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Finding the Yellow Brick Road: Bridging the Gap Between African American Foster Care Youth and Higher Education.

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Finding the Yellow Brick Road: Bridging the Gap Between African American Foster Care Youth

and Higher Education.

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science in Higher Education Policy & Student Affairs

By

Chyna Hart

May 2022

Dedication

To the black girls like me . . .

Who had to be twice as good to get half

Who were told you weren't enough

Who were told you didn't deserve

Who went unseen and unheard

You are not good, you are great

You will have it all

You are enough

You do deserve

I see you

I hear you

They can't stop the magic . . .

Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge the power of God and thank him for his mercy and grace during this journey. Over the past two years, I have experienced many academic and personal hardships and the Lord saw me through it all. It is through him that I had the strength to persevere.

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Lastly, I must acknowledge my cohort members, especially my HEPSA Hotties. Your support has meant everything to me. I am so grateful to have had you as peers, colleagues, and now lifelong friends. May you all continue to be the change that you want to see in the world.

Abstract

This critical action research thesis addresses the need for a university-based bridge program for African American foster care youth seeking to obtain a college degree. The reviewed literature explores a plethora of barriers African American foster care youth face in pursuing higher education, and how social and systemic structures have contributed to those barriers. In examining this literature, and literature regarding on-campus foster care youth support programs, I have proposed and justified an intervention plan. This intervention plan coined the *Yellow Brick Road Program* will help eradicate the barriers that hinder accessibility for African American foster care students. By creating an on-campus central point, these students will have access to support services that will tend to their emotional, financial, educational, and personal needs. The outcome of this program will lead to African American foster care youth successfully transitioning into college and graduating with a college degree.

Keywords: Foster Care, Student, African American, Foster care alumni, foster youth, students of color, higher education, College Access, Bridge Program

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter One: Introduction

"I can't do this sh*t" was a constant thought for me throughout my undergraduate college experience. This thought rang especially true during my senior year at West Chester University. The year was 2014 and my life was completely upside down. I was struggling financially, mentally, academically, and physically. My mother was struggling to pay for my attendance, I was amid an extremely abusive relationship, I was failing a core class that I needed to graduate, and I would drink almost every day. Being a college student was stressful.

There were always exams, papers, reading, and studying to do. In addition to that, I had to try to stay involved on campus, maintain my social life, make opportunities to network, and maintain my off-campus employment. Many would say some of those things are normal college student stressors but for me, a first-generation college student, I had more things to consider. First, there was my horrible imposter syndrome that constantly got reinforced by my white peers, advisors, and even professors. Even my family and friends would reinforce this idea. I was constantly trying to prove or disprove people's ideas about me and college, and it was exhausting.

Next was having to be the constant interpreter between the university administrators and my mother. This was especially difficult because many times both my mother and I were confused about college concepts and institutional jargon. Lastly, my family and I were constantly worried about money. I know that many college students have this concern, but I believe that the financial burden of college weighs heavier on first-generation college students and their families. As a first-generation college student, my mother and I struggled through the FAFSA process, and we had no idea about the kinds of scholarships and grants I could apply for. In ignorance, we

took out lots of students' loans. The burden of those loans is still felt today despite the fact it has been over 10 years since I first stepped on a college campus.

My college experience was extremely rewarding but at the same time, it was extremely difficult. There were a lot of personal, social, academic, and financial barriers that I had to get through with little to no assistance. As a young Black woman hailing from a lower-middle-class single-parent home in West Philadelphia, I am living proof that college success is possible. However, I feel like, for those like me, obtaining that success is a huge struggle. This experience of struggle and success left me feeling inspired yet angry. This anger drove me to make some serious life decisions that in turn guided my career goals and life path.

In My Professional Opinion

It was 2016 when I took on my first student success role. I was tasked with managing a scholarship program for first-generation low-income students from some of Philadelphia's most underperforming high schools. For three years, I led these students and their families through the college process and watched hundreds of them successfully graduate with college degrees. It was such an amazing feeling to see my students succeed, especially because I had witnessed their struggles firsthand. I had spent many hours reading student scholarship applications and learning about who they were.

The students who endured the most hardships were my foster care students of color. Many of them talked about their hardships in their personal statements and expressed their desire for success and a better life. Most of those students had suffered extreme abuse and neglect while being in the foster care system and had serious academic, financial, mental, emotional and overall stability issues. I knew that college would take a toll on them but their passion for a brighter future was plausible. Learning about their lives fueled my fire to be of even more

assistance and I constantly found myself calling institutions and organizations on behalf of students and advocating for their needs.

This made me wonder what support institutions had for these students and why they were constantly coming back to my scholarship program for help with things their institution *should* be providing them. I constantly wondered "Why should students struggle to pay so much money for an institution that is only making success harder for them?" As a college graduate, I knew the power institutions had and as a professional, it infuriated me that they were not using it for those who needed it the most. It was after this experience that I realized it was time for me to really figure out what was going on with institutions of higher education. So, I decided that I was going to go back to school and obtain my master's in the Higher Education Policy & Student Affairs program at West Chester University.

I am now in my second year of the program and have a much better understanding of what is going on from an institutional standpoint. I've also come to realize that the issue of foster care youth of color being under-supported in their pursuit of and matriculation through college *still* stands. As a graduate assistant for West Chester University's Resource Pantry, I service many populations of students. The main population is foster care alumni. In my encounters with these students, I've come to learn that West Chester University helps to provide food, basic need items, housing, scholarships, academic support, and employment opportunities for these students.

However, many of these students still struggle emotionally and carry the burden of dealing with everyday college student woes in addition to emotional and mental woes onset by their experience in the foster care system. Additionally, as explained by Merdinger et al. (2005), precarious finances are one of the biggest challenges faced by foster care student students. Thus,

these students have also come to the Resource Pantry for guidance in applying for government assistance. My conversations and experiences with these students have caused me to ask more questions than I previously had. I constantly wonder: why isn't there a one-stop-shop on campus where students can obtain food, basic need items, housing, funding, academic support, and emotional/mental support? and, why isn't there a campus program that handles all these aspects that foster care of color face?

Institutions should try to combat the on-campus issues these foster care students of color face prior to them stepping on campus. Universities should work with neighboring high schools to prepare these students for college. By doing so, then they could truly say they are making higher education accessible to all. My lingering question is, are institutions making college accessible for everyone like they say? In this paper, I will attempt to answer this question and provide an intervention plan that could help to better prepare and support this population of students in their collegiate journey. In this paper, I will highlight why these issues are essential for institutions of higher education and provide an intervention plan that could help to combat those issues.

The Issue

Accessibility is a human right that we all share. Historically, racism, sexism, and classism have been used as a vehicle to violate this right. Since its inception, higher education institutions have upheld these reprehensible values. During the 1600s, when institutions were first founded, they were private, limited to young white Christian males, and taught "history" that centered on the experience of white European colonizers (Patton, 2016). It wasn't until the 1800s, during the civil war outbreak, that the purposes, practices, philosophies, and demographics of higher education institutions began changing.

During this time, people of color and women were permitted to obtain a college degree, build their own institutions, and take on professions that led them to become lawyers, accountants, physicians, scientists, and educators (MacKinnon, 2004). This societal shift forever changed the nature of higher education. Since the 1800's there have been many other societal shifts that have led to new laws emerging and old laws changing, which created more accessibility to higher education institutions. Laws such as Title X, the Civil Rights Act, Affirmative Action, National Defense Act, and the GI Bill have helped to combat inequitable, and harmful practices that barred many populations of students from obtaining a degree.

Today, those same populations who several hundred years ago would not have had the opportunity to experience a college education, now have that opportunity and so much more. I am proud to say I belong to a few of the populations that are benefiting from these institutional changes. However, the ghosts of our horrid foundation still linger within our society and educational system and there is still a lack of accessibility for other populations of students who desperately need access and support. According to researcher Mauriell Amechi (2016), "youth exiting the U.S. foster care systems are among the least likely to enroll in college and are overwhelmingly one of the most disadvantaged groups in higher education" (p. 31). These students struggle financially while enrolled in college, have difficulty finding safe and stable housing, experience instability in relationships, and may struggle with past trauma (Amechi, 2018).

In addition, these students have been shown to be less prepared academically and experience less support and guidance than their peers (Amechi, 2018). These factors contribute to poor educational outcomes among foster care youth of color, which increases their likelihood of experiencing homelessness and incarceration (Day et al., 2011). When foster care youth can

achieve higher levels of education, they are much more likely to obtain greater self-sufficiency, financial stability, and healthier lifestyles, among other well-documented benefits (e.g., higher lifetime earnings, lower unemployment rates, a wider range of employment opportunities) (Amechi, 2016). For these reasons, it is important to focus on properly supporting this population of students. As a student affairs professional, it is my job and the job of higher education institutions to help students become successful. The likelihood of college success increases for students when they have support and access. Allowing vulnerable student populations to go unnoticed and become left behind goes against what I believe is the purpose of higher education. In chapter two, I will share with you my philosophy of education and what I believe institutions should be doing for students.

Thesis Preview

In Chapter 2, I will cover my philosophy of education and give an overview of critical action research and how it applies to my thematic concern. Next, in Chapter 3 I will discuss the history of my thematic concern and give a review of the current literature surrounding my topic. This chapter is imperative to my thematic concern as it contains material that supports my claim and intervention plan. In Chapter 4, I introduce my intervention program. My intervention program is a campus-based bridge program that supports African American foster care youth as they transition from high school into college. The key elements of my program consist of four pillars: Scholarship, Economics, Wellness, and Aspiration. Programming and support efforts will be centered around these pillars, all of which research has identified as major factors in African American foster care youth's success. Lastly. In Chapter 5, I will share my recommendations for implementation, my plans for assessment and evaluation, and briefly go over limitations and things to consider.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks

In this chapter, I will explore my own personal philosophy of education, discussing what higher education should be ideally in our society. More specifically, I will highlight the importance of dialogic, problem-posing education, which is empowering to students in their educational journey. Next in this chapter I will explore the framework of Critical Action Research, articulating key components of this methodology as well as how it connects to my thesis concern.

My Philosophy of Education

Venturing into the field of higher education and student affairs has given me a lot to think about regarding education. As a student affairs professional, I believe it is my job to help create experiences that grow and shape students in and outside of the classroom. The impact of this role on students is tremendous and aids in dictating students' life trajectories. For this reason, it is imperative to spend time examining how I can positively impact students' lives. In this section of my thesis, I will detail what I believe to be the purpose of education, what excellent educative experiences look like, and lastly, why excellent educative experiences matter. To begin, I will recount my own experiences as a student in order to compare and contrast those experiences to what I believe should be our ideal. Each recounted experience has been given a title based on the position I and the educator played in the experience. For example, in my second experience section, I was the zombie and my professor was the indifferent. This pattern will hold true for each recounted experience.

