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A Phenomenology Of Affective Engagement In Advanced Placement Courses

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A PHENOMENOLOGY OF AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN
ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Matthew Henry

September 2023

**A PHENOMENOLOGY OF AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN ADVANCED
PLACEMENT COURSES**

By

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the students whose voices are not always heard by those who need to listen.

Acknowledgments

A special thank you to all who have put up with me over the course of the last three-plus years. Everyone at William and Mary who has contributed knowledge, an encouraging word, or a piece of advice—you are amazing! I'd like to give a special thank you to Dr. Steve Constantino and Dr. Peggy Constantino for picking me up when I needed it most, not only in terms of this program but also in this post-Covid educational arena.

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Abstract

This phenomenology of affective engagement experienced by advanced students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses at River City High School (RCHS) was conducted in order to better understand the potential affective experience of all enrolled and future students in AP courses. Additionally, this phenomenology sought to help improve negative affective experiences as needed and continue to enhance positive experiences of all students in advanced (TAG) programming which includes AP courses.

The overall categories of *Others*, *Stress*, and *Inspiration* were revealed through potential themes collected from the student experience. Students experienced affective engagement relating to *Others* through both positive and negative interactions. In a crowded school community, it is expected that other people will influence the affective experience of students, yet, within the AP program, *how* is the question. The presence of others created competition, connection, and variations on comfort. *Others* disappointed students and isolated students physically and metaphorically. The other two categories—*Stress* and *Inspiration*—related to progress or movement. *Stress* impeded or slowed down; it was found to perhaps break students. *Others* directly influenced *Stress* such as through competitiveness, disappointment, and isolation. Affective themes grouped under this category show that we need to do more to support students who experience them. Inspiration propelled students forward. These are the affective experiences we want to encourage in AP programming. The themes and categories tied into the value students experienced in AP which includes immediate-, short- and long-term value.

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN
ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

As educators, teachers see dozens if not hundreds of students a day. We get to know them as best we can over the course of each fast-paced year, to understand them as young people, not just as a student in the room, or one we pass by in the hall. The students are quite diverse in their abilities, achievement levels, passion for learning, ethnicities, desire to be challenged in their courses, evolving plans for post high school and in many other ways. They come from highly privileged backgrounds, from modest financial support, and from financial poverty. Given the vast differences in the students served, how can we determine if the curricular options provided are meeting their needs and desires, especially as programming such as Advanced Placement (AP) is increasingly encouraged to be made accessible for all students?

The longstanding debate about equity and excellence (Brown & Garland, 2015) is at the heart of the notion that “society loses human capital if gifted children are not nurtured” (p. 91). In other words, are advanced students within advanced courses shortchanged by the access an open enrollment policy provides? Might access for all create obstacles to excellence for all? Access for all yields greater visibility of diverse students in advanced courses, the opportunity to participate in more complex thinking and skill development, and increased expectations for typically or potentially college bound students. On the other hand, it could mean that the needs of some students are not being met. For high achieving students with gifts and talents (SWGT), open enrollments might mean a broader spectrum of student skills within the classroom impedes

pacing, learning and engagement. For students who are motivated but who may struggle as compared to more advanced students in the class, impediments might include feeling left behind or a generalized frustration. To make gifted programming that is open to all students beneficial to all students, educators must better understand how differentiation and acceleration in instruction and content, student motivation, engagement and value combine. While some students may find the long-term outcomes of value, such as college credit, a prestigious academic transcript and preparation for college, others may find the social connections, content, or challenge of greater value. These examples require a detailed curriculum and appropriately trained teachers to ensure that the needs of all students in these courses are being met.

Despite recent dissertation work in the area of open enrollment and such a policy's impact on the experience of students within gifted programming such as AP and Dual Enrollment (DE) DE(Aaron, 2018; Gray, 2023; Malsky, 2021; Williams, 2022), the influence of such a policy on the affective engagement of students is relatively unexplored. Perhaps the lack of research is due to the important and urgent need for equity and access in schools. Borland (2005) states, "Indeed, most would argue that educational equity is what brought them to the field in the first place...despite the best intentions, gifted education, as historically and currently practiced, mirrors, and perhaps perpetuates, vicious inequities in our society" (p. 13). The reputation of gifted education as identifying and serving predominantly a white and elite demographic necessitates broadening access (Ford et al., 2020). However, opening gifted programming to an open enrollment may ultimately be a reversal of fortune or a change for the worse. AP may not be the solution for advanced students despite dominating so many gifted programs. The College Board, the parent company of AP, "strongly encourages educators to make equitable access a guiding principle for their AP programs by giving all willing and

academically prepared students the opportunity to participate in AP” (as cited in Bowie, n.d.), 2022, however the program relies solely on teacher skill to provide the necessary supports for all students to be successful. Although there is a place for AP in serving advanced learners, until differentiation meets the needs of all advanced learners and fully engages them academically, cognitively, and affectively, until all teachers of advanced students are properly trained in meeting the needs of said students, and until equity and access truly stand for all students, the public education system, and gifted education along with it, faces a challenge. When and if that radical reform or paradigm shift occurs, more needs to be understood from the student perspective. To understand the value students find in AP programming in the moment, rather than only in the long term, will help stakeholders meet the affective needs of all students in AP so long as AP remains the dominant form of gifted programming at the secondary level. While educators may assume they know the student experience in terms of affective engagement in the classroom, our perceptions may not align with actual student experience. While this study will not examine an open enrollment policy as a variable in affective engagement, the encouragement for open access to AP by the College Board therefor needs to be acknowledged, and the different ways it may potentially influence the affective engagement of all students needs to be considered. Consequently, future studies may examine a specific open enrollment policy as a variable in the student experience.

Lived experience is the foundation of phenomenology, a philosophy established in the early 20th century by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, among others (Beyer, 2022; Sokolowski, 2000; Wheeler, 2011). While the meaning of *lived experience* in education today is more subjective and sometimes misunderstood, the root of Husserl’s philosophy is “the act of giving an account...of various phenomena, of the various ways in which things can appear”

(Sokolowski, 2000, p. 13). *Lived experience* and the associated concepts of *authenticity* and *being* (Frechette et al., 2020), as they relate to students, are often overshadowed by graduation rates, standardized test scores, and other hard data. Phenomenology encompasses both what is presented as well as what is absent, parts as well as wholes (Sokolowski, 2000; Toadvine, 2016). Understanding the experience of students “is to bring to light what is taken for granted” (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 1). An effective phenomenological study allows us to “‘see’ the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience it describes” (Van Manen, 2006, p. 122). What is sometimes taken for granted, under the guise of “they’ll be fine,” is the emotional experience and satisfaction (affective engagement) of our most talented students. This study “let us see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself” (Van Manen, 2006, p. 130).

Of all the billions of humans who have walked this earth, no one has experienced or will experience the world exactly the same. The affective experience of students and its impact on the value students take with them is not only inconsistently observable (Suldo, Parker, et al., 2019) or assumed, but students are not often given a chance to voice their experience in meaningful ways. “Students are experts in their own experience” (Agbehenu, 2019, paragraph 5), yet how often do they get to share how they feel in that experience? If we were to look at their online lives, probably quite a bit. However, though there may be value for educators in the unfiltered emotions of teenagers online, to better encourage or support that affective experience, we have to provide space and time and safety to do so.

Advanced students early in my career inspired this study, and I have continued to advocate for advanced students despite the general sense that advanced students are wrongly assumed to be fine. Post Covid-19, with greater awareness of social emotional and academic learning, it is clear many students are not fine socially, emotionally and/or academically. In my

experience, development gaps are real, and they are wide. However, while this awareness of specific gaps does address some issues impacting all students, it does not address the pre-pandemic concern that the affective experiences of advanced students may need support.

In my earliest English 10 Honors, the only advanced choice for students in my district, I have always felt that some advanced students simply were not fine—not challenged, not happy, not engaged despite my best efforts as a relatively new teacher. When students pushed for an advanced English 10, I listened. I heard them. I supported them. We were denied. Though frustrating, I took the opportunity to get my Gifted Endorsement. And since then, I have advocated for talented students. I have always wondered what their experience was truly like, behind the easy-As and the cooperation and the congeniality. I wondered what they really experienced in my class and their other classes where an open enrollment policy increases access and equity but also the disparity in abilities. Though relationship building provides some insight into the hidden emotional lives of advanced students, ultimately, I wanted to know what they were getting out of their time spent with me. Over the years, I have learned to ask not, why are you here (as I, admittedly, still sometimes tend to do to students), but I have learned better to ask why am I here?

This study of affective engagement of high school students in AP contributes to the understanding of the value of advanced programming for all students participating with the specific focus on the affective experience of the students—one part of the whole student experience (Sokolowski, 2000). Employing phenomenological methods, this study provides narratives from individual student experience which in turn create potentialities of the overall student experience. This information may allow for recommendations to ensure the success and

growth of all students participating in the programming and may suggest further study on specialized programming for SWGT or a stronger support system for all students.

According to the Virginia Department of Education (Gifted Education, n.d.), school districts are required to provide identification and programming services for SWGT in Grades K-12:

Each school board approves a comprehensive plan for the education of gifted students that includes the components identified by the regulations. In addition, school divisions are required to submit a copy of their approved plan at the time of the VDOE's request for a technical review. (Overview)

However, due to the College Boards encouragement of open access, there are varied policies in who may participate in advanced programming such as AP. In other words, the programming is not uniformly exclusive. Therefore, students who are designated talented and gifted (TAG) and their general population peers all have access to potential TAG programming which predominantly consists of AP, DE, and Honors courses but may also include independent study and online courses and opportunity for 10th and 11th grade students to apply to the statewide Governor's School Summer Residential Program. While DE courses require—through the local community college¹-- a specific grade point average, PSAT score or placement test to enroll, AP does not. AP potentially becomes the most accessible component of a Virginia district's gifted programming. This study examined the affective engagement of student participants from open enrollment AP Language and AP Literature courses; however, students may speak on their experience in any AP course. This limitation is at the request of the district.

¹ In order to protect the anonymity of RCHS, the name of the community college is withheld.

Context

Despite the diversity found in many schools, demographics of AP courses in some districts do not often reflect that diversity. Therefore, the encouragement of open enrollment by the College Board and individual schools does have benefits. When viewed through the lens of equity, many students who are often overlooked for TAG identification may in fact thrive in advanced courses and be more noticeable to a teacher who may recommend them for a TAG screening. Although that designation might not reward the student with any specialized programming at this level, it may help boost confidence, motivation, and provide explanation for other concerns such as lack of motivation or struggles with behavior. Additionally, students who do not fall under the typical notion of gifted--those who excel in core content subjects such as math, science, and language arts--but who are gifted in other areas such as athletics, service, arts and leadership have access as well. Furthermore, twice exceptional students, or those with gifted abilities and a learning, physical, or emotional disability, have access to advanced programming. Finally, students who are highly motivated and high achieving, those who are gifted *at school*, also have access. In districts with more segregated gifted programming, these students would likely not benefit.

To protect the anonymity of participants, their school and the school district, throughout I will be referring to the school as River City High School (RCHS) and the district as River City Public Schools (RCPS). RCPS is a majority minority district as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Demographics in River City Public Schools

Race	%
Asian	6%
Black	26%
Hispanic	37%
White	28%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<1%
Native American	<1%
Multi-racial	3%

Although the exact demographics of AP programming across 38 different courses are difficult to determine at this time, particularly for recent years, using other district data allows us to create a mosaic of the population as recent as 2020-21. According to one RCPS report, 36% of students in Grades 10-12 participated in an AP exam in 2018. Although not illustrating the percentage of each demographic enrolled in AP programming, this report does indicate that while some populations are making gains, others are not, and the overall rate of participation in AP courses is on the decline. This could be due to the rising popularity of Dual Enrollment courses. It is also worth noting the report, while commending the district on their AP program of studies which is the bulk of programming for SWGT along with dual enrollment courses, recommended an address of underrepresented groups and their exam performance. Although this report does not explicitly provide exact demographic data of AP programming, it does indicate

the possibility that either some populations of students are coming in unprepared for AP work or are not prepared for the test.

A previous evaluation² of the district’s TAG program is also useful in determining the demographic makeup of the AP program at RCHS (Table 2).

Table 2

Students who receive TAG services in River City Public Schools

Race	%
White	64%
Black	11%
Hispanic	11%
Multi-racial	7%
Asian	4%
American Indian and Native Hawaiian	<1%

Note. TAG = Talented and Gifted

As the demographics shown in Table 2 is district wide, meaning students in grades K-12 who receive TAG services, it shows that those students in the TAG program receiving services, which includes AP courses, do not match the demographic data of the district (Table 1).

