engagement and cultural affirmation c. Any observed shifts in engagement or cultural expression compared to prior sessions

d. Instances of students supporting or affirming each other's cultural identities

e. Examples of students connecting Clap Club experiences to their broader school experiences

Appendix 2-G

Miss Mary Mack (Original Version)

Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack

All dressed in Black Black Black

With silver buttons buttons buttons

All down her back back back

She asked her mother mother mother

For fifteen cents cents cents

To see the elephant elephant elephant

Jump the fence fence fence

It jumped so high high high

It touched the sky sky sky

It never came back back back

Til the fourth of July ly ly

Note. The traditional African American hand-clapping game is taught in session one.

Participants learned this version before collaboratively creating their own contemporary adaptation.

Appendix 2-H

Miss Miracool (Participant-Created Version)

Miss Miracool, cool, cool

All dressed in jewels, jewels, jewels

Confident at school, school, school

She asked her dad, dad, dad

For a hundred bands, bands, bands

To see the ballers, ballers, ballers

Go shoot the three, three, three

They shot so many, many, many

They got so glazed, glazed, glazed

Got punched in the face, face, face

Got right back up, up, up

They never stay down, down, down

Unashamed and proud, proud, proud

Unashamed and brown, brown, brown

Note. Collaboratively created hand-clapping game developed across Sessions 3-5. Participants revised traditional lyrics to reflect their contemporary experiences as Black girls in predominantly white institutions. See Appendix H for line-by-line analysis of counter-narrative elements.

Appendix 2-I

Significance of Miss Miracool, line by line

Table 7

Significance of Miss Miracle, line by line

Line	Significance	Counter-Narrative Function	Connection to Sessions 1-5
Miss Miracool, Cool, Cool	Replaces Anglo "Mary" with "an ethnic name that could represent them all"; positions Black girls as extraordinary rather than problems	Rejects deficit narratives; frames Black girls as sacred/divine rather than ratchet	Connects to Session 2's cultural identity work and Session 3's discussion of being stereotyped as "loud" and "ghetto"
All dressed in jewels, jewels, jewels	Represents "the swag and rizz that Black people have"; claims cultural wealth and style as inherent value	Refuses respectability politics; asserts right to adornment and material displays without shame	Responds to Session 3 & 4's discussion of code-switching appearance (hair, clothing) to avoid judgment
Confident at school, school, school	Claims confidence as a right in the very space that tries to diminish them; aspirational self-presentation	Direct resistance to surveillance and tone-policing; asserts right to exist boldly in PWI	Addresses Session 3's "loud/ghetto" stereotypes and Session 4's revelation that students feel only "70-80%" themselves at school

Line	Significance	Counter-Narrative Function	Connection to Sessions 1-5
She asked her dad, dad, dad	Deliberately chose "dad" instead of "mother" to challenge absent Black father stereotype	Explicitly works "to go against the stereotype that Black kids don't have dads in the home"	Connects to Session 2's cultural identity work, Session 3's discussion of being stereotyped as "loud" and "ghetto," and Session 5's collaborative revision process where participants exercised creative agency
For a hundred bands, bands, bands	"Bands" (rolls of hundred-dollar bills) represents financial aspiration; uses Black vernacular to center their language	Refuses narrative that Black youth should be satisfied with less; claims economic literacy and ambition	Echoes Session 2's student who wrote "asked her mother for EBT" - both address economic realities
To see the ballers, ballers, ballers	Basketball as centering of Black athletic excellence and cultural community practice	Money sought for community experience, not individual consumption; celebrates Black cultural spaces	Connects to Session 3 discussion of finding community and Session 4's longing for spaces where "diversity is appreciated"
Go shoot the three, three, three	Celebrates mastery, skill, and high-level performance in Black cultural context	Positions Black excellence as the standard; claims space for Black achievement	Responds to Session 4 discussion of white students calling other schools "ghetto" while those schools excel at basketball

Line	Significance	Counter-Narrative Function	Connection to Sessions 1-5
They shot so many, many, many	Collective success; abundance rather than scarcity	Refuses limiting narratives; celebrates proliferation of Black excellence	Links to Session 1's discussion of cultural practices as showing "the world our brilliance"
They got so glazed, glazed, glazed	Contemporary slang meaning excited, hyped, or rowdy	Validates intense emotional expression; refuses tone-policing that demands Black girls remain quiet and contained	Directly counters Session 3 and 4 discussions of being labeled "loud" and having to moderate emotional expression at school
Got punched in the face, face, face	Acknowledges that excitement and authentic expression can lead to conflict or consequence	Refuses to present idealized narrative; acknowledges that living authentically comes with risk and sometimes harm	Connects to Session 4's discussions of being targeted when expressing themselves
Got right back up, up, up	Immediate resilience; refusal to be permanently diminished by harm; physical and emotional recovery	Counters narrative of Black girls as fragile or defeated; claims resilience	Links to Session 5's practiced responding to harm rather than freezing
They never stay down, down, down	Collective commitment to perseverance	Reframes resilience as communal practice	Connects to Session 1's community building, Session 4's solidarity