The Classroom

For seventeen years and counting, I have been a student. I've had many experiences with educators that varied from good to bad, to ugly, and even to life changing. Most of my

experiences with these educators have impacted my life, and others have had little to no influence. From this, I've learned to differentiate between what I believe are positive, negative, impactful, and unimpactful experiences. I believe that my most impactful experiences came from educators who established a personal connection with me, challenged me academically, and encouraged me when I did not do well or did not believe in myself. They also presented resources to me when I needed them, supported the idea that I was an adult deserving of respect, and instilled in me that I was an important person who had something valuable to offer in the classroom and in the world. Having educators with these characteristics has helped me continuously make positive and informed decisions that continue to serve me academically, professionally, and personally.

Although I feel that my positive experiences have had the most substantial impact on my life, there are a few negative experiences that have helped me come to the place that I am currently. Those experiences have inspired me to look critically at higher institutions and suggest reforms by adopting my educative philosophy. Below, I will further discuss my educative philosophies and how my personal experiences have helped me form them.

The Savant vs. The Savant

The year was 2013 and the class was elementary Spanish. Before having my first day in this class, I was excited. I had come from a blended family where Spanish was spoken regularly, and diversity was encouraged. I was used to hearing, learning, and speaking Spanish, so I believed this class would be one of my easier courses. This, unfortunately, was not the case. As skilled as she was, my professor could not accept that I, a non-native Spanish speaker, could know anything about Spanish. She revealed this to me one afternoon during class as we began learning adjectives.

She went around the room asking students to describe a person we knew in Spanish and use as many adjectives as possible. When she called on me, I proudly stood and recited my sentence. I was about halfway through my sentence when I noticed my professor frowning. Once I was finished, she told me that I did not do well with my adjectives and that I misunderstood the assignment. Little did she know that different Spanish-speaking countries may use other words to describe things with the same meaning. Many Spanish speaking countries may also use the same words, but they have different meanings depending on the country or region it is used in.

I explained this concept to my professor, but she refused to accept it. She insisted that she was the expert and that she had been speaking Spanish years before I was born and that she was a native speaker. This event set a negative tone, which unfortunately carried through the duration of the semester. Each time I had my elementary Spanish class, the atmosphere was tense, and my professor and I were on the defense. This led me to believe that professors didn't value students' ideas and were not interested in hearing perspectives that weren't their own.

Knowingly or maybe unknowingly, this professor had adopted the "banking" philosophy of educating. As explained by philosopher Paulo Freire (2000), the banking concept consists of knowledge being given as a gift to the unknowing. Those who are unknowing are to receive the gift, file it, and store it away in their memory (Freire, 2000). This educational philosophy supports the act of resisting dialogue and treating students as objects of assistance (Freire, 2000). According to Freire (2000), this educative philosophy is oppressive and stifles students' power and creativity. I, for one, agree with Freire. Students are not empty vessels; they come with their own life experiences and knowledge from their past, which is real and valid. No one on this earth knows everything. Knowledge is ever-changing, and there is always something more to know and learn.

Students should have classroom experiences that allow their knowledge to be validated and respected. This is how mutual respect is established between students and professors. It is hard to absorb what is taught by someone you lack respect for, and it is hard to teach someone you believe is not worthy of respect. Authentic learning and growth become present when mutual respect is present between parties. This way of thinking is closely related to the problem-posing philosophy of education. According to Freire (2000), when using the problem-posing education philosophy, both the student and the professor are responsible for creating a situation where growth and learning happen for all. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are not valid. Both parties are the student and the teacher, and there is a sense of equality in expertise and validity (Freire, 2005). I believe that students could thrive better in classrooms using this philosophy. This allows them to be more receptive and creates a collaborative and positive experience for all involved.

The Zombie vs. The Indifferent

The year was 2014, and the class was public speaking. Each week of my 2014 fall semester, I would travel to my class from the south campus to the north campus of West Chester University. Each time I attended this class, I spent most of my time looking out the window, watching as other students walked by. I was what many would call disengaged and what I would call a zombie. During this time in my life, I was going through the motions. I was amid an extremely abusive romantic relationship that left me depleted and zoned out most days. Most of my professors could see that something was wrong and consistently asked me to stick around after class for a brief discussion. However, this professor did not care.

Towards the end of my semester, my professor kept me after class one afternoon and haughtily told me that he was failing me and that I shouldn't be surprised when grades were

finally revealed. I asked him why, and he said to me that I hadn't turned in my primary assignments and that I didn't participate during class. I tried to explain what I was experiencing outside of class and asked him why he never told me that I was in danger of failing before the close of our semester. He replied, "It's not my job." He went on to say, "I'm sorry you're having a tough time. If you need to talk to someone, you should've gone to the school counseling office instead of sulking during class." This event was incredibly disheartening and led me to believe that seasoned educators only taught for the prestige of being an educator and for the sake of receiving pay and benefits. I carried a negative mindset about professors, educators, and higher education in general for some time.

Unfortunately, this was not the last time I've heard these kinds of words come from "educators." Throughout the rest of my collegiate and professional career, I've seen, heard, and experienced this adopted attitude by "educators." Many feel that their job only consists of giving students information, testing students' memory of that information, and determining whether their comprehension of that information was sufficient for a passing grade. As mentioned before, this is yet another case of the banking concept of education in use. The educators I've encountered who subscribe to this philosophy have often said things such as "This is extra work," "It's not my job," and "I don't get paid enough to do this" when working outside the banking concept scope was required.

This type of educative philosophy is detrimental and is counterproductive to what I believe a classroom and educative experience should be. Students are not just students; they are people. People are multidimensional. They have intersections that correlate with and affect one another. What happens in one aspect of a person's life affects another. Because of this, I believe it is an educator's job not merely to provide information but to create a positive experience and

space where learning can take place regardless of whether the nature is academic. Knowledge is not only acquired via textbooks but through experiences.

Many of us believe the things we believe or feel the way we do about the world because of our experiences in it. Therefore, educators must be mindful of creating positive, educative experiences for students. Philosophers such as Dewey (1938) share my stance and believe that it is the educator's business to assess what direction an experience is headed and the attitudes and environment that is being created. Educators are to be sympathetic and understand individuals and consider what is going on in the mind of those who are learning (Dewey, 1938). Taking this approach to teaching could give students the little push they need to do well in times of hardship. I could've benefitted from such a philosophy during my challenging times. Dewey (1938) also mentioned that it is important for educators to keep in mind that factors such as community, physical space, history, economic conditions, and occupational status play a role in how we may experience things. These are examples of sources outside of an individual that give rise to experience (Dewey, 1938). Had my professor understood this philosophy, they might have been able to better understand how my outside circumstances affected my class participation and experience.

The Inquisitive vs. The Existentialist

The year was 2020, and the class was about the history of higher education. This was one of the first classes of my graduate career, and I was curious to know about the professor I would encounter. I typed in his name on a professor rating website and began reading the comments. He appeared to be a favorite and had excellent ratings. I assumed that my experience with him would be a positive one. However, it wasn't just positive; it was life-changing! Many of the previous professors I encountered were very different from this one. They subscribed to the

idealist and realist philosophies of education. To further explain, idealism involves accepting ideas and theories that society overall believes, rather than considering individuals' views and beliefs (MacKinnon, 2004). Realism calls for students to learn what is already known, rather than spending time examining topics that call for exploration (MacKinnon, 2004). For years, many educators followed these philosophies and believed them to be the best approaches to administering education.

However, I believe I had a positive life-changing educative experience because this professor took a new approach. This professor had an existentialist approach to educating. According to MacKinnon (2004), existentialist educators inspire students to explore topics that they feel personally connected to and to stray from the norm or what experts may claim. Students are encouraged to interpret what they have learned and make their own conclusions (MacKinnon, 2004). With this philosophy, education is an ongoing active process that allows students freedom while also allowing students to obtain proper guidance from professors (MacKinnon, 2004).

This is an educative philosophy that I believe all professors should adopt. For the first time in my life as a student, due to this philosophy, I had an educative experience that transformed me and made me feel different about my life's purpose. For the first time, I got a chance to go in-depth and explore the topics that I cared about. I also had the opportunity to have meaningful discussions about these topics with my professor and peers. These discussions forced me to think critically about the issues I wanted to explore and how I could do something to fix them. With encouragement and guidance from my professor, I was brought closer to finding real-world ways to solve issues, and I now know what direction I'd like to take my career so that it can include my passions. Also, I have begun formulating an excellent thesis topic for my final paper and have been considering a Ph.D. program.

This is the kind of transformation each student should experience when they are in the classroom. Students should leave classrooms with confidence and new perspectives that inspire them to make choices that improve the quality of their life and bring about purpose. Every student should be encouraged and guided to marry their passion with their everyday life so that when they enter the working world, they are doing what they love rather than what they must.

The Institution

The educative experiences mentioned above have played a considerable role in how I view education and universities overall. These experiences have transformed my thinking and have given me a clearer idea of what universities should be like and what they should achieve. I have heard many critiques about universities via professors, lawyers, politicians, activists, and everyday people. They each describe the university differently and believe it has specific functions. For example, political education activist Robin Kelley (2016) stated that "institutions will never be engines of social transformation." I do not support Kelley's critique of universities, especially because history has shown that social change has been inspired by activities that arose on college campuses.

A prime example of this unfolded in 1982 which included students from my very own alma mater, West Chester University. The Commonwealth Student Association, comprised of the 76,000 students in the Pennsylvania state college system, organized petition drives, letter-writing campaigns, and demonstrations on campus to block a midyear tuition increase of $75 that had been announced by the state education department and Governor Richard L. Thornburgh (Hook, 1982). The Commonwealth Student Association was successful in its efforts and won a court injunction against the increase (Hook, 1982). This major event later led to more political activity on college campuses and encouraged politicians to focus more on issues directly related to

education (Hook, 1982). Politicians also began to take more consideration of who they put into political offices (Hook, 1982). This is only one of the hundreds of examples of how institutions, in fact, can be engines of social transformation.

Educational philosophers such as Stefano Harney and Fred Moten have argued that modern universities are dedicated to professionalization, order, scientific efficiency, counterinsurgency, and war (Kelley, 2016). They go a step further by stating that "university culture [is] bent on creating socially isolated individuals whose academic skepticism and claims of objectivity leave the world-as-it-is intact" (Kelley, 2016). Once again, I cannot support the critiques of Harney and Moten, especially as a student affairs professional. According to Thelin (2003) "American higher education was distinctive from the beginning in that it was based on the belief that the student's character, as well as scholarship, must be developed" (p. 1). For this very reason, the Student Affairs profession exists.

The emergence of extracurricular activities such as student organizations and clubs, volunteer, and internship opportunities all help to shape and cultivate students' character. Participation in these activities helps students think more critically and inform them about the world around them. These experiences force students to have experiences that challenge the status quo of our larger society. Students leave the university anew and go out into the world with the courage to change the social conditions around them and the knowledge to know exactly how to do it. I have experienced this as a student and continue to see this happen with students as a professional. So, once again, I do not subscribe to Harney and Moten's dated ideas about higher education and its purpose.