Collectively, however, the data presented thus far hints at some disparities in enrollment and performance in AP exams that may need to be addressed. These demographic disparities also support the need for this study’s examination of affective engagement in AP. Yes, high AP

² In order to keep the school district anonymous, the authors and date of the evaluation will are not included in this study though it did take place within the last 10 years.

scores reflect well upon a student, a program, and a district, but whether that is the meaningful experience and true value for students enrolled in the course is debatable.

The recent evaluation of the district's TAG program offers some valuable insight into the AP programming at RCHS, at least from the perspective of SWGT and other stakeholders such as parents and teachers. Although the student focus group from the evaluation was small—just twelve 12th-graders with a TAG designation—it is worth examining in order to show that there is a need for additional data. The sample alone does not create a full picture but does offer up the opportunity to question the value of the AP programming. For example, student stakeholders found that the honors courses leading up to AP courses lacked rigor with parents worried those honors courses catered to the lowest students in the class as a result of the open enrollment policy, a sentiment that some parents expressed regarding AP courses as well. The concern regarding the honors courses that lead up to AP courses may be due to lack of choice in the early grades. For example, according to degree requirements and core content course selection as presented by the RCPS Course Catalogue, rising 10th grade students have twelve math core content courses to choose from including four AP courses, eleven science core content courses including three AP courses. Rising 10th grade students have four social studies core content courses from which to select, including one AP course. For English classes, rising 10th grade students may select from two: honors or standard. When choice is limited, we see a broader spectrum of skill sets in the classroom which may lead to high achieving students feeling unchallenged. Though more choices open up with the addition of AP, the number of choices by grade are quite varied. The many math and science choices provide opportunities for acceleration as several of the courses are offered in the Grades 6-8 which allows students to take more challenging courses in Grades 9-12. This is not necessarily true for English and Social Studies.

However, as the evaluation suggests, students feel more challenged once they can select AP courses, perhaps due to the course catering more to their skill set as the spectrum of skills required in the classroom is narrower than that of their honors courses. Or students are responding to the increased motivation of their peers in an AP course as compared to an honors course.

Despite this criticism of the honors program, according to the evaluation, stakeholders held the AP course offerings in RCHS in high regard citing such benefits as challenge, acceleration and the focus on college readiness. But is this true of all students in AP courses? The evaluation was specifically for the district's TAG program of which RCHS' AP courses are only one part--as its programming is open to all students--from which *twelve* students participated in the evaluation. According to school division records, there are more than 4,000 students enrolled at RCHS with 36% taking an AP exam in 2018. That leaves over 1,400 students who were not heard from for the evaluation regarding TAG services which includes AP programming. On the other hand, course evaluations are distributed to students by teachers each year, although only a summary of results written by the teacher is submitted to administrators. While a phenomenology relies on descriptive narration of a student's experience and we cannot interview all 1,400 students in the program, this study revealed the potential affective experiences of that larger population and future populations.

Finally, according to 2020-21 district data, 17% of the population at RCHS is designated TAG and the numbers per demographic are nearly identical to the district TAG population indicated in Table 2.

Table 3

2020-21 Percentage of TAG-Identified Students by Race/Ethnicity: River City High School

Race	TAG	Overall
White	65%	25%
Black	13%	26%
Hispanic	13%	41%
Asian	4%	6%
Other	5%	4%

Note: TAG = Talented and Gifted; Total Enrollment at RCHS = 4149; Total TAG-Identified at RCHS = 703

However, the value of a program from the student perspective cannot be evaluated without hearing from all students. While the TAG population in RCHS is an important stakeholder and their voices should be heard, there is a need to hear from a more representative sample.

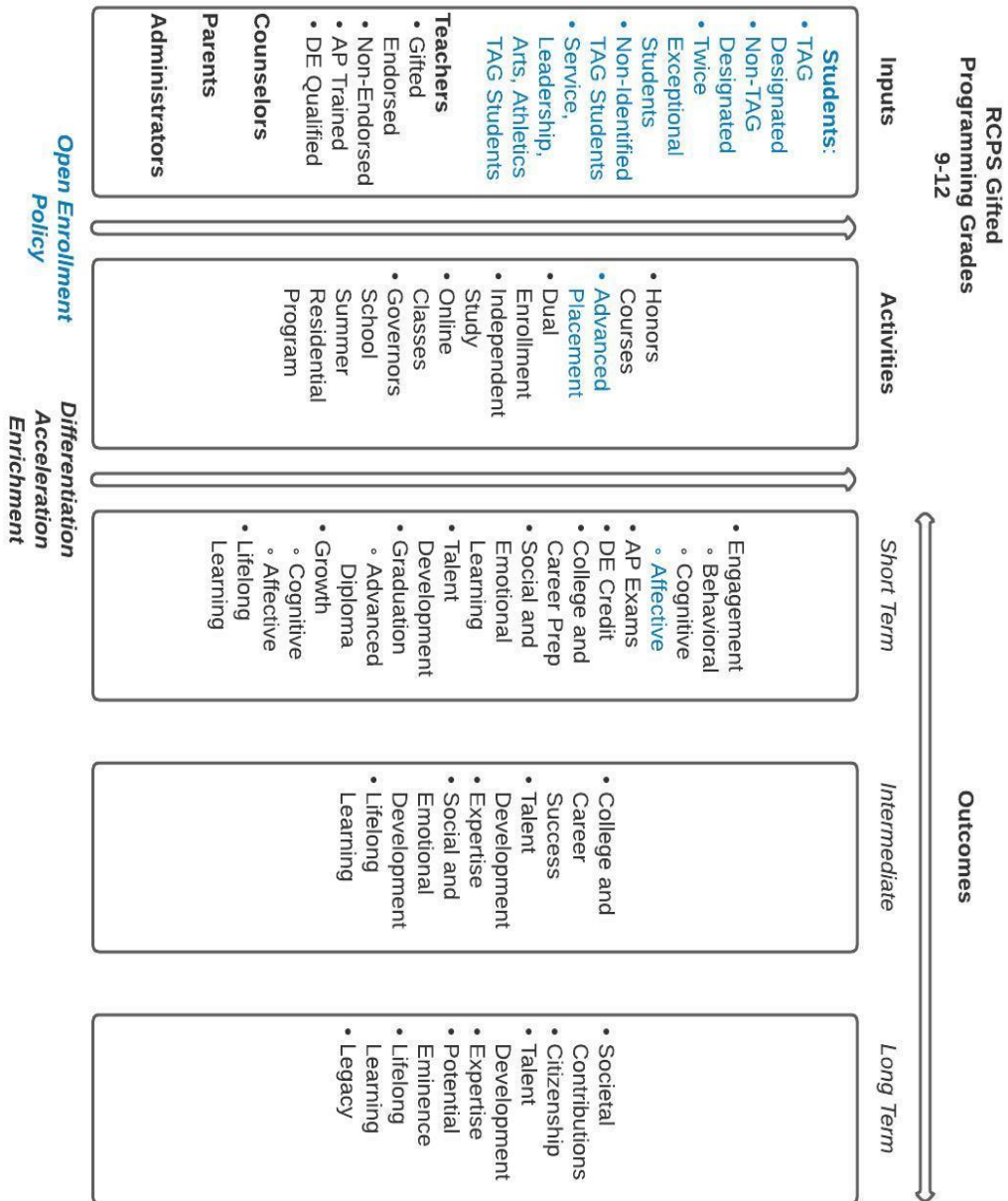
Factoring in the passage of time, the Covid-19 pandemic which greatly affected and continues to impact the daily lives of students, and the growing importance of equity and access, the actual benefits—the value—of the AP courses could be different today. Additionally, much of the value of AP courses, according to the 2017 evaluation, is assessment-based and college- and career-oriented, with end goals rather than a more immediate value. In other words, we must ask, if AP is a popular option for students in terms of advanced programming, is there more value to the experience than just high school transcripts and college credit.

Description of the Program

One short term goal of the RCHS TAG programming, and therefore AP programming, is the overall engagement of SWGT (see Figure 1). Engagement consists of behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement (J. Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Groccia, 2018). In other words, are students participating academically, are students being challenged, and do students find the programming worthwhile? Ideally, the answer to all three is *yes*. However, since all students have access to the programming, we can apply those same three questions to the non-TAG population as well because, ultimately, we want all students to feel that their behavioral, cognitive, and affective needs are being met or exceeded.

Figure 1

Logic Model for RCPS Gifted Programming Grades 9-12



Note. Components in blue represent the focus of the study

Because the program is not specialized, there is a menu of course offerings and students can elect to enter and exit the program as best fits their schedule each academic year. In other words, students may take courses included in the programming one year and the next year opt for lower level courses or electives. The programming shares similarities with the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli et al., 2009) in that it allows all students to capitalize—if they choose—on their creativity, level of task commitment and interest. Although the Schoolwide Enrichment Model includes an identification process in order to create a talent pool (Renzulli et al., 2009), the major goals of this model are “designed to challenge and meet the needs of high potential, high ability and gifted students, and at the same time, provide challenging learning experiences for all students” (Renzulli et al., 2009, p. 30). RCPS echoes this idea and maintains commitment to equity and access through the open enrollment policy.

Overview of the Study Approach

This phenomenological study examined the lived experience of affective engagement of students in Advanced Placement at RCHS to better support the potential experiences of future students. The study did not critique the courses in the program, teacher qualifications or the open enrollment policy per se but sought to determine what the experience is like for students as it relates to affective engagement within the programming. The relevance, however, of those components—AP courses, teacher preparation and qualification, and district policy—factored in throughout the study as each may influence student affective engagement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine student affective engagement in advanced courses and understand the potential student experience. From student narrative data, a

phenomenology uncovers repeated themes across participants. These themes are then viewed as potentialities, what students in such programming *may* experience. So, from data voiced by a set sample, future students may share similar experiences. Thus, if we can determine what these potential experiences may be and what they may look like, this may help determine how stakeholders may encourage, support or improve upon that experience. If student engagement needs are not being met through the programming, it may be determined that significant changes may be considered, such as applying more weight to teacher recommendations for enrollment in the course, support courses particularly for those enrolling in an AP course for the first time, greater differentiation or teacher training therein, course acceleration, or ultimately, a call to hear and listen to more student voices. Ultimately, the goal of any academic program or course is to meet the needs of the student, and satisfaction and finding value also extends to parents, teachers, and those who may want to maintain equitable access to quality programming for all students. However, this study will focus only on the affective engagement experience of a sample of student stakeholders and how that expected outcome is met. The affective component of engagement corresponds to the student's sense of well-being which may have an impact on both learning behaviors and achievement (Geertshuis, 2019).

Focus of the Study

Employing phenomenological data, the focus of this study is on the affective engagement experience of students. Referring to the logic model's short-term outcomes of academic, cognitive, and affective engagement (Figure 1), all forms of engagement are part of the student experience in the course. We want students to achieve and feel challenged, however the specific focus on the affective engagement in their experience magnifies the value students find within the varied offerings of the program and will help determine if students find their investment in

the course worthwhile. Should it be discovered that students do not find the course to be so, does not satisfy their motivation to enroll, or undergo a generally negative experience, recommendations can be made to improve the programming so that students are more affectively engaged, and the overall experience improved.

Research Questions

Though some students may argue otherwise, students do not experience a typical day in high school trapped in a loop. Each day is different as students apply and experience each through various lenses both personal and social. These filters may taint or tint an entire day for a student, influencing their experience in all classes. For students in advanced courses, their experience is often more than just what is observable in an 80-minute course. Layering an open enrollment policy upon the lens of affective engagement, this study seeks to discover more beneath the surface and outside of those 80 minutes and whether the students' needs are being met. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to examine, based upon the affective engagement of students in AP courses, the satisfaction of students with their experience and identify strategies to address student issues that influence their experience in the course.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses?
2. How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?

Definitions of Terms

Advanced Placement

For this study, C. Finn and Scanlan (2019) offer a fairly comprehensive definition of Advanced Placement and its parent organization College Board:

AP is not a federal program or mandate...it is not something that states impose on reluctant school systems and teachers. Rather, it is a privately operated, mostly privately financed, and almost entirely voluntary curricular option for high schools and their teachers and students, one that's been competently managed and adroitly led by the nonprofit, nonpartisan College Board. As such, AP enjoys an excellent reputation and is broadly popular among both parents and educators, including many who bridle at other items on today's reform agendas. (p. 2)

Affective (or Emotional) Engagement

In addition to Groccia's (2018) definition below, emotional engagement can be more simply defined as a student's positive reactions to, interest in and value of school (Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Engagement

For this study, I used Groccia's definition of engagement from his 2018 article *What is Student Engagement* wherein he states:

a student must engage with the learning process on behavioral, affective, and cognitive levels. To engage at a behavioral level, the learner must have some degree of participation or effort, and be persistent in the learning process. At the affective level of engagement, the learner must have a level of interest in the experience that results in improved motivation and enjoyment, thus establishing a level of commitment. Lastly, the learner must engage on a cognitive level displaying a degree of mental activity, processing thoughts about the experience, and establish linkages to previous experiences. Adding to the complexity of student engagement is the fact that it is possible to engage

positively along one or more of these three dimensions while also engaging negatively along others. (p. 14)

Lived Experience

According to Van Manen (2016), lived experience is “the ordinary or pre-reflective dimensions of human existence: life as we live it” (p. 39), both actively and passively. It “involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself” (Van Manen, 2006, p. 35). Lived experience maintains one or more essence that we recognize through reflection as part of a potential motif which acts as part of a “system of contextually related experiences, explicated from it through a process of reflection on its meaning” (Van Manen, 2006, p. 37).