Line	Significance	Counter-Narrative Function	Connection to Sessions 1-5
Unashamed and proud, proud, proud	Explicit rejection of shame; pride as active stance rather than passive feeling	Directly counters messages that Black girls should feel ashamed of themselves, their appearance, their families, or their culture	Responds to cumulative sessions' discussions of surveillance, judgment, and pressure to modify themselves; affirms Session 1's affirmation card work
Unashamed and brown, brown, brown	Connects pride explicitly to racial identity; "brown" as unifying term	Racial identity is source of pride, not shame; existence in Black/brown body is itself an act of resistance	Synthesizes entire intervention's work

Appendix 2-J

Code Book

Table 8

Code Book

Subcategories	Code Descriptions	Evidence
Racism and Microaggressions		
Physical Appearance Mockery	Code refers to racist comments targeting Black students' physical features, hair, or appearance.	"Worried about her hair because people always have something to say about it."
Hypervisibility and Surveillance		
Hypervisibility Recognition	Code refers to Black students being simultaneously highly visible as tokens while having their individuality erased.	"We are different but treated the same like we are rowdy."
Performative Diversity	Code refers to institutions using Black students for diversity optics without substantive inclusion.	"Every time we have an event, there is always a camera in my face to capture the fake diversity."
Safe Space and Intervention Dynamics		
No Surveillance Norm	Code refers to the group-established norm that Clap Club would be free from institutional monitoring.	"No surveillance (no teachers, no guidance counselor, nobody)" (Destiny).
Safe Space Dynamics	Code refers to participants expressing feelings of safety, trust, and authenticity within Clap Club.	"Black girls find each other... I felt safe with the group" (Power).
Emotional Expression	Code refers to participants sharing vulnerable emotions, supporting each other, and expressing authentic feelings.	"Participants rated themselves from 5 to 9.25, with words like encouraged, tired, and excited."
Cultural Connection and Heritage		

Subcategories	Code Descriptions	Evidence
Cultural Connection	Code refers to participants connecting with African diasporic heritage through artifacts, stories, and practices.	"Displayed an afir bracelet from Ghana with the Gye Nyame symbol meaning 'I fear nothing except God' (Power).
	Critical Consciousness	
Critical Consciousness	Code refers to participants analyzing systemic racism, institutional practices, and power dynamics.	"This school always talks about diversity, but they don't embody what they preach" (Essence).
	Advocacy and Resistance	
Advocacy Resistance	Code refers to strategies for self-advocacy, confronting racism, and practicing resistance.	"That's a racial slur. You don't get to say that" (Promise).
Social Efficacy	Code refers to participants' growing confidence in social situations and belief in their ability to effect change.	"Practicing, advocating for yourself is a lot harder... the more you practice it, the better you will become at it" (Zakkiyya).

Note. This table structure was informed by qualitative coding frameworks that emphasize iterative organization. As Saldaña (2021) explains, "Maintaining this list provides an analytic opportunity to organize and reorganize the codes into major categories and subcategories" (p. 41).

Appendix 2-K

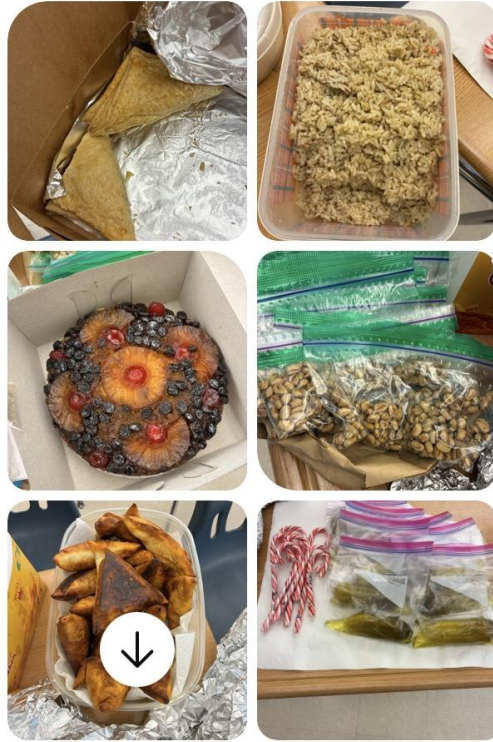
Cultural Artifact Display



Note. This is from session two. It is the wrappa or sleep blanket that Reign's grandmother gave to her as a welcome gift the first time that she visited Nigeria. It represents womanhood and welcoming someone home in Lgbo culture.

Appendix 2-L

Cultural Snacks



Notes. From left to right: Haitian pate, Liberian sardine rice, Haitian Fruit cake, Breadfruit seeds, Sambusa, Kosher pickles and peppermint sticks (Midwest African American snack)