Like philosopher, Michael Oakeshott (2004), I believe the university has gotten mixed with notions such as advanced training, exploitation, world power, and social and individual

egoism. Due to society, which is the home of these notions, those who dwell within it bring these beliefs into the university when seeking what they believe is higher learning. Higher education professionals of today must rebuke this kind of thinking. Oakeshott (2004) called for universities to "beware of the patronage of this world." Allowing the university to be a space of competitiveness, bias, prejudice, racism, patriarchy, racial capitalism, and simple job training defeats its purpose and proper function.

A real university is a place of hospitality. According to Derrida (2000), hospitality involves making a space or giving space to those who are unknown, anonymous, or other and letting them arrive and take the space that is offered without the expectation of reciprocity. The university must be a hospitable place that welcomes the voices, stories, experiences, and knowledge of those who are historically unknown, unmentioned, and considered "other" (Derrida, 2000). These voices allow one to experience the world as one knows it through others' lens, thus creating a new lens for oneself and transforming one's mind (Derrida, 2000). This is what I believe to be one of the main goals of the university – transformation. Those who enter the university must exit it anew.

Philosopher Dewey shares my sentiments and agrees that a truly educative experience should include transformation via growth and interaction within one's environment (Dewey, 1938). According to Dewey (1938), interactive experiences between people and their environment can be labeled "educative," because it creates a space for continued growth through continual interaction. "As people grow through interaction with their environment, they also alter their environment in substantive ways" (Wozniak, 2021). The environment not only becomes altered but so do those who dwell within it (Wozniak, 2021). Their experiences change something within them, enabling them to change others (Wozniak, 2021). Thus, going back to

my aforementioned statement "those who enter the university exit it anew," and as they have changed themselves, set out to make changes within our world and the larger society.

A real university is also a place of collaboration. Per Oakeshott (2004), a university does not draw inspiration from just one single man, but from a body of scholars who share with one another personally and scholastically. Creating spaces for open sharing and collaboration forms a sense of freedom and acceptance, which allows one to grow academically and socially. The university is where academic and personal growth happens simultaneously, making it a unique and influential place. A university is not a real university if it cannot be hospitable, transformative, and collaborative. These key factors are needed to fulfill the university's ultimate purpose, which is to produce citizens that are not just capable workers but justice-oriented individuals who can engage constructively and ethically and who will forge a healthy democracy.

Action Research Becomes Critical

Critical Action Research is a form of Action Research that seeks to expose and change existing power structures and inequalities experienced by a community being studied (Kemmis, 2008). This branch of Action Research serves to usher a new relationship between the researcher and the participants and offers new means of observation on the relationship between theory and practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Unlike the scientific method, CAR seeks to educate participants in ways that will help them understand the nature and consequences of their actions more fully and make conclusions for the next steps (Kemmis, 2008).

CAR seeks to have participants collaborate in sharing perspectives, have the researcher take on a participant role, analyze issues and brainstorm solutions, and transforms and improves

matters for all stakeholders (Kemmis, 2008). CAR also focuses on changing history and establishing justice by "exploring existing conditions to find out how particular perspectives, social structures or practices may be irrational, unjust, alienating or inhumane" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 125). Further, it helps to explore how particular perspectives, social structures, and practices are interlinked and how they conspire to produce unwanted effects (Kemmis, 2008). According to Kemmis (2008), the overall aim is to find ways to change these things, so unfavorable outcomes are avoided.

Successfully carrying out the CAR process involves looking at issues dialectically (Kemmis, 2008). This means reviewing an issue objectively, as others see it (observers, outsiders, others) and reviewing an issue subjectively, as the person involved sees it (internal, insider, participant, self) (Kemmis, 2008). This helps to provide an understanding of issues from multiple points of view and can aid in creating more cohesive solutions. CAR participants engage in communicative actions that allow them to build solidarity and communicative power in spaces that go beyond a mere group project (Kemmis, 2008). According to Kemmis (2008), shared perspectives and discussions during CAR usually connect to a broader public sphere, giving the participants views and ideas a sense of legitimacy. The outcome of CAR leads to a transformation of social and institutional structures and practice. CAR also compels participants to change the way they interact in various settings, two of which include educational and social settings (Kemmis, 2008).

The Importance of CAR

CAR have contributed to many advancements in the higher education field. Through undergoing these research processes, students, professors, and other higher education stakeholders observed, reflected, and acted on social and institutional issues they faced and

created immediate solutions. CAR, in particular, has helped to improve processes of learning and teaching. It has aided in developing and enhancing "policies, plans, and procedures for how programs and services are delivered to those served by institutions" (Stringer, 2014, p. 60). As its popularity and effectiveness has grown, CAR has become a fundamental component of teaching, developing curriculum, assessment, classroom management, and student research. (Stringer, 2014). It has also helped higher education professionals collaborate effectively with families and communities (Stringer, 2014).

CAR has become the foundation for wise and prudent social action on themes, problems, and issues of contemporary concern (Kemmis, 2008). It has offered its practitioners new ways of investigating existing conditions and possible futures (Kemmis, 2008). With CAR, higher education professionals are equipped to examine how social structures, perspectives, and practices are related to institutions. This examination could explain how institutional structures mirror societal attitudes and ideals, which aren't always rational, just, or humane. CAR will not only allow its participants to identify and examine unfavorable structures, perspectives and practices but will help to produce solutions that will be "for the good of individuals persons and mankind" (Kemmis, 2008).

For these reasons, I will be using a Critical Action Research lens to examine the issue of African American foster care youth not being properly supported by higher education institutions. The crux of this issue stems from social structures and systemic structures that are designed to further disenfranchise this specific population of students. Examining this issue through a CAR lens will aid me in generating robust solutions and help decipher how and what specific issues play a part in the problem. I will be referring to research, testimonies, and data

collected by activists, higher education professionals, and students to help identify issues and

solutions. I will then discuss how a solution can be reached and implemented.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The foundation of our society is rooted in racism, sexism, classism, and capitalism. The spirit of our roots is embedded in everything we do in our country. In this chapter I will discuss the history of higher education, paying particular attention to who colleges and universities were constructed to serve at their founding, as well as the marginalized students they left out of their missions. Next, I will discuss relevant factors that have impacted the experiences of African American foster youth in higher education, including racism and inequality in the United States, and laws and policies that impact foster care youth. Finally, I will explore the current state of my concern by reviewing the literature on African American foster youth and their school experiences.

Historical Context

Higher Education Institution Foundations

To fully understand the effects that racism, classism, and capitalism have on African American foster youth entering the higher education system, we must first examine how our education system came to be and how it has transformed into what we see today. As previously stated in Chapter 1, During the 1600s, when institutions were first founded, they were private, limited to young white Christian males of high social status, and taught "history" that centered on the experience of white European colonizers (Patton, 2016). For centuries, institutional curriculum left little to no mention of the experiences of colonized people despite the fact that these people were the reason institutions existed.

The Atlantic Slave Trade played a huge part in the foundation of higher education institutions. African slaves were used economically to fund institutions and were used physically to construct and upkeep these very same institutions (Wilder, 2014). The buying, selling, trading,

and bequeathing of slaves, plantations, and goods administered by slave labor generated the means to sustain higher education institutions, award student scholarships, pay students tuition, build successful careers, and pass on wealth from generation to generation (Wilder, 2014). Those who founded, attended, invested in, and willingly supported higher institutions during the 17th and 18th centuries benefited financially and socially (Wilder, 2014). Their descendants continue to economically and socially benefit today. For hundreds of years, African slaves did not have the privilege of attending the institutions they built. They did not have access to the education that would have helped them to become economically and socially equal with their colonizers. Because of this, many of their descendants continue to economically and socially suffer today.

Transforming Higher Education Institutions

With the start of the mid-1800s, higher education institutions began looking very different. Due to the Civil War outbreak in 1862, societal needs and desires began transforming higher institutions' purposes, practices, philosophies, and demographics (MacKinnon, 2004). The types of degree programs offered had increased, extracurricular activities began to emerge, and women had become permitted to attend higher education institutions, take on faculty jobs, and even develop their own women's colleges (MacKinnon, 2004). The emergence of trade schools, along with historically Black colleges and universities began taking America by storm (MacKinnon, 2004), mainly due to the widespread segregation of post-secondary institutions.

Segregation, brought on by racism, played a major role in the turbulent relationship between African Americans and higher education. African American students like James Meredith and Autherine Lucy have experienced first-hand how higher education institutions have excluded and alienated people of color. In 1962, James Meredith attempted to enroll at the University of Mississippi, an all-white institution (Onion et al., 2010). The University of

Mississippi had previously denied Meredith admission until he filed a racial discrimination lawsuit against them and won (Onion et al., 2010). Once he arrived on campus, he was attacked by a mob of over 2,000 students and others – ending with two dead, hundreds wounded, and many others arrested (Onion et al., 2010). This event was so chaotic that the Kennedy administration had to call out some 31,000 National Guardsmen and other federal forces to enforce order (Onion et al., 2010).

African American graduate student Autherine Lucy, suffered a similar fate. According to the United States Courts (2021), in 1952, Lucy applied to attend the University of Alabama and was admitted. After finding out that she was African American, the institution revoked her acceptance (United States Courts, 2021). Lucy called on the assistance of a prominent lawyer by the name of Thurgood Marshall to help her reverse the institution's decision. The U.S Supreme court decided in Lucy's favor and in 1956 she stepped foot onto the campus (United States Courts, 2021). After 3 days of being on campus, Lucy was attacked by a mob who threw eggs at her and used hateful language (United States Courts, 2021). After the attack, Lucy hid in a nearby classroom for safety. The university later suspended her, claiming that the action was taken for her own protection. After the event, Lucy and Marshall attempted to file a complaint against the university, which resulted in Lucy being expelled on the grounds that her legal action had slandered the university (United States Courts, 2021).

For hundreds of years, African Americans had to endure traumatizing and horrific experiences in pursuit of a higher education. Many of these experiences were highly publicized and gained the gaze of citizens across the United States and the world. The scrutiny from those in favor and against these events brought forth the current social and educational changes we see today. With societal attitudes altering around race, class, gender, and education, the laws

affiliated with them too were altered. Below I have listed a few laws that played a huge role in shaping our current higher education system. These laws have been put in place over time to help absolve our education system of its shameless and discriminatory foundation. The purpose of these laws was to restore human decency and create social and economic equity, equality, inclusion, and balance within our larger society.

Table 1

Year	Law	Description
1890	The Second Morrill Act	This act withheld funds from states that refused students' admission to the land grant colleges based on race. However, states could provide separate institutions for minorities to avoid fund withholdings.
1954	Brown v. Board of Education	This ruling concluded that "separate but equal" educational facilities were unconstitutional.
1961	Affirmative Action	This was an executive order issued by President John F. Kennedy, which created the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. This was the first time Affirmative Action was referred to.
1961	Dixon v. Alabama	This court ruling established that students who attended public higher education institutions should be given due process in dismissal from institutions.
1964	Civil Rights Act	This law protected people from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin.
1972	Title IX	This law prohibits discrimination based on gender, marital, and parental status in the following areas: admissions, financial aid, health, and insurance benefits, career guidance, and counseling services, housing, courses, and other educational activities and scholastic, intramural, club or intercollegiate athletics.