Phenomenology

According to Beyer (2022), phenomenology is a way to describe “those aspect of the noema that remain the same irrespective of whether the experience in question is veridical or not” (Section 6, paragraph 2).

Value

From Wigfield and Eccles’s (2000) Expectancy-Value theory, value is how important, useful, or enjoyable a task is perceived to be by a person. Combined with expectancy—the idea that the task can be done—finding value in a task can lead to achievement, interest, and engagement.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Much of the research that relates to my study of affective engagement in AP is, as VanTassel-Baska (2009) states when she speaks of gifted education, “a patchwork quilt” (p. 1295). This is due to the lack of consistent policies at the national level about advanced coursework and who may participate in such programming. Existing research on AP reflects that uncertainty. Access is of utmost importance, but once access is granted, the value of AP courses and solutions to develop value for all participating students requires more study. On the other hand, affective engagement, the research shows, is an abstract, multilayered concept, and the study of it complicates what it looks like. Although there are threads that connect various studies, understanding student affective engagement, especially post pandemic, on a more intimate level, such as what a phenomenology may reveal, is worth pursuing. Understanding the emotional experience of students has the potential to change lives.

Open Enrollment and AP

Much of the research on AP relates to policy rather than the student experience in an AP classroom (Kang et al., 2018; Kolluri, 2018). With no federal policy for the education of SWGT, AP and DE make up the bulk of programming for advanced high school students, each existing in more than half of states, though little has been done to ensure needs of advanced students are met the way other groups have benefited from federal policies (Ford & Russo, 2014; Kolluri, 2018; VanTassel-Baska, 2018).

When AP and DE courses are considered the bulk of a district's gifted programming, yet each is open to any student, suddenly the value of the programming for SWGT and other advanced students is questionable. While individual students determine the value they take from their experience in AP, there are varied perspectives over the last couple of decades regarding the value of AP and its role in gifted education. Some have advocated for the abolishment of roadblocks and requirements for access to AP programming (C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019a; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Maina et al., 2020; Roegman & Hatch, 2016). Others have weighed the pros and cons of access to all (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2004; C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b; Gallagher, 2009; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Klopfenstein, 2003; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Kolluri, 2018; VanTassel-Baska, 2001). Still others have vouched for AP as an integral part of gifted programming but advocate for additional programming, indicating that AP by itself, regardless of who has access, is not necessarily meeting the needs of all SWGT due to various components of the program (C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019a; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Rene Islas, 2016; VanTassel-Baska, 2001, 2005). In other words, the value of AP programming—whether one views the course as important, useful, or enjoyable (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000)—is dependent upon who you ask and when.

One such factor that contributes to that value, or lack thereof, in terms of gifted programming is teacher training (Clark et al., 2012; C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Klopfenstein, 2003; Winebrenner, 2006). Teachers have such power in the shaping of a student's experience. Decisions made in advance and in the moment by teachers can positively or negatively influence to such a degree that a teacher might not realize the impact they have made on an individual student. Requirements and levels of teacher training and years of experience in AP vary state to state according to a 2016 report by the Education Commission

of the States (Rafa & Railey, 2016). The notion that AP is an effective brand (C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b) appears to trump the inequity of teacher training due to the expanding AP programming and its effects on students. Another factor that relates to teacher preparation is the resistance by teachers, along with parents and counselors, to opening the programming to all students (C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b; Ford et al., 2020; Roegman & Hatch, 2016; Winebrenner, 2006) which some view as negatively impacting more capable students (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2004; C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; VanTassel-Baska, 2001). Rather than teaching up and supporting students, teachers cater to the lowest skill levels in the class.

In this age of equity, there is hesitancy to restrict access. Therefore, many scholars have proposed major reforms over the years (Borland, 2005; J. Cross, 2013; T. Cross & Cross, 2020;), essentially creating an open enrollment for gifted programming. Borland (2005) suggests removing gifted programming altogether, challenging the social construct of the term *gifted*, and providing individualized instruction through differentiation and acceleration. This would take, as he suggests, a paradigm shift, echoed by several colleagues in the field (Coleman, 1985; J. Cross, 2013; T. Cross & Cross, 2020; Dai, 2013). Though each offers a slightly different fix, all support access and fall somewhere along the spectrum of Dai's (2013) factory model versus client-based model argument. But while we wait for efficient reform or the ever-slowng evolution of the public education system, we must meet the needs of all students, not just SWGT, currently in that factory model where the benefits of equity and access to advanced programming such as AP seem to outweigh the individual needs of a specific group. The educational inequities exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have changed much about education. As a result, and as more doors are open to more students, there is a need to further study how access for all affects excellence for all (Brown & Garland, 2015).

Chatterji et al. (2021) echoed the call to reduce barriers to advanced coursework, noting the bias in identification of advanced students which happens in the earlier grades. They found that better supports for diverse students and open enrollment in more challenging courses, such as those that aid in developing self-esteem, engagement, and more favorable attitudes toward academic materials, supports the value of closing equity gaps. However, this study found that participation in advanced coursework did not correlate to success in college as the caliber of student who typically enrolls in advanced courses is already high. Similar to Chatterji et al. (2021), Kang et al. (2018) found in their study of AP science classrooms that while there is a sense of belonging developed by students, gatekeepers such as teachers and counselors recruit from high caliber students who have an interest in the subject prior to enrollment. As there are more science and math AP courses, student interest is perhaps a greater factor in enrollment while in courses with limited AP options such as English and Social Studies, student motivation may be more numerically based. AP credits and potential grade point average (GPA) boosts (which is not a guarantee across states or districts) often eclipses interest and engagement as a primary motivation for advanced students (Chatterji et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2018; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016).

The idea of gatekeepers to AP programming has been explored in several studies. In discussing gifted programs, Ford et al. (2020) examine the pipeline to gifted and advanced classes including AP, wherein they describe an over-representation of White students, taught by White teachers and “protected by White parents...differences as deficits” (p. 28). An open enrollment policy, therefore, would mitigate “well intentioned discouragement” (Ford et al., 2020, p. 29) from educators when a student shows interest in enrolling in advanced courses. This discouragement may be assumption-based such as when a student is told that the course requires

hours of study outside of class or when a counselor or educator exaggerates the difficulty of the class, thus showing implicit bias. With a clear understanding of the requirements of the course, a motivated student should still be able to try. By eliminating barriers and opening up enrollment, we are exposing students to an experience in AP courses that is not entirely understood yet (Ford & Russo, 2014; Ford et al., 2020) so it seems unfair that even in increasing access, there still exists discouragement (Kolluri, 2020). Therefore, a study examining the experience of students in AP courses under open enrollment will contribute to that understanding.

The student experience in AP programming is evolving. There are several factors that have been explored, though much still needs to be done. Some studies examine the social emotional aspect of high achievers in AP courses (Suldo, O'Brennan, et al., 2018), others look at the motivations and psychological costs of enrolling in AP (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Tabron & Chambers, 2019), and still others examine AP through a more critical and historical lens and how the program is slow to evolve and adapt (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Kolluri, 2018, 2020). In their study examining supports for students in accelerated classes, Suldo, O'Brennan, et al. (2018) suggest that the mental health of advanced students is often overlooked due to high achievement, compliance, and family stability or wealth. The stress of a single AP course or an overload of AP courses may be internalized and negatively impact experience as it relates to life satisfaction and thus may contribute to avoidance, a sense of being in it alone and higher levels of parent-child conflicts (Suldo, O'Brennan, et al., 2018) which could potentially result in more harmful behaviors such as substance abuse, severe mental health issues, self-harm or suicidal thoughts. Suldo, Parker, et al. (2019) connect life satisfaction of SWGT in advanced programming to Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being, an idea behind positive psychology that lists positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment or achievement

as indicators of overall life satisfaction. Kolluri (2020) found a similar disconnect from stress in her study of young Black men in AP courses. Tabron and Chambers (2019) also found “tradeoffs or the value of missed opportunities that students of color forfeit to achieve academic success in white-normed school environments” (p. 125) such as AP courses. These psychological costs include racial identity, or “Racial Opportunity Costs” (Tabron & Chambers, 2019, p. 118) and connections to the culture with which the students feel most comfortable with (Tabron & Chambers, 2019). However, while it is often assumed that the student’s value of education is diminished by this disconnect, Tabron and Chambers (2019) found that is not true, rather, it is the student’s cultural identity that is most negatively affected, though affective engagement is not entirely exempt. The disconnect experienced by students, particularly those students of color, has not adequately been addressed by The College Board as it relates to cultural relevancy and curricular representation (Kolluri, 2020).

Despite these findings, the popularity of AP continues to rise, but the effectiveness of the program does not match that rise (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Kolluri, 2018). Due to grade weighting and college credits, enrollment in AP has increased as students are more motivated by long-term outcomes such as grade point averages and top AP test scores (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016), however with no national standard in terms of grade weighting, it is essentially meaningless in terms of college, especially as more school districts do away with class ranking. It is this meaningless incentive of grade weighting and the potential for college credit that attracts the large numbers Kolluri (2018) says are not prepared for AP. As the value of the college degree has risen, the appeal of AP has as well, yet the effectiveness of AP and the support structures of such large numbers of unprepared enrollees is questionable (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Kolluri, 2018, 2020; Suldo, O’Brennan, et al., 2018; Tabron & Chambers, 2019).

College success attributed to AP, a program according to VanTassel-Baska (2018) that is advanced by 1 year, is because students were likely already college ready (Kolluri, 2018). On the other hand, AP students found that the courses alleviate boredom, provide challenge and a sense of community, and when found to be culturally relevant, helped students have a more positive view of their school in general (Kolluri, 2018). Maina et al. (2020) examine the experience of the AP enrollment process by students in Montgomery County, Maryland, including interactions with teachers, counselors and other gatekeepers, and restrictions. Although the study did not examine student experience within the course, the motivational value of the course expressed by participants is similar to that found in Hertberg-Davis and Callahan's (2008) study, which found that the value of AP courses for students was the long-term benefits rather than the actual experience in the course. While looking to the future is important, affective engagement is more closely related to the immediate experience, when commitment is strengthened through interest and enjoyment of the experience itself and increased motivation (Groccia, 2018). Overall, though there are gaps in enrollment, access, scores and college success, AP remains a dominant program of advanced course work and college preparation, and the program's struggle to remain effective for all students, those who struggle and those who excel, may be impeded by well-intentioned policies (Kolluri, 2018).

Affective Engagement

The goal of differentiation and other strategies to address the learning needs of individual students is engagement. Interest, motivation and meaning are affective foundations of engagement (Subotnik et al., 2011). Students “gauge the task by virtue of how important doing well or poorly at it might be for them, how much they enjoy it, and what role it might play in

their future goals” (Subotnik et al., 2011, p. 18). Several factors add up to student engagement: teacher delivery, student interest, and content among them. Removing barriers to each can help level the playing field in terms of opportunity, and through differentiation, the needs of each student can be addressed.

Referring back to the definition of affective engagement as containing elements of positive emotions, interest and value (Wang & Eccles, 2013), it is important to note that the literature reflects a more concrete idea of what affective engagement is compared to the overall idea of engagement which is more complex. Though studies show that the layers that complicate defining engagement itself can influence affective engagement, the core affective elements of interest, value and positive emotions are threaded throughout (Eccles et al., 1983; Fredricks et al., 2004; Shernoff et al., 2016; Wang & Eccles, 2013). When examining value, Eccles et al. (1983) described four components: *interest*, or the importance of doing well on the task; *attainment value*, or the importance of task for future goals; and *cost*, or negative aspects of engaging in the task. However, they also emphasize that emotional engagement is not easily observable and therefore, the positive emotions on display may not be a result of that value (Eccles et al., 1983). It is the concept of flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)—complete involvement, intense concentration, and high interest that causes an individual to lose track of time and space—that more often correlates with positive emotions toward a task (Eccles et al., 1983; Shernoff et al., 2016). Shernoff et al. (2016) describe flow as involving “intrinsically enjoyable activities” (p. 54) which “support the proposition that meaningful engagement may include interactive but independent processes facilitating perceived academic intensity and positive emotional responses” (p. 58). *Affective*, however, does not designate only positive emotions (Rimm et al., 2018; Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020; Shernoff et al., 2016).

Negative emotions such as boredom or anxiety (Shernoff et al., 2016) are also a component of affective engagement. Ronksley-Pavia and Neumann (2020) included the idea of positive and negative connections to the learning environment which may contribute to a multitude or a lack of positive emotions. They went further by identifying affective engagement elements according to Betts and Neihart's (1988) gifted profiles such as the successful learner, the creative and the at-risk profiles. Each profile is then linked to potential affective elements, for example, the at-risk gifted learner can be described as defensive, critical and withdrawn (Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020). Examining students in pull out advanced programs or specialized groupings—such that they are with more like-minded peers—Rinn et al. (2010) determined that such experiences can lead to both positive emotions such as excitement and negative or threatening emotions. Rimm et al. (2018) echoed this in saying that though advanced students are often “better adjusted than regular students and have better self-concepts and greater overall self-actualization,” this does not rule out such negative emotions as feeling a sense of “otherness, loneliness, boredom or apathy, perfectionism, stress, superiority, anxiety and depression” (p. 28).

While educators hope that instruction, content, environment, and motivation all lead to positive emotions, engagement itself is a complex beast. How does affective engagement fit in the overall concept of engagement? According to Newmann (1992), conversations about school improvement “had neglected the most salient issue for both teachers and students each hour of the school day” (p. 2). Though some have reported that there is still, in the 21st century, a need for more research on engagement, the conceptualization of it has important potential (Fredricks et al., 2004). There is research examining the cyclical layers of engagement (Appleton et al., 2008; Fatou & Kubiszewski, 2018; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Newmann, 1992; Wiseman et al., 2016) as well as the addition of social engagement and its influence on the more prominent

behavioral, cognitive and affective engagement of students (Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020). The social and cyclical dynamics of student engagement within AP courses, particularly in open enrollment, may provide insight into the value and emotional experience of all students.

Defining engagement itself is not easy. Much has been stated regarding what engagement is, what influences it, the components of engagement, and types of engagement. Before examining recent language on affective engagement, it is important to look back several decades to show how our understanding of student engagement has changed, yet much of what impacts student engagement has stayed the same. Newmann (1992) wrote

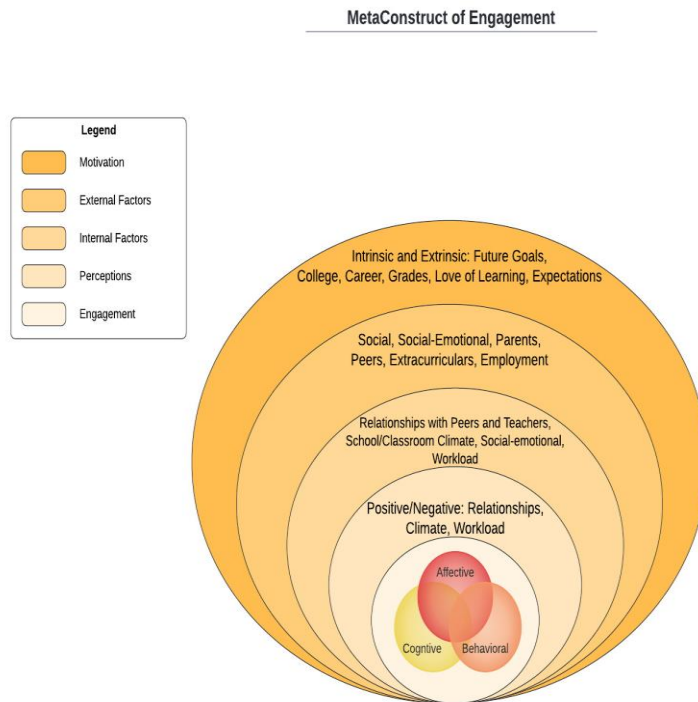
Today, however, schools' ability to engage students is constantly tested by increased cultural diversity in the student body, by large proportions of students who need special forms of care that school staff traditionally have not been expected to offer, and by a host of powerful distractions that compete for students' time and emotional investment (p. 3).

This statement could easily be applied to schools today in 2023. Thirty years ago, school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, support, success and caring) and authentic work (reward, interest, ownership, connection, and fun), combined with a need for competence, influenced student engagement (Newmann, 1992). School membership and authentic work—both of which are affective in nature—are influenced by student backgrounds, community norms and policies, school culture and organization, curriculum, teacher background, and teacher-student interactions both in and outside of class time (Newmann, 1992). Fredricks et al. (2004) support this idea that the source of a student's emotional reaction is not always clear as affective engagement is less observable than cognitive or behavioral engagement. While an observer may see positive emotions, those emotions could be due to friends in the classroom, for instance, rather than the instruction.

Although Newmann’s examination of engagement is more binary than we view it today—with a more defined line between engaged and disengaged—much of it continues to be relevant, and others will point to the conceptualization of engagement, with more layers of influence (Appleton et al., 2008; Fatou & Kubiszewski, 2018; Lovelace et al., 2017; Markowitz, 2018; Wiseman et al., 2016; Xerri et al., 2018; see Figure 2). Therefore, much of what we know and continue to learn regarding affective engagement is buried within and relational to these layers.

Figure 2

Engagement Meta-Construct



Much of what Wiseman et al. (2016) explore in their study of engagement in digital environments (which is applicable to recent virtual learning as a consequence of schools shut down during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-2021) can also be applied to in-person learning. There are multiple layers of engagement that create confusion in terms of consistent definitions across studies (Wiseman et al., 2016). The idea of layers to engagement is echoed by Fatou and Kubiszewski (2018) who examine how perceptions of school climate influence student engagement. These levels include macro-meso-micro levels within-person and at task level that can be both observable and unobservable (Fatou & Kubiszewski, 2018; Wiseman et al., 2016; Xerri et al., 2018). The *perceived* versus *actual* interpretations of school environments, workloads and relationships can serve as a link between affective engagement and motivation according to Fatou and Kubiszewski (2018) who suggested six dimensions of school climate that influence the affective engagement of students: student-teacher relationships, affiliation climate, educational climate, justice, security, and student-student relationships.

Similar to Newmann (1992), Wiseman et al. (2016) and Fatou and Kubiszewski (2018), Appleton et al. (2008) found that engagement is malleable, cyclic and episodic. In the effort to examine and integrate numerous constructs of engagement, Appleton et al. (2008) focused on the less observable affective engagement, including components such as interest, identification, belonging, and a positive attitude about learning, but also touched on psychological elements such as relationships, connections to content, value, attitude, emotion, and goals. Affective engagement works hand in hand with participatory behaviors and motivation though “motivation is necessary but not sufficient for engagement” (Appleton et al., 2008, p. 379). A high rate of engagement—both participatory and affective—are predictors of academic performance and

achievement (Abbott, 2017; Appleton et al., 2008). Abbott's (2017) study of interest development theory in middle schools is easily applied to the affective engagement of high school students as triggering and maintaining student interest links to affective engagement. Similarly, in that the context of the study falls outside that of high school, Xerri et al. (2018) included findings in their study of engagement and higher education, primarily focusing on how perceptions of workloads and relationships (student-student as well as student-teacher) ease anxiety and create purpose, which in turn may increase affective engagement in academic pursuits.

Another study found that emotional intelligence served as a predictor of affective engagement in higher education, particularly about relationships and perceived relationships with family, peers, and professors (Maguire et al., 2017). As AP is a college level course, any findings regarding engagement in higher education may prove valuable, though it is acknowledged that high school is a vastly different landscape than college. Additionally, Griffioen et al. (2018), in their study of high ability students and satisfaction in higher education, found several things that may relate to advanced students in AP courses. The first is that choice, perception, and challenge all influence satisfaction (Griffioen et al., 2018). The second is that satisfaction is connected to motivation and that there are differences in internal versus external elements that contribute to satisfaction, mainly that the intrinsic motivation is often expected in the more extrinsically focused school environment (Griffioen et al., 2018). Applying this to AP courses, we could question whether the extrinsic motivating factors—exam scores, grade weight, college credit—factor into the satisfaction of a student more so than intrinsic motivations such as a love of learning, general interest, or challenge. Ultimately, Griffioen et al. (2018) found that “the more cognitively able students are more difficult to satisfy” (p. 900). We might then conclude that in

an AP course under an open enrollment policy, the levels of satisfaction would vary according to ability. However, although higher ability students might be expected to be less satisfied, that may also depend on their motivations for enrolling in the course. Contradicting Griffioen et al. (2018), it remains possible that, under an open enrollment policy, struggling students may have similar weight behind their levels of satisfaction, though for different reasons.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Lovelace et al. (2017) examined how engagement serves as an indicator of dropout rates and on time graduation, though the authors do state that engagement is “associated with academic, social and emotional learning outcomes for all students” (p. 71). By examining how engagement influences dropout rates, we may also be able to examine how engagement and its affective component influences the decision of a student to drop an AP course for a lower-level course. Perhaps a way to mitigate that decision can be found in Arguedas et al.’s (2016) study on emotional awareness and its ties to engagement. They found a positive correlation between emotion awareness and motivation and engagement, particularly for students who received affective feedback from teachers regarding academic emotions such as enjoyment, anxiety, pride, hope, anger, shame or fault, relief, boredom and hopelessness (Arguedas et al., 2016). Referring to the extrinsic and intrinsic layers of engagement in Figure 2, positive social emotional learning is shown to improve engagement and vice versa (Arguedas et al., 2016; Lovelace et al., 2017).

Just as there are positive emotions associated with affective engagement, the lack of affective engagement often indicates negative emotions (Eckert & Robins, 2017; Rimm et al., 2018; Rinn et al., 2010; Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020). Ronksley-Pavia and Neumann (2020) and Rinn et al. (2010) stressed the malleability of the affective engagement of advanced students due to numerous variables and contexts. Affective engagement is “demonstrated

through happiness, identification with school, a student's attitude, and both positive and negative connections to peers, teachers, school and learning" (Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020, p. 3). Although it is generally understood throughout many of the studies mentioned that positive emotions increase engagement and achievement, a lack of positive emotions can lead to the disengagement of students and negatively impact achievement even in more advanced students. Similarly, in their study of student self-concept, Rinn et al. (2010) found that more advanced students "tend to have positive general academic self-concepts, which are higher than those of less academically talented peers (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993)" (p. 4). However, when more homogeneously grouped, advanced students may experience the Big Fish Little Pond Effect such as "when academically gifted students...attend [AP] classes, accelerate into more advanced classes...they will experience a new environment with equally competent peers, usually more challenging materials and more rigorous requirements" (p. 4). This can, again, lead to both positive emotions such as excitement and negative (perhaps threatening) emotions (Rinn et al., 2010). Rimm et al. (2018) support the greater self-concept often seen in more advanced students but warn that a stronger self-concept does not rule out negative feelings. Negative emotions may result from the tendency of advanced students to develop asynchronously and balance multiple commitments both inside and outside of school, and advanced programming should address the social and emotional concerns that come with those characteristics (Eckert & Robins, 2017). In order to address such negative emotions that may result in disengagement, it is suggested that

there should be provision for grouping arrangements that facilitate this access to true peers so that students spend time working at the edge of competence, developing their talent as well as the attitudes, beliefs and interpersonal skills needed for high performance and well-being (Eckert & Robins, 2017, p. 126).

In the 30 years since Newmann's (1992) research, American educational policy might have affected how students engage in school today. Markowitz (2018) examined how federal policy such as 2001's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) diminished student engagement. Negative influences from NCLB include teaching to the test, lack of relationships with teachers due to reduced critical thinking and reduced student interactions, disinterest in materials not related to the tests, and "narrowed curricula, reduced instructional support and autonomy in the classroom, and increased teacher anxiety" (Markowitz, 2018, p. 750). There is some potential positive influence, however, in that higher expectations in terms of testing indicates that students felt valued by the school and teachers (Markowitz, 2018), even if only in terms of data and meeting standards and requirements. And though NCLB may have enhanced behavioral engagement due to testing expectations, it may have also diminished emotional or affective engagement (Markowitz, 2018), or in other words, students meet expectations but develop negative feelings about school. Markowitz suggests that further studies explore how recent policies such as the 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act* influence student engagement. Since school engagement is influenced by, but not accounted for, in many federal and state policies (Markowitz, 2018), this study contributes to the discussion how school and district level policies such as open enrollment may help or hinder affective engagement.