(Boggs et al., 2020; Forest & Kinser, 2002)

I would argue that for the most part, these laws have accomplished that. The same populations of people who several hundred years ago would not have had the right or access to higher education, now have that opportunity. However, the ghosts of our horrid past still linger

and accessibility in our higher education system is STILL an issue. Currently, this issue is severely impacting some of the most vulnerable populations of students in our country.

<div align="center">**Relevant Factors**</div>

Racism and Inequality in the U.S.

As stated in the state of my concern section below, African Americans are a vulnerable group within the child welfare system and are more likely than their peers to be placed in foster care due to poverty. This issue of poverty can be directly connected to the topics of racism, classism, and capitalism. As you've read, descendants of African slaves do not have an equal economic or social status, in comparison to other groups of people in the United States. The effects of our disreputable past have continued to paralyze the descendants of African slaves, also known as African Americans. According to the 2020 Census report, those who identified as Black or African American had the highest poverty rate, hovering at 19.5%, which did not change from the poverty rate recorded in 2019 (Shrider et al., 2022). Latinx/Hispanics had a poverty rate of 17%, Asians had a poverty rate of 8.1%, and Caucasians had a poverty rate of 8.2% (Shrider et al., 2022). The overall poverty rate in the United States is currently11.4%, yet the poverty rate for African Americans alone almost doubles that (Shrider et al., 2022). These statistics put into perspective just how dire the racial disparity is in this country.

Other factors such as redlining help to perpetuate this disparity and keep communities of color in or below the poverty line. Redlining is known as an illegal discriminatory practice that landlords and mortgage lenders would partake in to restrict housing based on race in certain areas. Historically landlords and mortgage lenders would mark areas on a map with red ink to determine what areas were and weren't suitable for minority races (Pearcy, 2020). Today the marking of maps no longer take place, however, redlining still happens. Many refer to the new

form of redlining as gentrification, but that is another topic for another paper. The origins of redlining can be traced back to slavery and the Civil War.

After the Civil War, many African Americans in the south moved north to escape systemic oppression and racial terrorism (Pearcy, 2020). However, what they found was that the North was less overtly threatening but was still a repressive place that followed a system that sought to regulate the presence of African Americans in public spaces (Pearcy, 2020). The southern states were known for enforcing specific and specialized laws against racial integration, the northern states achieved this same outcome but via housing laws and restrictive covenants (Pearcy, 2020). This sparked segregation and ghettoization which is a deliberate result of the housing policies of the federal, state, and local governments (Pearcy, 2020). This deliberate act "steered people of particular racial/ ethnic backgrounds toward less desirable neighborhoods and away from ones they might have chosen—which were, inevitably, whiter" (Pearcy, 2020, p. 44). To ensure that specific races stayed in their "designated areas", rent, mortgage, and local property taxes were raised – barring individuals who historically and generationally do not come from favorable economic backgrounds (i.e., African Americans and other people of color) from desirable housing.

In being barred from favorable housing, African Americans were also barred from having their children attend more favorable schools. Since a significant portion of school revenue is derived from local property taxes, and African Americans do not have the highest property taxes in their neighborhoods, they were extremely undervalued and received scant educational funding (Pearcy, 2020). This lack of proper funding has led to a lack of proper educational resources for African American students, which in the long run keeps them and their families in poverty. Research has shown that as the average family income in a school goes up, so does student

achievement. This can help to explain why African Americans and other students of color have difficulty in educational success (Pearcy, 2020).

These historical impacts are exacerbated for Black foster care youth as compared to youth in the general population, youth in foster care are less likely to perform at grade level, are twice as likely to repeat a grade, experience out-of-school suspension, and expulsion far more than their peers, and tend to be concentrated in the lowest-performing schools (Day et al., 2011). Thus, as noted by Davis (2006), when entering higher education, foster care youth "generally need remedial assistance" (p. 30). This history impacts Black foster care youth financially as well. Because of the past practices of redlining, Black families have significantly lower wealth than white families (Bhutta et al, 2020). Subsequently, Black families have less ability to contribute to paying costs related to college for their children. As noted by Hanson (2022), "Black college graduates owe an average of $25,000 more in student loan debt than White college graduates," and "four years after graduation, 48% of Black students owe an average of *12.5% more than they borrowed"* (emphasis original, p. 1). Families in the foster care system tend to experience high levels of financial inequality (Eckenrode et al, 2014), making higher education financial struggles even more likely for foster care youth. Thus, because of the history of racism and inequality in the United States, Black foster care students in higher education are often doubly disadvantaged as they transition to college.

Law & Policy Issues

During the early 1980s, researchers, child welfare advocates, and lawmakers began to become concerned about the outcomes of youth who had aged out of the foster care system (Okpych, 2012). They found that many of these youth had experienced incarceration, mental health issues, and homelessness (Okpych, 2012). These outcomes were not only shocking but

alarming, and over the past 25 years, several pieces of federal legislation have appropriated funding to promote foster care youths' transition into adulthood via higher education (Okpych, 2012). Some of those federal legislative pieces included the Independent Living Initiative of 1986, the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, the Education and Training Voucher of 2001, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (Okpych, 2012). Although legislation has been put in place to help support the foster care youth transition, the extent of assistance and services available to youth aging out of care is contingent upon several factors.

According to Okpych (2012), the financial and non-financial support that is available varies widely based on the state in which foster youth reside and the postsecondary institution they attend. Youth aging out of foster care can apply for federal support through income-based grants and programs (e.g., Pell Grants and GEAR-UP), student loans, and national scholarships, however, there are several other services and supports that are contingent on location (Okpych, 2012). Each state receives funding for foster care youth seeking a college degree, however, they have the authority to dictate the amount of funding they allocate to these students and what services they'd like to provide them (Okpych, 2012). Some states offer foster care youth tuition waivers, scholarships, or grants while others do not (Okpych, 2012). This is disheartening because African American foster care youth in all states deserve an equal opportunity to receive benefits and supports that could make obtaining a college degree possible. Allowing states to control the amount of educational funding and support provided to foster care youth accommodates further inequality and sets the goal line at different levels for these youth.

In the state of Pennsylvania, my home state, colleges and universities, including public, private, community colleges, and state-related schools, award fostering independence tuition

waivers to foster care youth who are pursuing a college degree (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). The waivers cover tuition costs as well as college application fees, and they can be used for up to five years or until a student reaches age 26 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). The Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program was created by Act 16 of 2019 and it seeks to remove barriers to accessing post-secondary education for youth who are or have been in foster care (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). While Pennsylvania is not alone in taking additional steps to increase educational accessibility, the journey to obtaining a college degree could be more difficult in states where there is less extensive support (Okpych, 2012). Foster care "youth who age out of care and attend college in states where support is not as extensive become increasingly responsible for sustaining their own basic livelihood while at the same time acclimating to college and fulfilling academic responsibilities. Financial demands may necessitate that they work to pay for unmet expenses but doing so could compromise their ability to remain enrolled and do well in school" (Okpych, 2012, p. 1392).

<center>**The Current State of My Concern**</center>

African American Youth vs The Foster Care System

The child welfare system is intended to protect children and maintain their safety. According to Lane (2017):

> African Americans are a vulnerable group within the child welfare system. They are disproportionally represented in the foster care system, accounting for 14% of the U.S. child population, but representing 24% of the child welfare system. African Americans are more likely than their peers to be placed in foster care due to poverty and remain in foster care longer than children of other races. They are also least likely to be adopted.

African American foster care youth experience trauma, neglect, abuse, instability, and a lack of support in educational advancement while navigating the foster care system (Day et al., 2011; Morton, 2018).

The trauma that they experience may include sexual, physical, and emotional abuse (Hallett et al., 2018). Trauma is further experienced when these children are taken away from their birth families, when they are separated from siblings, when they lose friends or family members, or when they are moved from one foster care placement to another (Day et al., 2011; Morton, 2018). According to Day et al. (2011):

> Entry into foster care, as well as any subsequent placement changes, is often accompanied by changes in the school. These school changes can have a negative effect on academic progress, especially if poor coordination occurs between child welfare and school personnel. Difficulties while transferring school records also add to the negative effects and lead to a significant delay when foster care youth enroll in a new school. Placement instability helps to explain the negative relationship between educational achievement and foster care youth.

African American Foster Care Youth vs. The Education System

The trauma and abuse that these youth face may also help explain their negative educational outcomes. Researcher Day et al. (2011) reports that the trauma experienced by children who have been neglected or abused can lead to a variety of developmental problems, such as learning disabilities or behavioral and emotional disorders. Researchers Hernandez & Naccarato (2010) echo this claim and add that youth trauma has led to "academic challenges related to reading, writing, and math". Additionally, compared to youth in the general population, youth in foster care are less likely to perform at grade level, are twice as likely to

repeat a grade, experience out-of-school suspension and expulsion far more than their peers, and tend to be concentrated in the lowest-performing schools (Day et al., 2011). A major consequence of foster care youth experiencing these difficulties is that they are less likely to graduate from high school than their peers (Day et al., 2011).

Research has shown that as few as one-third or as many as two-thirds of youth in foster care graduate from high school (Day et al., 2011). These numbers are extremely low in comparison to the general population of students. The numbers for foster care youth transitioning into college are equally low. Studies suggest that fewer than 10% of foster youth attend college, others suggest that the figure may b e as high as one-third (Day et al., 2011). For the few that do matriculate into college, the national completion rate hovers around 15% (Amechi, 2016). Those numbers for African American foster youth may be lower, since in general, African American (37%) youths have a lower rate of college attendance than their White (41%), Asian (62%), or Multiracial (47%) counterparts (Lane, 2016 & De Brey, 2021).

In addition to the academic and mental hardships, African American foster youth face a lack of financial and parental support. Many of these youth do not have the monetary capital or financial knowledge needed to make paying for college a reality (Morton, 2018). Many times, they cannot depend on their foster parents to help with this process. According to researcher Brenda Morton (2018), oftentimes foster care youth are placed with adults who underestimate their potential and lack post-secondary experience. As a result, they are not encouraged to explore and pursue a degree (Morton, 2018). "This leaves foster care youth without guidance on how to successfully prepare and navigate the challenges and complexities of a college or university" (Morton, 2018).

African American Foster Care Youth & Fortitude

Despite their many challenges and low enrollment rates, African American foster youth, have a strong desire to obtain a college degree. An estimated 70% of foster care youth aspire to obtain postsecondary educational credentials (Geiger et al., 2018). According to Lane (2017):

African American foster youth tend to use their unfavorable social factors and harmful experiences in foster care as inspiration to achieve a college degree. Many of them feel that being college-educated would break the cycle of social and economic adversities within their family systems. They also hope to break the cycle and stigma around poverty and foster care youth, in particular, those related to the notion that foster care youth are incapable of being successful in social and educational endeavors.

African American foster care youth not only have the desire to procure a better life for themselves via a college degree, but they also have the commitment required to be successful college students and graduates. According to Amechi (2016, p. 29), they "are more likely to progress toward self-authorship as adolescents as a result of the adverse environmental conditions within the foster care system. The provocative and adverse experiences related to foster care proved to be catalysts for self-authorship development."