Affective Engagement in AP

Although not primarily focused on the student experience in AP, Suldo, Storey, et al. (2019) and Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick, et al. (2018) examine emotionally at-risk first-year students in advanced courses and predictors of success for students in AP and International Baccalaureate courses respectively. In the 2019 study, Suldo, Storey, et al. showed that teacher ability to identify emotionally at-risk students was lower than if the students identified

themselves as at risk. This was due to the idea that teachers too often use achievement as indicative of an issue; low achieving students were more likely to be identified by teachers as at risk, while emotionally at-risk students who maintained their performance were not (Suldo, Storey, et al., 2019). In the 2019 study, stress is identified as an indicator of a lack of success. High achieving students, faced with a no win situation, seem to have a choice between high grades or better mental health. According to Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick, et al. (2018), many of the coping mechanisms that students adopt lead down one path or the other. For example, students who choose to vent or talk about their stress from advanced courses with their peers, ultimately, “co-occurred with *worse* mental health, but predicted *better* grades and test scores” (Suldo, Storey, et al., 2018, p. 366). On the other hand, the researchers state that “coping with academic stressors by seeking diversions (taking breaks to do athletic, social, or tech/media activities) predicted better mental health, but lower scores on AP/IB exams” (Suldo, Storey, et al., 2018, p. 366). This, they imply, is due to the diversions taking away time from studying. As educators, parents, and counselors, it seems we are asking students to play a zero-sum game. Of particular interest is that these studies were published pre-Covid-19 pandemic. With obvious post-pandemic social-emotional struggles observed in students and more awareness of such struggles, we now have an opportunity to better support our advanced students.

Phenomenological Research

As this study examined the affective engagement experience of students within the district’s gifted programming, it is therefore based on phenomenological theory which is “concerned with those aspects of the noema that remain the same irrespective of whether the experience in question is veridical or not” (Beyer, 2022). In other words, this study focused on the student experience of affective engagement that may reveal potentialities of experience for

future students within the programming. Phenomenology examines experience at its point of departure and reveals the conditions that may shape or structure that experience (Wheeler, 2011). As student views and perception evolve over the course of the programming, from previous experience to expectations then to experience and the outcome or value of the experience, this phenomenological approach provides an opportunity to involve students in the study and allow them to share their experiences. In a responsive evaluation, Mertens and Wilson (2019) cite Malcolm Parlett and David Hamilton's (1972) approach called *illuminative evaluation* "because it reflects the depth of understanding that evaluators can achieve when they are immersed in the program context" (Mertens & Wilson, 2019, p. 135). The evaluator, they say, is to capture the everyday experience of the participants in order to determine meaning (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). Although this was not a program evaluation study, the ideas of immersion into and illuminating the present student experience allows us to see the potentiality of student experience for future generations; this allows district stakeholder to then accommodate those experiences.

Summary

Student affective engagement in advanced courses such as AP requires an understanding of the complexity of engagement and where and how affective engagement fits into that construct. Affective engagement takes on a variety of forms, both observable and unobservable. It is influenced by everything from perception to trauma to policy. Engagement itself runs the spectrum from routine to meaningful and from extrinsic to intrinsic. Engagement, including affective engagement, has the power to hinder or enhance a student's future. As just one component of the overall concept of engagement, our understanding of affective engagement will continue to develop, particularly as researchers explore how the Covid-19 shutdown of schools essentially disengaged so many of our students, even some of our brightest. AP on the

other hand, is slow to adapt to a changing world. Held in high esteem by some, it is viewed by others as being a relic of a privileged past that is not doing enough to support all students even though the door may be open to all students. Though AP has taken steps in the right direction, work still needs to be done in removing barriers, adjusting attitudes toward atypical AP students, and developing meaningful support systems.

CHAPTER 3

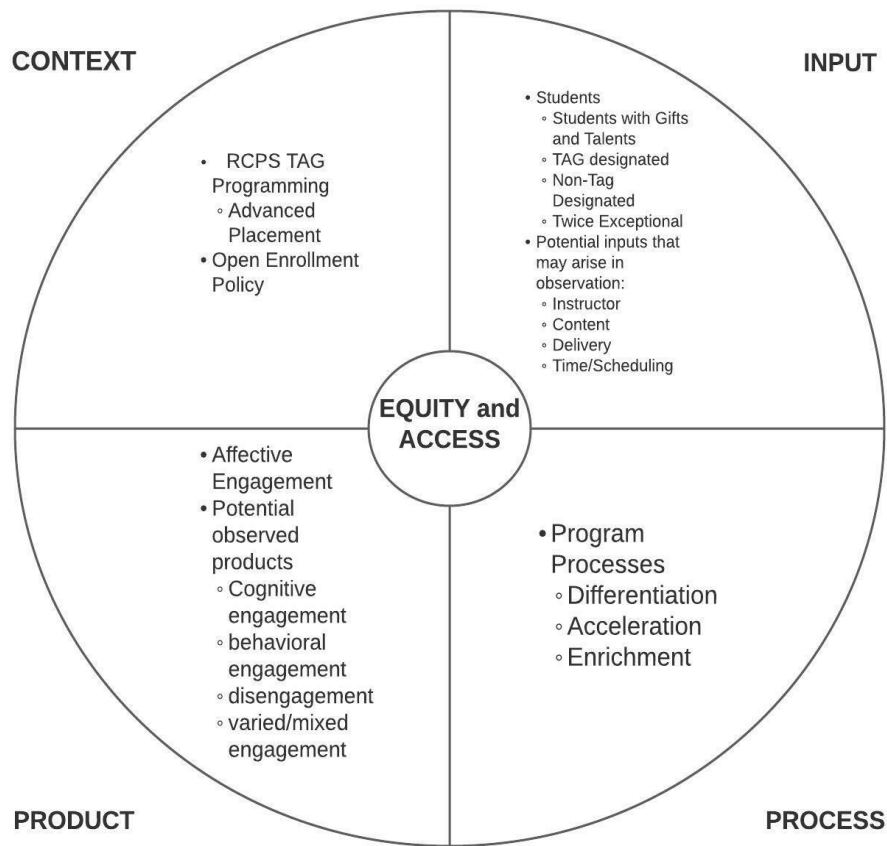
METHOD

The focus of this study was the affective engagement of students in AP courses (see Figure 1). This study used interviews with a variety of students to capture the student experience of affective engagement. Referring to the logic model's outcomes of academic, cognitive and emotional or affective engagement, both academic and cognitive engagement are important in the student experience. After all, we want students to achieve and feel challenged. However, the specific focus on affective engagement magnifies the value students find in their experiences within the varied offerings of the program. It may be determined that the affective value is as varied as the motivation and as diverse as students within the courses. To maintain this diversity, equity and access will remain a constant thread and consideration in the study (Figure 3). From the *CIPP Model for Affective Engagement* (Stufflebeam, 2003)), only one component of RCPS gifted programming is being studied: AP. Although the study focused on students, other inputs might influence student affective engagement. These could include the instructor, content, instructional delivery and student schedule or workload as well as the perceptions of these items. This schedule includes additional courses, extracurricular activities and possible employment or home responsibilities. The model also acknowledges the various processes of the course (or lack thereof) that may influence student affective engagement. These may include differentiation, acceleration, and enrichment. Finally, the model acknowledges potential by-products of the student experience. Student reporting may also include reference to other types of engagement to

include behavioral and cognitive, disengagement or a combination of two or more types of engagement.

Figure 3

CIPP Model for Affective Engagement in AP



Note: CIPP = Content, Input, Process, and Product; AP = Advanced Placement; RCPS = River City Public Schools; TAG = Talented and Gifted

Research Questions

1. How do advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses?
2. How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?

Description of the Study

This study examining the affective engagement experience of students in AP courses included a data collection that coincided with the AP exam window near the end of the academic year. This provided data to illustrate whether or not the experience in the course measured up to any student expectations while still allowing examination of the affective engagement of students. Collecting data too early in the academic year may have resulted in limiting student narratives relating to Wigfield and Eccles's (2000) Expectancy-Value theory which often informs affective engagement.

Working with several cooperating AP Language and Composition and AP Literature teachers, a student interest survey was distributed to all students in the courses. From those interested, a pool of 12-15 students was curated to best represent the varied types of students within the AP program. Of the 22 students who responded to an initial interest survey, only 14 scheduled their interview, with 13 participants able to complete the interview (see more regarding this under Procedure).

In a phenomenological line of questioning, the goal is to capture “experiences as we live them” (Van Manen, 2006, p. 27). In other words, I sought to capture the students’ world in AP pre-reflectively, what Van Manen (2006) refers to as “the ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence” (p. 28). From these

descriptive narratives, phenomenological strategies such as reflection and reductive thematic analysis were used “to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of” (Van Manen, 2006, p. 41) the affective engagement of advanced students. Each student description described a potential experience, and through reflective writing, a possible interpretation of that experience revealed itself. Parent/guardian permission to participate in the interviews was required (see Appendix A) .

Role of the Researcher

In the role of a 10th grade Honors English teacher, I have worked with advanced students for 12 years. Honors is the highest level English a 10th grader can take, is the only advanced option for SWGT, and is also open enrollment. Therefore, I have worked with classes whose range of reading comprehension runs from elementary to college level and whose writing ability runs from unable to write a complete paragraph to college level writing. I have not taught any AP or DE courses, though I have participated in AP training for English Language and Composition prior to rolling out this study.

As an internal researcher, given the opportunity to perform a phenomenological study of the affective engagement of AP students, I did so by sampling outside of my specific content and grade level. However, there was a chance that I have taught one or more of the participants in the sample during their 10th-grade year. Therefore, to mitigate any participation bias, it was important that I was not visibly associated with the initial student interest survey. Unfortunately, as the sole interviewer, I could not dissociate myself entirely from that process and considered interviewing students who I have not taught previously. A potential solution for this dilemma is employing a digital interview process such as through email. However, even that may induce participant bias due to the inclusion of my name in work and school email addresses. Ultimately,

there were two paths forward in terms of my involvement: acting as interviewer or removing myself as interviewer. My reputation and name preceded me, of course, and I did in fact previously teach one of the participants. Acting as interviewer proved beneficial as my rapport and reputation with students allowed students to feel secure in sharing their honest responses in interviews, responses they may not have provided to someone they were not familiar with. It is also important to acknowledge that some participants may have preferred a written dialogue (Pollio, 1997). This option however removed the pre-reflective nature of phenomenological narrative. In a written response, students may revise, edit, and revise again their response. Plus, in an interview, the nuance of a shared dialogue—facial expression, body language, and tone—can reveal an authenticity to the experience that a written response will not. Therefore, written responses were not used.

As the sole researcher, in a phenomenological study, it is important to acknowledge my own biases as they relate to the concept being studied. Affective engagement is defined as the positive and negative feelings associated with an activity along with feelings of value and interest. The primary lens that I bring to this concept is that of an educator. I have been a teacher for 12 years now, and though I may not always observe affective engagement in students, it remains one of the things I strive to bring to my students and one of the things I strive to maintain for my own career all while mitigating the negative emotions for both. The other lens that I carry with me into this phenomenology is that I was once a high school student in AP courses. High school and specifically AP courses in the early 1990s were a vastly different world than what students experience today. In addition, much of my recollection of that experience has been filtered through time and nostalgia. So, while I often speak of how much I loved school growing up, I acknowledge that that love was not felt every day in every class. The lived

experience was likely different than what I recall these many years later. Pressure from my parents to be well rounded and a high achiever came with both positive and negative consequences over time, for example, perfect attendance from kindergarten through 12th grade, though admirable in some regards, likely contributed to some struggles post high school. Coming out of the closet as gay at seventeen in the 1990s also affected my day-to-day experience in my junior and senior years. I can recall adoring the teachers and classes I was greatly interested in such as my AP French IV and V classes and my AP Lang and AP lit classes; at the same time, I wrote a prize-winning poem about murdering my AP Calculus BC teacher because I was failing the first semester. The effort on my AP exams ranged from putting forth all my effort to bubbling in others to create fun pictures on the answer sheet. The 1990s were a different time, but the core components of affective engagement—positive and negative emotions, value and interest—remain the same. Furthermore, as education has evolved, there is more focus on and support for engaging student interests and social-emotional health.

Participants

Interest surveys and parent permission forms were distributed to all participating students in two AP Language and Composition courses and two AP Literature and Composition courses, an estimated 110 students, at the request of the participating school district. While there are many other AP courses including science, math, social studies, art, world languages, and the seminar and research program, four AP English classes provide a manageable sample of students with which to gain interest. Many students in English AP courses were enrolled in other AP courses related to math, world languages, science and social studies. During the interview process, it was assumed that selected students may speak on their experience in multiple AP

courses. Prior to conducting the study, parent or guardian permission for students to participate were collected.

A list of 22 interested students was compiled via the initial survey. Those students were notified by email and asked to schedule an in-person interview of 30-60 minutes. Zoom was also an option if that better fit the student’s schedule. Only 14 students responded to the request to schedule their interview with one failing to show up and rescheduling only to fail to show up again. The total interviewed students numbered 13.

Table 4

Demographics of Participants

Student	Grade	No. of AP Courses	Gender	Notes
Student 1	11	2	F	ELL/Middle Eastern
Student 2	11	6	F	TAG/Asian
Student 3	11	5	M	TAG
Student 4	11	2	F	
Student 5	11	5	F	
Student 6	11	8	F	TAG
Student 7	11	7	F	
Student 8	11	3	M	Autism Spectrum
Student 9	11	11	F	TAG/Black
Student 10	12	12	F	Previously taught by interviewer
Student 11	11	7	F	TAG
Student 12	11	7	F	TAG
Student 13	11	7	M	TAG

Note: AP = Advanced Placement; ELL = English Language Learner; TAG = Talented and Gifted

Far too often the demographics of gifted programming such as AP do not match the demographics of a school or district, which becomes a common indicator of inequities (Sklra et al., 2009). The sample of participants in Table 5 reflects that. Additionally, we must acknowledge the various potential tribes we find in the selected sample. We have students who are taking their first AP courses. This group further breaks down into different categories: those who were encouraged by others to take the course, those who were self-motivated, or those who were pressured but remain reluctant (e.g., parental pressure). We might also have students who are not taking their first AP course, those who take a fewer number of AP courses, and those who take all AP courses.

Although not representative of the overall student population of RCHS (see Table 1), the demographics of the sample lean closer to that of the TAG identified population in RCHS (see Table 2). However, it is important to note that of the students interviewed for this study, only seven were identified as TAG by RCPS. While this study does not significantly increase the number of student responses from the previously mentioned evaluation, it does provide input from non-TAG identified students who participate in the TAG programming at RCHS whereas the evaluation did not. Racially, most students interviewed were White, although the sample does include one Black student, one Middle Eastern student, and one Asian student. Three students were male. The sample also included an English Language Learner and a student on the Autism spectrum. Students were in 11th or 12th grade at the time of the interviews. All students had participated in an AP course prior to the 2022/23 school year. The reason for a lack of 12th grade participants was likely due to timing and will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Only one student was previously taught by the interviewer in English 10 Honors and was the lone senior to participate.

Procedure

Initial student interest surveys were distributed (Appendix B) via AP Language and Composition and AP Literature teachers through the class Canvas page. Hard copies of the parent permission form (Appendix A) were then distributed for students in those classes who indicated they are interested. Interested students were instructed via email (which also included electronic copies of all forms) to return signed permission forms to their AP teacher, to myself or to my mailbox and to schedule their appointment. Being sensitive to the AP testing schedule that overlapped with this process, I maintained the utmost flexibility with students, thus interviews were conducted over the course of a month as students found time in their schedules. Once an interview was scheduled, the date and time was provided for parents.

Interview process:

- Students were greeted and directed to a seat
- Students would review and sign the student assent form (Appendix C) if they did not previously do so.
- I reviewed the topic of the study in student-friendly language and asked if they have any questions.
- The interview started with a few warmup questions (Appendix D)
- I provided a simple student friendly definition of affective engagement and began the interview using a semi-structured process (Appendix D)

In-person interviews required an audio recording to transcribe the dialogue while a Zoom interview required recording both audio and visuals. One student, however, was not given permission to be recorded during her interview. In a phenomenological interview, some questions are preplanned yet conversational, but it is the experience, the voice, of the participant

that matters and thus, questions may be altered or not used (see Appendix D for sample interview questions) while others may be improvised based on the participant's voice (Moustakas, 1995; Pollio, 1997).

Interviews were transcribed by a transcription service called Rev.com. Student privacy will be maintained by replacing names with *Student #*. All correspondence, forms, recordings (audio and any visual), and transcripts were destroyed upon publication of the study.

Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews was analyzed using phenomenological strategies that include semi-structured interviews to collect narrative data (Dapkus, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1995) regarding student experience, analyzing the data for common themes which were then collected to a spreadsheet (Appendix E) and categorized thematically (Appendix F), and ultimately the categories are used to describe potential future student experience with affective engagement (Dapkus, 1985).

Transcribed interviews were analyzed thematically (Moustakas, 1995; Van Manen, 2006) then categorized using grounded theory which is the combination of similar themes labeled under the dominating qualities in the category (Polkinghorne, 1995; see Appendix F). Rounds of coding were accompanied by a reflective writing process (Appendix G). Then, a Composite Structural Description illustrated how the interviewees as a group experience what they experience in AP courses (Moustakas, 1995).

Participant interviews created a depth of narrative data, allowing students to elaborate on their experiences. Data from these responses were coded accordingly (Table 4). The coding process, however, included analytic memo writing or reflection which includes “emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes and concepts in your data” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 44).

The concurrent process of memo writing and coding supports the construction of greater or hidden meanings in participant responses (Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, the narrative responses were analyzed using in-vivo coding (Appendix G) as this coding process will “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” and “is particularly useful in educational ethnographies with youth...and coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldviews” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). A final step involved a collection of exemplary quotations (Appendix H) from participants reviewed by a phenomenology research group consisting of both veterans and those new to the field. Nine participants reviewed my data which was broken down by theme. This group review provided confirmation of or reconsideration of my findings.

Table 5

Data Analysis of Affective Engagement of Students in Advanced Placement (AP) Courses

Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
RQ 1: How do students experience affective engagement in AP courses?	Interviews with 13 AP students	Interview transcripts were analyzed via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Vivo Coding • Thematic analysis • Reflection
RQ 2: How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?		

After interviews were transcribed, they were uploaded as Google Documents so that annotating was possible. I started with word choice and my initial reactions to what was said—things that stood out for one reason or another, surprising things, particularly moving things, things that created a visual. I annotated with my own questions as well, though I was not including member checking in my procedure. Alternating with journaling, I then moved to see

how the stories revealed specific themes. In my repeated readings and reflections, I sought the hidden messages in participant narratives. How did what was said change based on my annotations during the actual interview? Facial expressions, laughter, body language all change the meaning of what someone says. A student dismissed a serious thought with a nervous laugh, for example, or another waved off a positive feeling as if frivolous. In my reflection, I strove to read between the lines and behind the laughs, zooming in and out of the narratives as presented, building from word choice, to syntax, to theme. I considered how students experienced each theme, the extremes and the outliers. I reflected on how the themes grouped together and the bigger systems at play. This level of reflection aided in developing the categories of potential experiences. Finally, having additional eyes on data was helpful. My exemplary quotes, collected and grouped by themes, were reviewed by a phenomenology group I was invited to attend with the University of Tennessee who offered additional insight into the themes and resulting potential categories.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Delimitations

This study does not focus on TAG identification in RCPS nor does this study focus on the role of equity or open enrollment as potential obstructions for any students regardless of TAG status within the TAG education program. In other words, this study is not looking to suggest a roll back of these strategic policies regardless of what student narratives may reveal. Both equity and open enrollment are valuable initiatives that can benefit all students, hence the encouragement of AP for open access. However, because federal policy on special education mandates specialized services for students, this study contributes to the discussion of whether there may be a need for a similar federal policy mandating specialized services for SWGT based

on the potential affective engagement experience of students or whether there is a need for further investigation into the value of such programming for all enrolled students. Although this implies that the focus is solely on SWGT, the affective engagement experience in advanced courses of all students enrolled will be considered before any recommendations for further research or support structures for advanced programming are made.

Limitations

The dual enrollment program, which is also included in the RCPS gifted programming, was not included in the sample, though it does attract a sizeable number of SWGT and other high achieving students. AP students sampled may also be enrolled in a DE course, though they will not be asked to speak on their experience in that program.

A consequence of limiting delivery of the interest survey to participants in only the two AP courses (AP Language and AP Literature) is the lack of data from students of color. In RCHS, some students of color enroll in DE courses rather than AP courses due to the accessibility of college credits and perception that of the two college level programs, DE is the easier (C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b). Another group that was not represented are those students who are gifted, talented, highly motivated or high achieving in areas that do not necessarily fall under AP programming or who may take other advanced courses such as honors and DE. These include gifted and talented artists, athletes, leaders, and those gifted in service. That is not to say participants in the study are not artists, athletes, leaders, or service oriented, but rather the focus of this particular study was only on affective engagement in AP. However, findings from this study could be applied to other components of advanced programming in future studies.

Assumptions

As previously mentioned, this study is not about removing the opportunities, equity, and access provided by open enrollment policies. I assumed that the benefits are too great for overlooked populations when it comes to identification of SWGT. I also assumed that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the 2019-2022 school years will influence the experience of students to a degree due to the switches from in-person to virtual, virtual to hybrid, and hybrid/virtual to in-person along with any loss of learning during those years. Despite the transition back to in-person school, student experiences in general are vastly different than pre-pandemic. Finally, I assumed that students might respond to interview questions with responses relating to AP courses other than the course in which they respond to the interest survey.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to any administration of student surveys and interviews, I sought approval to conduct the study from the William & Mary Education Institutional Review Committee as well as the office of accountability in RCPS. I also consulted with the district TAG coordinator for RCPS and the RCHS staff leadership team, department chairs and content administrators prior to roll out. Following the guidelines of the district's office of accountability, students and parents had the choice of not participating or discontinuing participation at any point via a preliminary information letter provided to all students and families selected as potential interviewees. Although student names were collected as part of the interest survey, all student names were changed to numbers to be included in the writing of any research findings and discussion. Additionally, students were not asked their TAG identification status, though they were able to speak freely about it if they so choose. TAG status of students is available in the RCPS PowerSchool/SchoolNet and is viewable by all staff.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Post Covid-19, the education system in the United States has received a wake-up call. We cannot go back to the way things were, but we are finding it challenging to evolve. The importance of the social-emotional well-being of students has taken center stage in recent years. Schools across the nation have delivered survey after survey to students in the attempt to hear student concerns, to allow students to use their voices to help them adjust to this brave new world. Surveys and well-intentioned social-emotional and academic lessons derived from the Social and Emotional Aspect of Learning initiative (Department for Education and Skills, 2005) are an indication of progress in addressing issues affecting students both prior to, during and post-Covid-19. While that is a place to start, a survey only allows us to hear student voice through a series of Likert scales and multiple-choice responses. We must also learn to listen. Although the 13 young people participating in this interview are dynamic in their own ways, they represent but a fraction of their peers regarding a mere slice of the education experience at RCHS. Through their stories of affective engagement, we may paint a picture of potential student experience—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and hopefully, prepare all stakeholders for such experiences in the future. Their voices and their stories, however, represent only the *potential* affective experiences of advanced students in AP courses.

The experiences shared by students were revelatory (see Appendix G for full list of exemplary quotations). Part of my interest in student affective engagement was to understand potential student responses to questions I often wonder about (and sometimes ask students): *Why*

are you here? What are you really getting out of this experience? I wonder this about all students regardless of what classroom they are in. Listening to these students, educators should instead ask, *Why are we here?* After all, are we not—especially post-Covid-19—as one student put it so succinctly regarding the stress and camaraderie of AP, “all in hell together”?

Research Question 1: How do advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses?

Advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses in positive and negative ways related to Others, Stress, and Inspiration. These categories were revealed through in-vivo coding and thematic analysis of student interviews about their affective experience in AP courses. Applying Grounded Theory, categories were determined using the dominant characteristics of the revealed themes.

Students expressed both positive and negative emotional experiences, several of which interact with each other in a multitude of ways. Positive emotions included feelings related to comfort, confidence, connection, interest, focus, and perseverance. I have included enjoyment as a separate theme in the findings, however, many students described comfort, confidence, interest, and connection as enjoyable experiences. Negative emotions described by students include competitiveness, disappointment, stress, frustration, and isolation. These negative emotions were often specifically related to the classroom environment and course workload. Furthermore, individual students experienced affective moments more extreme as a result of the aforementioned negative emotions. In other words, they were not common across participants but are important to acknowledge. Students described feeling melancholy, apathetic, intimidated, and hopeless. A layer to consider in examining their words and experiences is that students often use thinking and feeling phrases interchangeably. For example, a student might say, “I remember

feeling like ‘I don’t get it.’” Or they might say, “I thought it was confusing.” Both, however, imply a theme of confusion. Students appear to cross feelings with their inner monologues at times. In establishing the categories, themes were grouped not as strictly positive or negative.

Others

Every participant described some experience of affective engagement or disengagement relating to others. In a school of such size, it would be difficult to imagine a student’s experience to be completely unaffected by another person. Table 6 shows both positive and negative themes that relate to both the presence and absence of others.

Table 6

Research Question 1: Others

Student #	Comfort	Competitiveness	Connection	Isolation	Disappointment
Student 1	X		X		
Student 2	X	X	X	X	X
Student 3	X	X	X		
Student 4	X		X		
Student 5			X		X
Student 6	X	X	X		X
Student 7		X	X		X
Student 8	X		X	X	
Student 9	X			X	X
Student 10	X		X	X	X
Student 11	X	X		X	X
Student 12	X	X	X		
Student 13		X		X	X
Total	10	7	10	6	8

Comfort. Advanced students experienced affective engagement when they feel comfort in an AP classroom, however, affective engagement was also experienced when students are drawn out of their comfort zones.