Self-Authorship is defined by Baxter Magolda (2004) as "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations." (p. 269). In Lamens terms, this means that African American foster care youth can build their core selves and have a stronger sense of who they are at a younger age. This is a skill that many do not gain until they become young adults. Having this ability "enhances their success in terms of their academic self-efficacy, and their ability to cope effectively with and respond to adversity in college. In other words, students who enter

college with a self-authored way of knowing may display greater confidence in overcoming academic challenges and coping with difficult sociocultural experiences" (Amechi, 2016, p. 30).

It is clear that African American foster care youth have the desire and the willpower it takes to have college success, but they lack the proper support in those endeavors. When youth become 18 years old and age out of foster care, the welfare system is no longer responsible for them (Lane, 2017). This means that they lose the prior support they received while they were in foster care. This can include educational, social, financial, physical, and mental health support and services. Once foster care youth age out of the welfare system, they are expected to conduct themselves as self-sufficient adults, who are responsible for their own well-being (Lane, 2017).

This is extremely troubling because many of the African American foster care youth suffer from mental, social, financial, and academic difficulties that do not go away once they turn eighteen. Many foster care programs realize this issue and have made strides to increase resources for youth who are aging out of the system, including transitional housing, mental health, and independent living skills program (Hallet, 2018). However, they still fall short of meeting the needs of these youth.

Supporting African American Foster Care Youth

According to Lane (2017), the lack of resources available to African American foster care youth can impede their ability to thrive in college, specifically, those from lower socioeconomic circumstances. "Exposure to opportunities to increase their social and cultural resources is crucial to their academic success. Those experiences may include college-bound programs, intensive training programs, mentor programs, and involvement with cultural and professional groups" (Lane, 2017, p. 149). African American youth are more likely to attend college when they have the influence of social supports such as school counselors, administrators, teachers,

and even parents and family members (Lane, 2016). Research also suggests that having comprehensive supports serve as buffers for foster youth and helps them navigate college and career opportunities (Amechi, 2016).

A study conducted by Pier et al. (2019) showed that foster care youth who have received services from college support programs feel that these programs are beneficial to their success and should address issues such as housing, academics, relationships, and finances in a holistic way. Another study conducted by Gillim (2018) concluded that 86% of foster care youth who received college support services believe that their program brought forth a sense of family and stability. More than 75% of foster care youth indicated that this feeling of family was important to them (Gillim, 2018).

As stated, prior, the reasons for African American foster care youth having low retention and graduation rates can be attributed to them having a lack of academic preparation, mental health issues, lack of social support, insufficient funds, and need for emergency assistance (e.g., with food, transportation) (Gillium,2018). These factors may be overcome with appropriate support and services, which include personal, familial, collegiate, state, and/or federal participation and reinforcement. (Gillium, 2018). After examining the issues African American foster youth face and the factors that cause these issues, I believe an intervention needs to take place. In chapter 4, I will discuss my intervention plan for this population of students and how it can be carried out.

Chapter Four: Program Design & Implementation

As previously discussed in chapter 3, African American foster care youth endure major roadblocks in their journey to post-secondary education. Higher education institutions, high schools, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders have noticed these roadblocks and have been motivated to make changes. In the past decade, there have been many programs across the U.S. that provide various services and support for foster care youth, on and off-campus (Geiger et al., 2016). Many of these programs have been shown to be successful and have become models for other emerging programs across the country (Geiger et al., 2016). Some notable programs include Michigan State University's FAME program, Western Michigan University's Fostering Success Program and Seita Scholars program, The University of Washington's Champions program, Texas State University's FACES program, Arizona State University's Bridging Success program, and California's Guardian Scholars Program which spans over 32 higher education institutions across the California state (Geiger et al., 2016). I have reviewed these programs and believe that many of them have strong components that aid in the success of African American foster care youth. This knowledge coupled with my research in developmental theories, higher education and student affairs competencies, and my personal experience working with this population of students has helped to form what I believe would be the best intervention plan for African American foster care youth struggling to obtain a college degree.

Theories Considered

In creating my intervention plan, I considered two types of theories—developmental and research. The first developmental theory explored was Self-Authorship. Self-Authorship was created by researcher Marcia Baxter Magolda (2004) and is defined as "the internal capacity to

define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations" (p. 269). This theory helped me to understand the drive and mental fortitude that African American foster care youth possess. Through examining this theory, I concluded that African American foster care youth had the ability to build their core selves and have a stronger sense of who they are at a younger age. Having this level of mental maturity has prepared these youth to exercise self-efficacy and perseverance when faced with adversity. Knowing this information has inspired me to incorporate programming that seeks to grow and challenge these students mentally, academically, and emotionally.

The second developmental theory I considered was Dewey's idea of an educative experience. Dewey's (1938) idea of an educative experience involves educators being sympathetic and understanding to individuals and considering the events that affect their thoughts and worldview. This theory was important to and informed my intervention planning. Major parts of my intervention program such as foundational course instruction, academic advising, and counseling must take this approach in providing support to African American foster care youth. The professionals carrying out these services must be able to consider students holistically and recognize how outside influences and intersectionality affect their educational experience and overall success.

In thinking about my research theory, I decided to use Critical Action Research (CAR). The role of Critical Action Research is to expose existing power structures and inequalities experienced by a community being studied and suggest change (Kemmis, 2008). In participating in CAR, I was able to explore how different social structures, beliefs, and practices are interconnected and how they have worked together to produce inequality, inequity, and negative outcomes regarding African American foster care youth and higher education.

Social structures such as racism, classism, and capitalism have played significant roles to the detriment of African American foster care youth. The effects of these social structures are embedded within the foster care system and the higher education system. The details of the effects were examined in chapter 3 and explained how institutional structures mirror societal attitudes and ideals, which are not always rational, just, or humane. Attaining this information helped me to brainstorm ways my intervention plan could address the negligence of higher education institutions and bring forth a program that would require campus-wide support in combating accessibility and educational inequity that African American foster care youth face.

Competencies Considered

As a higher education and student affairs professional, it is important that the work I do is rooted in proper foundation. National professional organizations such ACPA and NASPA help practitioners like me build on solid foundations when creating solutions to problems our students and institutions may face. They also influence exploration and growth within the field. These organizations provide professionals with a published guide of professional competencies that touch on key areas within the field. These competencies help individuals consider imperative factors when planning program interventions. Below, I have listed a few competencies which have been essential in the planning of my program intervention.

Table 2

Competency Area/ Foundational Skill	Application to Thesis Project
Advising and Supporting	
• Establish rapport with students, groups, colleagues, and others • Exhibit active listening skills • Maintain an appropriate degree of confidentiality that follows applicable legal and licensing requirements,	These skills are crucial to possess when working with cohorts of students. The key to creating strong relationships is establishing trust. This will be especially important due to the instability that African American foster care youth face. They will need to feel that

facilitates the development of trusting relationships and recognizing when confidentiality is broken (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	they can trust and rely on the professionals guiding them.
• Facilitate reflection to make meaning from experience • Appropriately challenge and encourage students and colleagues effectively • Actively seek out opportunities to expand one's own knowledge and skills in helping students with specific concerns • Recognize the strengths and limitations of one's own worldview on communication with others (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	These skills can be utilized by staff and participating students. Staff will need to encourage and challenge students to take initiative. Students will also need to challenge and encourage themselves to take initiative and reflect on how their past experiences prepare them for their future.
Assessment, Evaluation, and Research	
• Facilitate appropriate data collection for system/department-wide assessment and evaluation efforts using up-to-date technology and methods • Design program and learning outcomes that are appropriately clear, specific, and measurable, that are informed by theoretical frameworks and that align with organizational outcomes, goals, and values (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	This skill can assist with the future development of my pilot program invention. I hope that the feedback can help push the program in the right direction as it becomes a permanent institutional program.
Social Justice and Inclusion	
• All Social Justice and Inclusion foundation skills (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	These skills are important to have due to the population of students being served. Staff will be supporting marginalized students who come from difficult backgrounds, and it is essential to be aware of one's positionality and its individual and institutional impact.
Values, Philosophy, and History	
• Describe the foundational philosophies, disciplines, and values on which the profession is built	These skills are important because they help individuals understand the history of marginalized groups in higher education and how they historically and presently are being impacted. Knowing this information has been

• Demonstrate responsible campus citizenship and participation in the campus community • Describe the roles of both faculty and student affairs educators in the academy • Articulate the history of the inclusion and exclusion of people with a variety of identities in higher education • Articulate the changing nature of the global student affairs profession and communicate the need to provide a contextual understanding of Higher Education (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	essential in building an intervention that will truly support African American foster care youth.
Leadership	
• Identify one's strengths and weaknesses as a leader and seek opportunities to develop one's leadership skills • Use technology to support the leadership process • Describe how one's personal values, beliefs, histories and perspectives inform one's view of oneself as an effective leader with and without roles of authority (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	My program aims to help to build foster care youths' sense of self academically and personally. Staff members will help groom participants into future leaders in their communities and in the larger society.
• Understand campus cultures and collaborative relationships, applying that understanding to one's work • Describe and apply the basic principles of community building (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	My program requires collaboration with the campus community which includes students, staff, and faculty. The goal is to be able to have this program replicated on campuses across the U.S. using the resources they may already possess.
• Think critically and creatively, and imagine possibilities for solutions that do not currently exist or are not apparent • Lead others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization (within the scope of one's position)	These skills will be useful when thinking about ways to improve my invention plan and combat barriers that may arise when running the program as a pilot.

• Articulate the logic and impact of decisions on groups of people, institutional structures, and implications for practice (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	
Student Learning and Development	
• Articulate theories and models that describe the development of college students and the conditions and practices that facilitate holistic development • Articulate how differences of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and religious belief can influence development during the college years • Articulate one's own developmental journey and identify one's own informal theories of student development and learning (also called "theories-in-use") and how they can be informed by formal theories to enhance work with students (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	These skills are essential to possess when working with African American foster youth. Individuals need to understand how topics such as race, class, gender, and other intersections play a role in supporting and understanding this population of students.
• Assess learning outcomes from programs and services and use theory to improve practice • Identify and construct learning outcomes for both daily practice as well as teaching and training activities • Assess teaching, learning, and training and incorporate the results into practice (ACPA/NASPA, 2015)	These skills are necessary for my intervention programs improvement and growth.

(ACPA/NASPA, 2015)

Graduate Assistantship Reflection

In addition to considering theories and competencies to design my intervention plan, I have considered and drawn from my personal experience in working with foster care youth within the higher education setting. As a Graduate Assistant at West Chester University's

Resource Pantry, I worked very closely with the Promise Program students. The Promise

program is a West Chester University campus support program that serves unaccompanied

homeless and foster youth – providing housing, food/basic need items via the Resource Pantry,

employment opportunities, mentorship, and access to scholarship funds. As a graduate assistant,

I was charged with coordinating campus-wide food and basic needs drives for the Promise

Program students. I would also coordinate the pick-up and drop-off of these items to these

students. In hosting these events, I was able to better understand the needs and challenges these

students faced. Many of these challenges included securing stable transportation and social

benefits, amongst several other things. The Promise Program students frequented the Resource

Pantry and would make suggestions for services they believed we should provide.