Out of the Comfort Zone/Out of the Norm. Most students described experiencing positive emotions in AP courses such as joy and fun when the routine of AP courses is interrupted by doing something outside of the routine of the course, whether that is in location, instruction, structure, collaboration, or ideology. This is important because the structure of an AP course is explicit; the training for the test is the end goal that dictates such pace and routine. These experiences were often due to other people in the room—interactions with students or lessons and activities designed by the teacher or the course. Students used words like “escape” (S11), “unique” (S10), and “change of scenery” (S11) to describe experiences that took them outside the classroom such as for labs in AP Environmental Science (APES). Student 10 noted how they often collaborated with students they did not really know, with one “fun” collaboration involving a “preserved corpse of a cat” that was “just so foreign.” The interruption to routine and the repeated structure of AP courses was often welcomed by students, described by Student 3 as

A break from the normal kind of learning about history from that we do normally on a daily basis just learning the facts and the dates and it kind of just made it more interesting and I thought it was a cool way to learn about history while also having fun with it, yeah.

Other breaks from the norm that engaged students affectively included the discussion of

A niche topic or a topic that wasn't widely discussed. And so, it was kind of fun to learn about something that we wouldn't normally have learned about. And it's interesting to see how other people feel about that sort of thing and see other people's opinions and not just

learning this is what happened and when, but how do you feel about what happened this time? (S3)

Students recalled these experiences precisely because they are out of the norm. From childlike play of being outside doing “science-y” (S12) experiments to the randomness of watching a classroom pet turtle, these experiences were recalled as fun, interesting, different, enjoyable, and challenging. Several students indicated a changed perspective toward others, content or the world, which can represent growth.

Comfort/Familiarity. Most students described experiencing positive emotions in AP courses when they were in familiar environments that bring a sense of comfort. Many of the students described seeing familiar students—students whose academic efforts and values reflected theirs. The “vibe of the class,” Student 10 indicated, “feels more intimate, more relaxed” particularly when the smaller class sizes include “people who think like you” (S6). Student 10 cited “student-produced engagement” when collaborating with students with similar interest and effort in school. Some students described challenging situations or assignments that, with overcoming them, brought a sense of comfort and relief or a return to feeling comfortable. For example, Student 3 described the nervousness and then consequent relief of a Socratic seminar, the anticipation and anxiety of having to perform in front of others soothed by a sense of accomplishment. Student 2 put it this way: “Sometimes if you know you're failing miserably, then you can feel that feeling. But then once you start to not fail as miserably, then you feel more comforted.” And while students described familiarity as a positive component of AP along with the diverse perspectives from peers (see Connection section), Student 2 pointed out that most of the AP students are White and connected that to a feeling of familiarity. Other students skirted

the issue of homogeneity in AP courses. While students used neutral terms such as effort, values and behavior, Student 3 said

I don't want to be in a class with people who don't want to go to class or don't want to go to school because I do. And I want the people around me to want to do good in a class and do good at something because that's what I want for myself.

Student 6 stated that “fights don’t happen in AP courses”. Unfortunately, if we were to look at attendance and discipline data for RCHS, while maybe not intended, each is implicating non-White populations of the school, which may indicate a racial comfort found in AP courses.

Competitiveness. Many students described feeling competitive in their experiences in AP courses. This feeling came in relation or comparison to peers and societal expectations about success.

Students expressed feeling nervous in group discussions, worried that what they said may be misunderstood or looked down upon as not seeming very smart. Although this seems like normal adolescent worry when speaking in front of peers, some of this comparison may be due to the sensitivity students felt in today’s political and culture battlegrounds. Student 3 described it as, “I'm always hesitant to say my idea because what if other people think it's a bad idea, but yeah, definitely nervous about saying something and contributing.” Much of the comparison, however, relates to doing as well as peers—whether that is on specific assignments, grades, the number of AP courses taken, the AP exam or in who may have more stress due to those items. This led to feelings of bitterness, sadness and tension, sometimes with friends outside of the AP courses. For example, Student 2 described “if my friends do well and I don't do well, then that makes me sad. I'm like, ‘This is terrible’.” Student 11 described the chain of competitiveness that begins with success in the class itself:

I feel like a lot of these students are just wanting to pass AP exam. Not even just to pass it because they want to get into a prestigious college...And I'm subjected to that. Even though I don't want to be, I don't know. All I'm reminded of is do well in AP so you can do well in the exam and then you can go to Harvard, whatever. And it's like, it's all I think about.

The competitiveness extended beyond the actual confines of the course on occasion, and whether this was in a humorous way or as a coping mechanism, Student 6 described it as, "Everyone in my classes seemed really sleep-deprived and everyone was talking how little sleep they got last night. It was like a competition, who got the least amount of sleep from staying up late studying for these classes". Ultimately, the competitiveness is going to come with the territory. High achieving students, societal expectations ingrained so deeply in their psyche, will naturally compare themselves to their peers. Interestingly, much of the competitiveness is among friends, as Student 7 explained:

even within my friend group, the competitiveness that comes with the number of APs you're taking and how they help you get into colleges. I have friends who want to go to in-state schools that maybe aren't as competitive, and so they take maybe one AP versus those who take five. And just even hanging out, "Oh, I'm super stressed about my AP exams." And that causes negative emotions sometimes with other kids who feel like you're maybe bragging about how you want to go to... I don't know, sometimes I feel like there's tension between my friends who don't take a lot of APs and my friends who do. Because I think there are connotations with, being super ambitious.

Isolation. Some students experienced isolation in relation to others. This may mean physically isolated as several pointed out regarding their experience in virtual AP courses,

demographically, metaphorically absent teachers, or feeling beyond the rest of their peers in the room.

Students described feeling isolated in several ways: how they were different from others in the room based on skin color, intelligence, political ideology, quality of work and learning styles, how they were different from their non-AP friend groups, feeling lost due to not understanding the content or not being able to keep up with the work, and, when teachers continued instruction from the virtual years which was very independent, students lamented about missed opportunities due to a lack of interaction. Recalling an experience in which an AP teacher kept her virtual instruction as the focal point of the now-in-person course, Student 10 remarked, “It was almost like mourning for the experiences I didn't get to have because the work was so self-paced.” Feeling isolated within a highly populated campus was captured by Student 11 when they said

I feel like, especially in the school, it's huge. And I think I am close with my teachers, but it's the sense of, I feel like they might have that same relationship with 50 other students. And I feel like you can just really easily get lost, and you can easily get left behind.

Then, feeling isolated within the classroom by a student of a marginalized group can have consequences for similar students who may be considering the course: “I took AP research this year and was one of two Black people. There were more blonde people in that class than people of color. That's a problem, and that does drive away students” (Student 9).

Disappointment. Many students expressed feelings of disappointment in regard to others. These feelings and experiences were due to actions or inactions by the teacher or peers, a consequence of an inability of peers to grasp a specific concept, or the sanitization of course content.

Some students discussed the disappointment felt when interest was stifled—by time constraints, for example, or teacher planning—when an enjoyable activity was unable to continue. This feeling of being stifled, as explained by Student 9, was also evident when difficult topics were avoided: “It's either been what they've chosen to just gloss over, which I think has been really interesting. And sometimes they say it's for a matter of time, but I sometimes think it's not because of that. I think some of that is too focused on, this sounds horrible, but sensitivity, I think.” This was described as a “sanitized” (S9) environment, one in which a student’s experience might have been made better by tackling these sensitive topics but were not, due to either the teacher or the lack of understanding on the part of peers. Student 9 further recalled, “I will say though that I come into it with some background knowledge on that, 'cause I do research on Black history myself, and it was somewhat disappointing to see my classmates not get that”. Sometimes, however, with the exam looming on the horizon, time simply was of the essence. For example, Student 10 described it as, “just a little ‘Aw,’ like lightly upset, gently upset that I couldn't keep discussing it with my table mates further.”

Students also felt disappointment in unexpected ways. With the depth of content, Student 9 expressed disappointment in the gap between a regular or honors course and what she was experiencing in her AP course; she was disappointed that others could not experience it as well. Student 6 expressed disappointment in society based on her experience in APES, that society was not holding itself accountable for the damage it has inflicted upon the environment.

Student 2 also described disappointment when it comes to success compared to peers: “maybe part of me being disappointed is if my friends do well and I don't do well, then that makes me sad. I'm like, ‘This is terrible’.” When asked to elaborate, she stated

I mean that I'm upset, but then it's also like, "What am I going to do?" So, you give up, or not necessarily give up, but you can only dwell on it for so long. So, you're just like, "Well, this sucks." But what else are you going to do about it?

Some students' disappointment bordered on annoyance when it came to teacher instruction which was described as "redundant or time-wasting typically" (S3), "silly" (S3) or could be done "better than the teacher" (S3). Student 3 described one experience as

I always had a complaint or I couldn't even focus on what was being taught because I thought it was being taught, my opinion on how they were teaching me the information was, I was like, I don't even want to learn this anymore because it was just annoying, certain things, yeah...I just would get... annoyed that this thing that I thought could be just completely simplified and didn't have to take this long on a little thing.

Connection. Most students described feeling connected in AP courses through content, the environment, and peers (which may be due to the lack of social interaction due to the Covid-19 pandemic that pulled students out of in-person learning). Though most students described relating to other people in the course, Connection can also mean content created or provided by another.

Connection to content came in several forms—from relating to a particular text or finding connections between content and real-world applications (see also Real-World Application section). Student 9 described a novel her AP Language class read:

I was like, 'Oh, this is something I would actually want to research and look into.' And they wrote it in a way where you could see into, it's so lame, the psychology of the characters or whatever, the people.

Though she included the word *lame*, she did so in a way to dismiss her excitement displayed on her face. This may be indicative of advanced students' habit of downplaying the actual enjoyment of learning. Student 4 also described a connection to literature:

I don't know, there's just a lot to talk about in relation to [Jesmyn Ward's *Men We Reaped: A Memoir*], especially how she makes you feel the emotions that she was going through and you're kind of like, oh, this sort of happened to me in a different sense, but also kind of the exact same.

For some students, the connection extended beyond the self and immediate content and changed how they viewed the world and those around them:

I think with AP Psychology, there's certain phenomenon, or that's how you say it, that people have been experiencing their entire life and now they get what it means and what it is like, oh, this is how sleep works and I've been sleeping every day, every night for my entire life, and now I'm just now learning why I feel better in the morning after sleeping. And I think absolutely that everyone is like, "Wow, that's crazy." (S3)

With the focus on social-emotional learning upon the return to in-person learning, it is particularly notable that AP Psychology resonated with students in this way.

The connection to peers also related heavily to the comfort and familiarity mentioned previously though some students recalled meeting new people or hearing perspectives different from their own as positive experiences. Student 10 used the previously mentioned phrase, "student-produced engagement" in reference to the fun she had getting to know students as they interacted with content. But that connection can extend to people not in the room as well. Student 4 described, "I got a lot out of it learning about the experiences of Black women, particularly in the deep South, Louisiana specifically." It seems that personal connections to others was

strongest in AP courses that offered discussions and differing perspectives. Student 10 described her experience in AP Literature as

And it was like I was familiar with all the people, but also it felt like the perspectives they were bringing to this work of literature were something that I hadn't considered before.

And it was really... we had agreements, we had disagreements.

She went on to describe the joy of sharing her beliefs and listening to the beliefs of others, so much so that she wanted to then share that experience with her family. Students described connection to peers during which they would “lose track of time” (S10), find “common ground” (S4), “building off each other” (S12), and ultimately finding “a better perspective of everyone else in the class and their views on things” (S3) which then allowed students to be “more conscious of everybody else's experiences” (S5).

Another way that students connected to others is through collective misery and struggle. Student 10 said, “I'm now realizing how much bonding in an AP course comes from talking about how much we dislike the AP course.” Student 6 mentioned the positive connection with peers in relation to negative aspects of the course: “we were all in hell together,” that the stress of AP was made better or more manageable by experiencing it together.

Stress

Every participant described experiencing stress which is not unexpected when it comes to advanced courses. However, the source from which stress was experienced, the degree to which it was experienced and the consequences that resulted, and the perspective on the stress varied.

Table 7*Research Question 1: Stress*

Student #	Competitiveness	Stress	Frustration	Disappointment	Environment	Workload
Student 1						X
Student 2	X	X	X	X		X
Student 3	X	X		X	X	X
Student 4					X	X
Student 5		X	X	X	X	X
Student 6	X	X		X	X	X
Student 7	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student 8			X		X	
Student 9			X	X	X	X
Student 10				X	X	X
Student 11	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student 12	X	X	X		X	X
Student 13	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total	7	8	8	9	11	12

Competitiveness. As previously shown in this study, competitiveness and the comparison to others was a common experience for advanced students in AP courses. This competitiveness contributed to much of the stress students felt in their experience. Student 11 described it as

But I think sometimes me and other kids probably, we just get so caught up in the constant flow of assignments and the constant, you have to do well in this. You have to do well or you're not going to college or whatever.