Hearing these students' suggestions and listening to their personal stories birthed the idea

of the Resource Pantry starting a benefits hub. This hub would help promise program students, as

well as other students, apply for social benefits and services. As this new initiative spawned, I

continuously thought about the needs and requests from the Promise Program students and

brainstormed ways in which all the separate campus supports could work in the students' favor

more effectively. From this, my intervention plan emerged. I would constantly hear Promise

Program students speak about the possibility of the benefits hub and having all their support

systems in one building on campus. According to Hallett et al. (2018), having fragmented foster

youth supports on college campuses adds to the students' challenges while navigating the higher

education landscape. Having a central hub for foster care youth could help them and campus

professionals better collaborate when issues arise that might negatively impact the foster care

youths' continued success (Hallett et al., 2018). In addition, this cross-collaboration helps ensure

that foster care youth receive the full benefit of campus resources that may otherwise be

untapped (Hallett et al., 2018).

Brief Program Overview

The *Yellow Brick Road Program* is my proposed intervention plan for African American

foster care youth pursuing post-secondary education. This program acts as an institution-based

bridge program for those foster care youth who are aging out of the foster care system and are

interested in obtaining a higher education. This program would help to eradicate barriers that

hinder accessibility for this vulnerable and underserved population of students. By creating an

on-campus central point, these students will have access to support services that will tend to their

emotional, financial, educational, and personal needs. The outcome of this program will lead to

African American foster care youth successfully transitioning into college and graduating with

their degrees.

The program is guided by what I call the "Four Pillars"- Academics, Wellness,

Economics, and Aspiration. These pillars are rooted in research that highlights the most common

issues that African American foster care youth face. These issues include experiencing trauma,

neglect, abuse, instability, and a lack of support in educational advancement while navigating the

foster care process (Day et al., 2011; Morton, 2018). It also includes these youth having a lack of

social capital, monetary support, and proper support from foster care parents (Morton, 2018).

Due to this research, it is imperative to have my program focus on these pillars to provide

exemplary support. By focusing on these pillars, African American foster care youth can be

accommodated holistically. My program's integrated approach helps individuals understand how

the pillars are interconnected and how they contribute to student success. This approach is

necessary since it is ineffective to aid individuals in one aspect of their lives when other factors influence the outcome of that aspect.

A Snapshot of "The Four Pillars"

As stated in chapter 3, African American foster care youth have major struggles in the classroom. Factors such as placement changes and trauma negatively affect their reading, writing, and math levels. (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Day et al., 2011; Morton, 2018) Because of this factor, my program will offer these students foundational courses to help them get caught up in their grade level. Having these courses will make the transition from high school to college smoother and will help students improve their SAT knowledge, leading to better test scores. Because trauma is so connected to African American foster youths' academic success, instructors will have trauma education experience and will incorporate this into their teaching style when conducting these courses.

According to Hallett et al. (2018), many foster care youths who experienced trauma will experience triggers during class or class related activities. Sometimes class discussions and activities broach issues that trigger an emotional response from foster care youth (Hallett et al., 2018). Having instructors who also have counseling experience would be beneficial as they will have the proper tools to manage emotional responses. Instructors will incorporate course syllabi information related to ways students can address emotional distress in academic spaces and set personal meetings with these students (Hallett et al., 2018). Personal meetings will provide a space for students to share foster care related issues and gives instructors an opportunity to counsel and direct these students to institutional resources (Hallett et al., 2018).

One crucial resource that these students will utilize in my program is specialized academic coaching. African American foster care students, especially those who struggle with mental health conditions, will have a standing appointment with campus academic coaches who specialize in helping students with disabilities prompted by mental health issues. According to Geenen et al. (2014), only 34% of foster care youth with mental health issues go on to obtain a higher education. This phenomenon could be due to high schools responding to these students' absenteeism, poor performance, and behavioral problems (often related to a history of trauma and life instability) with suspension, expulsion, and restrictive educational placements (Geenen et al., 2014). When students are responded to in this fashion, they do not receive the proper support needed to be academically successful. With this program component, students will become more academically confident and will have the proper tools for studying, test-taking, and retaining information.

Another imperative resource to mention is counseling services. During the program, students will have access to counselors who can support their mental and emotional wellness endeavors. According to Hallett et al. (2018), the reality of trauma is embedded in the narratives of foster care youth and frames the way they engage with education. Their thoughts and feelings about their life experience play a large part in their educational success. In my experience, when we as individuals do not feel stable emotionally and mentally, normal life stressors can feel overwhelming. If you put together the stress of recovering from trauma, life stressors, and being a college student, the emotional response could be more than paralyzing. Many foster care youths are challenged to manage these exact stressors when pursuing a degree and need emotional and mental support to achieve their collegiate goals.

In my proposed program, counselors will teach students mindfulness practices in conjunction with other techniques to reduce stress and promote mental wellness. Counselors teaching mindfulness to foster care youth invites self-inquiry about factors related to aging out of foster care and college success, such as positive self-image, solid interpersonal relationships, and good mental health (Gray et al., 2018). Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, belly breathing, guided imagery, and the STOP acronym help to bring present-moment awareness to "what is happening now" (self-attunement) and "what most needs attention" (prioritizing) in everyday life (Gray et al., 2018). Through mindfulness, individuals learn to "pause" and respond to their environment, including mental health triggers, with awareness (Gray et al., 2018). This way of working through mental turmoil has proven to be effective in areas such as stress reduction, concentration, sleep, and academic performance (Gray et al., 2018), all of which affect individuals academic and personal success.

According to Amechi (2016), African American foster care youth see obtaining a college degree as an important personal goal. These youth believe having a degree will improve their life circumstances. Research has shown that African American foster care youth who have obtained a degree experience a higher level of self-sufficiency, financial stability, and a healthier lifestyle, among other benefits (e.g., higher lifetime earnings, lower unemployment rates, a wider range of employment opportunities). With the help of this program, African American foster care youth will be able to make their aspirations become reality. The career readiness component will help to prepare these individuals for the working world and guide them in the job searching process. In doing so, these individuals not only achieve their aspirations of becoming college graduates but also achieve their personal goals and create lives that they want for themselves.

Many of us understand that creating the life we want for ourselves depends heavily on our finances. This concept of finances or lack thereof is not foreign to African American foster youth. Finances are one of the biggest obstacles that foster care and even non-foster care students face when it comes to obtaining a college degree (Eckenrode et al, 2014). Financial barriers include lack of monetary support from their foster family and lack of awareness of financial aid options (Gross et al., 2020). These barriers can serve as a deterrent to pursuing or continuing to pursue a college degree. The concerns around financial barriers cause foster care youth to become anxious, overwhelmed, and in some cases depressed (Gross et al., 2020). This program will work to ensure that these youth are aware of financial aid options and have access to a financial advisor who can assist with academic and personal finances.

These four pillars are the foundation of a strong support structure. They are all interconnected and I believe, essential to African American foster youths' well-being. Each pillar addresses a major theme that takes place in these individuals' lives. Many of these themes overlap with one another. My program will aim to address these pillars all at once and provide the most effective support, leading to African American foster youths' academic and personal success.

Program Layout & Proposal

The Yellow Brick Road Program (YBRP) will begin as a pilot program that supports African American foster care youths from neighboring underperforming high schools. The Yellow Brick Road Program CEO and founder will need to first reach out to underperforming high schools to pitch the program and assess interest. Obtaining this information will come through a partnership between the city school district and the Yellow Brick Road Program. The city school district will identify high schools (most likely public high schools) with the highest

number of African American foster care youth. The city school district will help to promote the Yellow Brick Road Program to superintendents and school principals.

Once high schools confirm their interest, a Yellow Brick Road program coordinator will be embedded into the school and serve as a liaison between the high school, high school students, and institution. Ideally, the program coordinator will identify as Black or African American and will have earned a degree in social work, psychology, sociology, or hold a related degree. The program coordinator will work with African American foster care youth who are high school juniors and seniors and establish a cohort of students called the Yellow Brick Road Scholars. There will be a collaboration between the Yellow Brick Road Program, the scholar's high school, and the scholar's case managers to coordinate personal, familial, and educational support while still in high school.

Pre-College Experience

Yellow Brick Road Program Scholars will need to sign up for the program via an online application portal. Prospective Scholars must commit to the institution via early action or early decision to fully complete their online application. The institution will work with their admissions office to coordinate this via the online application portal so that Scholar's decisions and application information will be accounted for at the institution. Scholars who successfully complete their application will begin the program in the start of their junior year where they will participate in SAT prep, resume building, tutoring, and college writing workshops which will be facilitated by university faculty and staff. Representatives from the admissions, financial aid, and career development offices will have a full-time staff member or Graduate Assistant help facilitate these workshops.

The scholars selected for this intensive program will also be able to take developmental dual enrollment college level coursework at the high school level to prepare them for college level writing and math. This will help scholars become accustomed to college course expectations and save them money. By taking these courses they will not have to pay for developmental course work in college that does not count for credit to graduation. Faculty members from the academic affairs department could assist in providing a few of these courses in exchange for a stipend.

During the scholar's senior year, they will participate in a First-Year Experience workshop, complete a college app workshop, and participate in two campus tours. The Yellow Brick Road Program will work with their university's office of new student programs department as well as the admissions department and other related departments to ensure that these students are provided with the necessary workshops for success. Many college campuses have already established programming to address topics that many first-year college students and first gen-college students find valuable so the programming piece should not be too difficult. The program coordinator will be responsible for coordinating these workshops and courses for Scholars. Each campus office providing a workshop or course will receive a small stipend for the use of their resources.

The scholar's workshops will take place after their classes and will function a lot like an after-school program. Attendance is mandatory and workshop participation is required. Prior to participating in the program, the scholars and foster parents will need to electronically sign the agreement portion of the online application which will outline the requirements for admission into the program, one being that scholars must fully participate in the Yellow Brick Road Program and attend all workshops and events. Those who show a lack of participation and are

continuously absent from workshops and foundational courses, especially after several accommodations are made, will be dismissed from the Yellow Brick Road Program. They will not have the chance to receive priority admission or scholarship funding which would be part of the Scholars package that the Yellow Brick Road Program creates with the institution. Scholars will also forfeit receiving premium school swag such as t-shirts, tumblers, tote bags, and more.

College Experience

The same sentiment will follow scholars as they transition into college. Scholars who are entering their freshman year in college will need to login into their application portal again and sign off on their agreement form which outlines the requirements for continuing the program. They will need to participate in all program workshops and events and will need to hold at least a cumulative 2.5 GPA. Scholars who fail to participate in programming and uphold a cummulative2.5 GPA will be dismissed from the Yellow Brick Road Program. They will not receive their semester stipend and will forfeit the benefit of having coordinated support while on campus.

Once the scholars graduate from high school, they will be officially introduced to their Yellow Brick Road Program Advisor. However, this will not be their first meeting as they will get acquainted with their advisor during campus tours, through workshops, and via email, mail, phone calls, or texts. Each Yellow Brick Road scholar will be assigned a program advisor who will serve as an advocate and liaison between the Scholar and campus support. The program advisor will be a university employee who is an experienced professional. Ideally, they will identify as Black or African American and will have earned a master's degree in social work, psychology, sociology, higher education policy and student affairs, or a hold related degree. In

addition, they should have at least three years of field experience or five years of related experience.

Program advisors will help to assist and coordinate the needs of their assigned scholars. They will coordinate students' financial, academic, career, and personal support as well as bonding events and workshops. Program advisors will collaborate with other program advisors so that scholars build strong relationships with one another. These events will take place once a month per semester. A formal planned schedule will be created and distributed to staff and scholars at the beginning of each semester. The dates and times of these events will be contingent upon student's class and work schedules, which they will submit prior to the start of each semester.

Yellow Brick Road Program Challenges

In thinking through my intervention plan, I've come to realize that there may be a number of challenges to consider. The first is obtaining buy-in and acceptance. Institutions, high schools, and even school districts may not be on board with my intervention plan. The program that I am proposing is unique in that it is a pilot campus-based program that spans from high school up to the completion of college. Many are used to seeing non-profit organizations support students' transition into college or offer support while in college via scholarship funding. The idea of an institution providing students with this type of support in addition to other supports (academic, mental, financial, and personal) prior to and during college is essentially unheard of and may be off-putting. Some may even say it's opportunistic.

Another challenge could be expenses. The Yellow Brick Road Program will need funding for personnel, students, operations, and more. As the program grows and transitions from a pilot

to a permanent program, it will require more manpower and could become very expensive. While in pilot mode, a financial plan should be created to prepare for projected future expenses. The final challenge to consider is the characteristics of my target student population. As explained in Chapter 3, African American foster care youth experience high levels of instability, largely due to frequent changes in guardianship (Day et al., 2011). These changes are crucial as they may affect students' participation in the program. Parents, like children, are unique and may have different beliefs and philosophies regarding higher education. Having their child participate in this program may not be a priority for them.

Chapter 5: Implementation and Evaluation

In this chapter, I discuss effective leadership in higher education and student affairs and how that will appear within the Yellow Brick Road Program. Then, I discuss my plan for sustaining and growing my intervention plan. Next, I review the importance of assessment and evaluation and explain why they are critical pieces of programming and development. In addition, I will review some of the limitations of my program, what specific aspects are beyond the scope of this paper, and what my program would look like if it was implemented as a large-scale program. Finally, I close out my thesis and share my plans for the future.

Leadership in Higher Education and Student Affairs

For years, higher education professionals have created seminars, workshops, and conferences geared towards teaching other professionals how to be an effective leader in the field. However, many professionals within the field have varying beliefs surrounding the topic. According to Northouse (2019), an effective leader has the ability to influence overall group effectiveness. Effective leaders can keep group members on track with set goals and uphold and manage processes in place. Effective leaders are decisive, resolution-oriented, and communicative. I believe that those who aspire to make real change in the higher education field will not just be effective leaders but transformative ones.

Like effective leaders, transformative leaders influence their group members and promote group performance. However, transformative leaders like to create a connection that raises motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2019). This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential (Northouse, 2019). Transformational leadership does not uphold the status quo

and seeks to make significant and lasting changes. Due to the United States higher education system's foundation, rooted in slavery, racism, sexism, and capitalism, we NEED leaders who do not uphold the status quo but bring about change and transformation. The way to help those in need, especially populations who have been negatively affected by the status quo, is to transform the system that we currently have in place. With the right leaders in place, this most certainly can and will happen.

Leadership and The Yellow Brick Road Program

Yellow Brick Road Program Staff

It is essential for the Yellow Brick Road Program staff members to establish the proper leadership style to create positive change within African American foster care youths' lives. I intend to draw from the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Rubric for guidance on how to coach staff members on exhibiting proper leadership skills. I have identified three competencies that I believe are key to accomplishing this. This includes (1) Self-Awareness and Continual Reflection, (2) Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills, and (3) Change Management and Innovation. Self-Awareness and Continual Reflection calls for one to "identify the experiences and theoretical perspective that inform one's leadership" (Perillo et al., 2015). Leaders who focus on this competency will understand how their experiences and perspective influence their actions regarding leadership. They will have an in-depth understanding of why they do or do not choose to make certain decisions and how those decisions affect an overall outcome.

Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills call for one to know how to "identify one's strengths and challenges as a leader and seek opportunities to develop skills" (Perillo et al., 2015). Leaders who look for opportunities for growth and improvement become very skilled and multifaceted leaders. These leaders develop many tools and learn how and when to use them to yield

favorable results. Change Management and Innovation calls for one to "know leadership theories and practices that can improve operations and campus cultures" (Perillo et al., 2015). Leaders who are competent in this arena can take in the political, social, and cultural climate of one's campus and strategically and creatively take action even in the face of criticism (Perillo et al., 2015).

These competencies play a considerable role in producing the proper leaders for the Yellow Brick Road Program. Program staff who can follow and master these competencies will have the ability to inspire positive transformation in the lives of African American foster care youth. This positive change will eventually lead to my goal of achieving systematic metamorphosis. This systemic change will take time, but I believe that my program will be a step in the right direction to help turn the higher education system into a system that genuinely services all who seek to matriculate within it.

Yellow Brick Road Program Scholars

Through personal experience as a student, and as a professional supporting student, I have learned that many students experience success when they decide to become a leader. They learn how to take charge of their lives and advocate for themselves, make sound decisions, and foster strong networks. Therefore, I intend to have the Yellow Brick Road Program Scholars follow the Social Change Model of Leadership Development. The Social Change Model of Leadership Development seeks to enhance students' self-knowledge and leadership competence and promote positive social change at institutions or in communities (Astin & Astin, 1996). In this model, students are provided with opportunities that foster personal qualities, develop leadership abilities, and engage in positive social change.

The Social Change Model of Leadership is based is governed by the "Seven C's" (Astin & Astin, 1996). The Seven C's include (1) Consciousness of Self: Being aware of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate one to take action, (2) Congruence: Understanding and being consistent with one's own values, beliefs, strengths, and limitations, (3) Commitment: Passion, intensity, and duration, directed both towards group activity and intended outcome, (4) Collaboration: Group members explore differences in individual values, ideas, affiliations, visions, and identities, (5) Common Purpose: All members of the group share in the vision and participate actively in articulating the purpose and goals of the activity, (6) Controversy with Civility: differences between group members can be accepted and resolved through open and honest dialogue, (7) Citizenship: Civic responsibility which works towards social change (Astin & Astin, 1996). These "Seven C's" would be used to help guide programming for the Scholars that help to build their character and develop them as leaders on campus, within their community, and within their personal lives.

The Yellow Brick Road Program Sustainability

For my program to be successful, I must have the proper funding to manage the program's essentials. Some essentials include personnel, office supplies and equipment, marketing, coordination, and programming/events. Funding for these essentials can be expensive, especially considering the level of support scholars will need during the program. I provided an itemized breakdown of some of the costs which can be found in Appendix D. To support the hefty cost of this program, I have considered a few funding sources. The first would be to look to the institution to provide financial support and assistance. This can be done through the campus foundation soliciting donations from alumni, institutional partners, and community members who are invested in the success of current and prospective students. Next, would be to

look to private organizations such as the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust to provide grant money and support for the program. I could then seek out federally funded programs such as The Chafee Education and Training Grant (ETG) Program and the Federal TRIO Program to provide further funding and support.

Assessment, Evaluation, and the Yellow Brick Road Program

In higher education, especially in the student affairs sector, the use of assessment and evaluation is crucial in determining the proper program development and budget needed to help programs be successful. Using assessments and evaluations will help to evaluate the impact that the Yellow Brick Road Program has on African American foster care youth, in addition to giving them a voice. The information collected from the assessments and evaluations will influence future decisions regarding programming, program content, special events, meetings, partnerships, support services, and even funding sources. The use of assessments and evaluations will also help provide a clearer picture of the staff members' experience and what they may need to better assist the Yellow Brick Road Program Scholars. In doing this, I will better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program from a student and staff perspective.

I will be able to pinpoint what things the Yellow Brick Road Program can and cannot change and where there are areas for possibilities. The data will also help to expose specific logistical, social, and systematic issues that prevent student success and how the Yellow Brick Road Program may be limited by these issues. Further, this data could aid in providing explanations and solutions regarding African American and foster care youth admission, retention, graduation, and success rates. Using assessments and evaluations for this purpose directly correlates with the purpose of Critical Action Research, which I explained in Chapter 2. Compiling feedback from students and program staff helps to ensure that my program is properly

catering to African American foster care youth and serves as proof that my program is essential in fostering students' success.

Assessment and Evaluation Methodology

I have decided to use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods when administering my assessment and evaluation for both program scholars and staff. For scholars, I will be assessing their experience during two parts of the program. In the first part, which takes place during their junior and senior years in high school, I will focus on programming, special events (e.g., their transition ceremonies and campus tours), and engagement. Scholars will receive these program assessments/evaluations towards the end of their junior year and then again towards the end of their senior year. During the second part of the program, which takes place during all four of their undergraduate years, I will focus on programming (e.g., staff, content, structure), special events, and support services. Scholars will receive these program assessments towards the end of each academic school year. Future assessments/evaluations will include a section on the peer mentor/mentee component I hope to institute if the program pilot seems to be a success. An example of the scholar assessments/evaluations can be found in Appendix A and B.

For staff members, I will be assessing their program experience in the areas of student engagement, programming, special events, collaboration, barriers, and staff satisfaction. Off-site staff (e.g., Program Coordinators) will receive their assessments/evaluations towards the end of the scholars' junior and senior year in high school. On-site staff (e.g., Program Advisors, Graduate Assistants, Program Directors, etc.) will receive their program assessments towards the end of each academic school year. Like the student assessment/evaluation, a section for feedback on the peer mentor/mentee component will be added contingent upon the program's success as a pilot. An example of the staff assessments/evaluations can be found in Appendix C.

Limitations

As an African American, a member of an underserved population, and after dedicating my career to supporting underserved student populations for years, I found it befitting to focus my intervention program on African American foster care youth. According to the research discussed in Chapter 3, these students are in the MOST need of institutional support (Amechi, 2016). However, I do recognize that other foster care youth of color could truly benefit from the Yellow Brick Road Program. In the future, there could be a possibility to expand the program to those other foster care youths who are seeking higher education. Many foster care youth of color experience similar challenges, however, I understand the role that culture, language, and even religion may play when providing accommodation.

In this case, this program may need to be tweaked or expanded so that it is intentional in providing support to all students of color. Farther in the future, there could also be some consideration for foster care youth who are not of color. Although this population has racial privilege, they still suffer from many of the plights foster care youth face. As previously mentioned, I would prefer that the Yellow Brick Road staff members identify as Black or African American. It is important that the staff members identify in this way or at the very least identify as a person of color. This would be of benefit when establishing trust and a relationship with the program Scholars. Depending on the location and the type of institution, this may be a challenge or limitation.

Looking Ahead

The road to addressing the ghosts of our past will not be an easy one. There is a lot of work to be done so that this country can truly embody its claims of freedom, equality, and democracy. *The Yellow Brick Road Program* is my personal contribution to combating hundreds

of years of systemic racism, oppression, and poverty within my community. I know that it will take a lot more than just my program to fix the issue, however, I believe this program is a good start and will inspire African American youth to fight for their true freedom – education. As a student affairs professional, I believe it is my job and the job of those alike to ensure that all who seek a higher education receive it. Freedom—education is a right, not a privilege. Until we can ensure that everyone can access and exercise this right, we can never truly say we are the land of the free.

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Appendix A

Adapted from the 2021 WCU Office of New Student Program Orientation Assessment

YBRP Pre-College Assessment

Consent Form

Purpose
To determine the effectiveness of the Yellow Brick Road Program and identify potential opportunities for improvement.

Confidentiality
The information you provide is confidential. Your personal identification information (e.g., name, email address) will only be available to the leadership team. Your personal identification information will never be shared in reports regarding the study.

Security
Data from this evaluation will be stored on equipment and software programs purchased by the University. Access to individual's responses will be limited to the leadership team.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing your responses from the evaluation. Your decision to participate/not participate in the evaluation will not affect your relationship with the University or the Yellow Brick Road Program.

Risks
There is always some level of risk when submitting information online. To minimize this risk, please clear your internet history and close your browser after submitting the evaluation.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits for participants, however, your responses may be used to improve the Yellow Brick Road Program for future students.

Questions
For questions about the study, please contact the Director of The Yellow Brick Road Program at Director1@institution.edu *or 555-555-555.*

Q1 Consent

    o   Yes - I agree to participate
    o   No - I do not agree to participate

Q2 Please select what applies to you:

    o   I am a Junior
    o   I am a Senior

Q3 Who is your Program Coordinator

    o   Jane Doe
    o   John Doe
    o   Jessie Doe

Q4 Are you a first-generation college student (none of your parents/guardians completed a Bachelor's degree)?

    o   Yes
    o   No
    o   I am not sure

Q5 To what extent were the following Workshops/Courses helpful or unhelpful:

	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Slightly helpful	Not at all helpful	Not Applicable /Did Not attend
SAT Prep	o	o	o	o	o	o
Resume Building	o	o	o	o	o	o
Tutoring	o	o	o	o	o	o
College Writing	o	o	o	o	o	o
College Math	o	o	o	o	o	o
First Year Experience	o	o	o	o	o	o
Applying To College	o	o	o	o	o	o

Campus Tours	o	o	o	o	o	o

Q6 Any additional feedback regarding the SAT Prep workshops:

Q7 Any additional feedback regarding the Resume Building workshops:

Q8 Any additional feedback regarding the Tutoring workshops:

Q9 Any additional feedback regarding the College Writing courses:

Q10 Any additional feedback regarding the College Math courses:

Q11 Any additional feedback regarding the First Year Experience Workshops:

Q12 Any additional feedback regarding the Off Campus & Commuter Services presentation:

Q13 Any additional feedback regarding the Campus Tours:

Q14 Overall, how would you describe the support you receive from YBRP staff members?

- o Excellent
- o Above Average
- o Neutral
- o Below Average
- o Terrible

Q15 Additional comments or concerns regarding YBRP staff members:

Q16 As a result of participating in the Yellow Brick Road Program, I:

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neutral	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Feel prepared to become a college student	o	o	o	o	o
Know what support services are available to me on and off campus	o	o	o	o	o

-Q17 How satisfied are you with your overall experience of this program?

- o Very Satisfied
- o Satisfied
- o Not Sure
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very Dissatisfied

Q18 What was the most helpful part of the Yellow Brick Road Program?

Q19 Please describe any challenges you encountered during the program (if any):

Q20 What did you learn that you didn't know before participating in the Yellow Brick Road Program?

Q21 What questions do you still have after participating in the Yellow Brick Road Program?

Q22 What recommendations do you have for making this program better for future students?

Appendix B

Adapted from the 2021 WCU Office of New Student Program Orientation Assessment

YBRP College Assessment

Consent Form

Purpose
To determine the effectiveness of the Yellow Brick Road Program and identify potential opportunities for improvement.

Confidentiality
The information you provide is confidential. Your personal identification information (e.g., name, email address) will only be available to the leadership team. Your personal identification information will never be shared in reports regarding the study.

Security
Data from this evaluation will be stored on equipment and software programs purchased by the University. Access to individual's responses will be limited to the leadership team.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing your responses from the evaluation. Your decision to participate/not participate in the evaluation will not affect your relationship with the University or the Yellow Brick Road Program.

Risks
There is always some level of risk when submitting information online. To minimize this risk, please clear your internet history and close your browser after submitting the evaluation.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits for participants, however, your responses may be used to improve the Yellow Brick Road Program for future students.

Questions

For questions about the study, please contact the Director of The Yellow Brick Road Program at Director1@institution.edu *or 555-555-555.*

Q1 Consent

- o Yes - I agree to participate
- o No - I do not agree to participate

Q2 Please select what applies to you:

- o I am a freshman
- o I am a sophomore
- o I am a junior
- o I am a senior

Q3 Who is your Program Advisor

- o Jane Doe
- o John Doe
- o Jessie Doe

Q4 Are you a first-generation college student (none of your parents/guardians completed a Bachelor's degree)?

- o Yes
- o No
- o I am not sure

Q5 To what extent were the following Workshops/Events helpful or unhelpful:

	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Slightly helpful	Not at all helpful	Not Applicable /Did Not attend
Co-Hort Kick Back	o	o	o	o	o	o
Star Scholar Ceremony	o	o	o	o	o	o
Scholar Graduation Ceremony	o	o	o	o	o	o

iSpy	o	o	o	o	o	o
Career Readiness	o	o	o	o	o	o
Goal Getter	o	o	o	o	o	o

Q6 Any additional feedback regarding the Cohort Kick Backs:

Q7 Any additional feedback regarding the Star Scholar Ceremony:

Q8 Any additional feedback regarding the Scholar Graduation Ceremony:

Q9 Any additional feedback regarding the iSpy Workshops:

Q10 Any additional feedback regarding the Career Readiness Workshops:

Q11 Any additional feedback regarding the Goal Getter Workshops:

Q12 Overall, how would you describe the support you receive from YBRP staff members?

- o Excellent
- o Above Average
- o Neutral
- o Below Average
- o Terrible

Q13 Additional comments or concerns regarding YBRP staff members:

Q14 As a result of participating in the Yellow Brick Road Program, I:

	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Neutral	Moderately Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Know what support services are available to me on and off campus	o	o	o	o	o
Feel confident to advocate for myself and seek assistance if needed	o	o	o	o	o
Feel that I am on track to graduate successfully	o	o	o	o	o
Feel that I will have success post graduation	o	o	o	o	o

-Q17 How satisfied are you with your overall experience of this program?

- o Very Satisfied
- o Satisfied
- o Not Sure
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very Dissatisfied

Q18 What was the most helpful part of the Yellow Brick Road Program?

Q19 Please describe any challenges you encountered during the program (if any):

Q20 What did you learn that you didn't know before participating in the Yellow Brick Road Program?

Q21 What questions do you still have after participating in the Yellow Brick Road Program?

Q22 What recommendations do you have for making this program better for future students?

Appendix C

Adapted from the 2021 WCU Office of New Student Program Orientation Assessment and the Southwestern College Spring 2015 College Employee Satisfaction Survey

YBRP Staff Assessment

Consent Form

Purpose
To determine the effectiveness of the Yellow Brick Road Program and identify potential opportunities for improvement.

Confidentiality
The information you provide is confidential. Your personal identification information (e.g., name, email address) will only be available to the leadership team. Your personal identification information will never be shared in reports regarding the study.

Security
Data from this evaluation will be stored on equipment and software programs purchased by the University. Access to individual's responses will be limited to the leadership team.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing your responses from the evaluation. Your decision to participate/not participate in the evaluation will not affect your relationship with the University or the Yellow Brick Road Program.

Risks
There is always some level of risk when submitting information online. To minimize this risk, please clear your internet history and close your browser after submitting the evaluation.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits for participants, however, your responses may be used to improve the Yellow Brick Road Program for future students.

Questions
For questions about the study, please contact the Director of The Yellow Brick Road Program at Director1@institution.edu or 555-555-555.

Q1 Consent

- o Yes - I agree to participate
- o No - I do not agree to participate

Q2 How satisfied are you with your overall experience of this program?

- o Very Satisfied
- o Satisfied
- o Not Sure
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very Dissatisfied

Q3 I feel that leadership demonstrates support for shared planning and decision-making.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q4 Leadership creates an environment that promotes trust and respect.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q5 Any additional feedback regarding leadership:

Q6 My workplace fosters an environment of ethical behavior.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q7 My workplace fosters an environment of teamwork and collaboration.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q8 There are effective lines of communication between sources of student support.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q9 I am comfortable expressing my opinion.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q10 Any additional feedback regarding YBRP work environment and culture:

Q11 I have a reasonable workload.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q12 The work I do is valuable and rewarding.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q13 I am paid fairly for the work I do.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree

- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q14 Any additional feedback regarding workload/life balance:

Q15 YBRP staff treat scholars as its top priority.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q16 Staff members take pride in their work.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q17 YBRP does a good job of meeting the needs of scholars.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q18 YBRP promotes positive student-staff relationships.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q19 Any additional feedback regarding the scholar engagement:

Q21 YBRP has the staff needed to do a good job.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q22 YBRP has the budget needed to do its job well.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q23 It is easy for me to get the necessary information to do my job well.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q24 I have sufficient resources available to achieve important objectives.

- o Strongly Agree
- o Moderately Agree
- o Neutral
- o Moderately Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Q25 Any additional feedback regarding YBRP resources:

Q26 Please describe any challenges you encountered during the program (if any):

Q27 What recommendations do you have for making this program better for future staff and Students?

Appendix D

	Estimated Expenses	**Total**
Personnel		
Staff	Employed and Compensated via the university	$0
Workshop Staff Stipends	20 workshops per school year	$40,000
Graduate Assistants	3 Full Time GAs	$30,0000
Subtotal (Personnel)		**$70,000**
Operating Expenses		
Campus Tour Transportation	Cost of renting a campus van/ school bus for scholar campus tours	$2,000
Swag/Giveaways	T-shirts, tumblers, gift cards, etc.	$2,000
Emergency Student Funds	These funds would be used to aid students who may be enduring a financial crisis	$4000
Other	Special ceremony and recognition events for scholars (decor, food, swag, etc.)	$2,000
Office Supplies	Printing and traditional office supplies	$2,000
Cleaning Supplies	Traditional office cleaning supplies	$1,000
Subtotal (Operating Expenses)		**$13,000**
Total Amount		**$83,000**