From this statement, the student implied that doing well leads to a better chance when competing for a spot at a university. Although it can be argued that the student is also experiencing pressure, the inclusion of others, the feeling that one must keep up with other students in order to succeed, stands out here. Student 12 similarly described it as

I have a group chat with one of some of my closest friends, and we're basically all just texting about how stressed we were and how we really wanted to get a 5 because we've done well. And we feel like this test shows that if we do well, that it shows that we did the class well too, which might not necessarily be the case if you're not a good test taker or whatever the circumstance may be. But probably in the crunch time especially, I feel like you feel the pressure a little bit.

Descriptive words such as “crunch time” and “pressure” indicate that kids know what is at stake with an AP course and that ultimately their goals are related to how others perform as well. Peer and non-peer performance mattered and the impact on one’s own performance was revealed. The pressure to do as well as or better than classmates, and the tabs students kept on it internally and externally, illustrate an innate competitiveness in AP courses. Also interesting is the messaging student received regarding performance. Students viewed the competitive nature of AP as relating to something more long-term regarding the course, not necessarily the immediate experience. It is about the test, the college credit and acceptance upon applying. “That's all I think about really, being honest. That's what we're just told to think about when we're in AP classes at this point,” Student 11 recalled.

Stress. Most students acknowledged feeling stress during their AP experience. It is evident in their interaction with others, with expectations placed on them by self or others, with the amount of the work, with the difficulty of the material, and future goals. Much of the stress

described by students appeared to come in waves, from small experiences such as on a particular assignment, to larger fluctuations that would last several weeks. For example, Student 13 recalled what was supposed to be a relaxed free write:

I remember feeling just a little bit stressed as I also didn't know what to write about because she told us, so don't put your pen down. You can't put your pen down. So, it was, you had to do that. But I wasn't supposed to be stressed, obviously, because this was a very calm exercise.

He goes on to describe receiving the prompt for the free write and feeling “kind of overwhelmed because there's a ton of stuff I have to do, but I just start writing and eventually, so I get it done in time, but I'm so deeply overwhelmed when I initially get the prompt.”

However, stress could also last for weeks at a time such as before the AP exam or when the workload of AP classes synchronizes. This often led to feeling overwhelmed. Student 7 stated, “in terms of stress, yes. Because the workload is very high. And definitely a couple of weeks ago before AP exams, I kind of was asking myself why I took five classes.” Student 6 shared a similar experience: “If you're in a lot of AP classes and all your teachers are starting to rush, then you really feel that. And then everyone started getting really stressed.” Students expressed feeling pressure, bombarded with the messaging of how important the exam was. For example, Student 11 described a literal sign reminding them of the exam: “But I'm constantly, they're reminding, we have this big thing on the board saying, ‘AP exam in,’ whatever days. It's just there's constant reminders and it's constantly, ‘Let's practice these skills for the AP exam’.”

The ability or inability to balance the stress and demands of a single AP course or multiple AP courses sometimes led to an improved perspective on the experience or self-doubt,

respectively. Students who could recognize the skill building in stress management showed appreciation for the experience such as Student 6 who declared the stress before AP exams “kinda worth it,” and this was before learning what her scores were. Student 7 saw her experience as preparing her for college:

I think even that I can see as has helped me with time management and just managing stress. And I'm sure I'll have a lot of work next year and in college as well. So I feel like that's only helping me prepare.

But not every student was so lucky in their ability to manage stress. Student 5 began to “get worried about not having enough time on one subject to understand it completely.” She also described feeling so overwhelmed in an AP Physics class she, “didn't really know why I was taking it.”

Frustration. Many students experienced frustration with some aspect of their experience in AP courses. Frustration resulted from interactions with peers, coursework, content, and teachers, and can boil over the top due to student needs not being met.

Students expressed feeling frustrated and bored due to lack of interest and challenge, the repeated structures of AP, over-dependence on textbooks, having already learned the material, or a general sense of apathy. Student 13 described zoning out of class, feeling “I'm so beyond what the teacher is teaching right now.” Student 6 had a much harsher description, calling AP work “dumb busy work” and “just kind of like ‘meh’.” This student was quite critical with content, instruction and overall atmosphere of her AP courses:

I don't need to learn about lang for the billionth time. I already know where the commas go. I know what this vocabulary is. I know how to use satire. I don't need this class. You

have to be in the class so your attendance doesn't like plummet. So, you kind of just go to sit there.

While this may be due to a lack of challenge, even opportunities for collaborative engagement she described as, "I'm just sitting there and the teacher's like, 'Discuss this chapter.' My whole table just will sit there and just be, meh."

Confusion was another negative emotion described in relation to student experience due to the newness of experience (for example, a first AP course or unfamiliar content), poor instruction, or the quickened pace of the course. Student 2 described an AP math course as

I'm like, "Where did that number come from? Where do these numbers?" Suddenly there are letters, and I don't know what's happening. And just feeling lost and having literally no clue where, how someone got from point A to point B, and you're still at Point A and they're at Point, like, C now.

An AP French class was described by Student 12 as having a looser structure than the student may have experienced prior and "gives a teacher more leeway to do things that might not make sense to the students." Student 8 had a similar reaction to his AP French class. The transition from an honors level course (still considered advanced programming) to an AP course also led to confusion: "it was confusing at first because, I don't know, there was just a bunch of different variables" (S12). Students also felt frustrated in their experience toward class activities and assignments. In her description of class discussions, Student 9 said

I think sometimes it's like, "Well, we want students to feel safe and we don't want to have to discuss this. And I understand there's only one or two Black people here, and I don't want them to have to carry the burden of having this conversation." But the people who need to understand this isn't us, it's the other people here, and if we gloss over it, you're

not protecting me if they don't know, because we're going to end up having these conversations again in the future.

But frustration was not only evident in assignments found in the classroom. AP requires a lot of work be done outside of class, so spillover is possible. Student 11 described feeling frustrated on an assignment as, “There were some nights where I was like, “Oh my God, I'm losing my mind because I can't figure this out.” Other times, she said she would “go home and shed a tear or two.”

These heavy feelings related to stress and frustration then led to feelings of doubt, melancholy, hopelessness and apathy. Student 5 described doubting her own knowledge and whether she belonged in the course. Student 11 painted a melancholic picture at home, feeling frustrated with an assignment from an AP class:

I remember we have this office in my house. And it's technically my dad's, but I took it over this year. I remember it was just adding to the mood. I remember it was raining, and I was just sitting. There's this huge window right next to the desk, and I was just sitting there.

For some, the sadness was due to the content of the course, particularly those that tackled “heavy” (S4) subject matter that “kind of just sticks with you for a couple days or until the next class or whatever” (S4). Student 2 described finding relief from the stress that caused these negative feelings:

If I'm feeling frustrated, sometimes I'll just give up and say, ‘I'll work on it tomorrow.’ Which I guess isn't really giving up if I still decide to work on it at a later time. Sometimes I take a break and I watch a video or go downstairs and eat a cupcake or something.

Still others described spiraling into hopelessness or apathy as a result of stress, frustration or feeling overwhelmed. Student 11 seemed to question every aspect of being in the course:

Sometimes I'm like, "Why am I taking all these college classes when I'm going to be in college for four plus years anyways? Yeah, I get it's preparing us. But can we do more of a soft launch maybe?" I don't know. I don't know. And there's so many expectations for these kids who, I don't know, aren't even there...I was like, I don't see a point in doing this right now. Because I'm just like, why am I doing this? Okay. I don't even care about the exam anymore. I don't care or whatever.

We can tie the apathy back to the feeling of boredom previously expressed by Student 6: "We don't really care. No one wants to discuss this book. We just sit there just waiting it out."

Some students described feeling intimidated by the amount of work they faced. When faced with the amount of work they had to do, particularly closer to exam time, students described it as "scary" (S5, S7, S11). However, several students were able to look at these negative feelings and see the benefit of them. Student 7 described, "I can see it has helped me with time management and just managing stress. And I'm sure I'll have a lot of work next year and in college as well. So I feel like that's only helping me prepare." Student 4 saw how a deep discussion about serious issues can still feel positive: "There are times where you go out of class feeling really happy and upbeat because of what we talked about. Even if the subject matter was dark and heavy". For others, however, the mix of negative and positive was a greyer area with Student 5 describing a seesaw of feelings toward the challenging workload:

sometimes I know challenges are good for me. I'm someone who likes challenging myself, especially in school, but a lot of times it can get kind of overwhelming, and I'll still classify it as a challenge, but I don't know, just in a more negative light.

Disappointment. Unfortunately, most of the disappointment experienced by students in AP courses is due to Others. Please refer to the finding under Others to read more about that. Disappointment is often due to something outside of student control, such as the choices of others, which can lead to feelings of frustration and stress, hence its inclusion under this super ordinate.

Environment and Workload. Every student described feeling negative emotions relating to stress in- or outside their experiences in AP course classrooms as evidenced above. The negative affective experiences all, in their way, impede the student journey in AP. From the findings described, students often carried these negative emotions from their AP class to their next class and the next; others allowed those negative emotions to stay with them as they headed home. Once home, the reading and homework either added to or introduced additional negative feelings. Then, when the number of AP courses were factored in, for some participants, it felt hard to get out from under that negativity. As several students described, once the AP exam was completed, these feelings may be relieved, however the value of such stress varies according to the individual.

Inspiration

Most students described experiencing some form of positive affective engagement in an AP course. The timing of the study may have impacted participant feelings as the number of total participants expressing each theme was significantly lower than those totals for negative emotions; this will be discussed in Chapter 5. The themes presented in Table 8 relate to forward movement, those feelings that help propel a student to success in the course.

Table 8*Research Question 1: Inspiration*

Student #	Confidence	Interest	Focus	Enjoyment	Perseverance
Student 1	X	X			X
Student 2	X				X
Student 3	X				X
Student 4		X		X	
Student 5	X	X	X	X	X
Student 6				X	
Student 7			X		
Student 8					
Student 9	X	X			
Student 10		X	X	X	
Student 11	X	X	X	X	X
Student 12	X	X			
Student 13					
Total	7	7	4	5	5

Confidence. Many students described experiencing a feeling or developing a feeling of confidence in AP courses. This was due to teachers, content, and interactions with peers. Student 12 stated, “AP Lang has helped me be a bit more confident in my writing skills because I've learned things about writing that I didn't know before.” Describing class discussion, Student 3 reflected, “I think it really was a good learning experience for me to learn how to talk to people and disagree and agree with people without being disrespectful and being able to tell people my

ideas.” The confidence he describes in being able to interact with others comes from overcoming the nerves he initially felt:

Definitely I was relieved to be done speaking and have gotten my point across, and it gives you more confidence to hear what everyone else has to say because that you already did your part, and you made your statement and contributed in my way. And it kind of puts me at ease so I could just listen to everyone else talk and think about what they said. Just definitely relief that I was done with what I had to say, but also maybe giving me the confidence to continue to talk again after hearing what other people have to say.

Student 2 also described how confidence may prohibit more negative feelings:

I think it depends how confident I am that I will overcome it. Because I think specifically in calculus, I just do AB, but I think that it's a more straightforward class in the way that there are specific rules and steps. So, if I'm stuck on a problem, I know that I will figure it out eventually, and it might take me more time, but I'll figure it out. So, if I'm working through the problem or something and I'm struggling, then I know that eventually I'll figure it out. Whereas something with, let's say English, if I'm struggling on a concept or writing an essay or whatever, I think it's harder to learn that skill. So, then it becomes easier to get frustrated when you don't have as much confidence that you're going to end up learning it or end up knowing how to get that skill.

Some students found the content to a confidence builder, for example, in describing viewing a video showcasing a female in the STEM field, Student 5 stated, “Yeah, I think I've always been pretty wary of going on to the next level with STEM or something, but when I hear someone

who's pretty accomplished in her field say that, it makes me feel pretty confident, at least prepared to take on the challenge.”

Interest. Some students described feeling interested in their experience in AP courses. As interest is a key component of affective engagement, it is important to note the timing of interviews, which took place during or after the AP testing window, so student interest may very well be non-existent at that point or other affective experiences were occupying more of students' minds.

Interest can form in a desire to do or learn more about a subject. Several students described experiencing this desire. Student 10 recalled about a group discussion that

I hadn't gotten to say all I wanted to say. And I felt like it was one of those almost, it was a collaborative *aha* moment. But we were called to stop before the *aha* had actually happened. So, it was that feeling of ‘No, we're onto something here and I want to keep getting at it until we put it into words.’

Student 4 described reading a book in her AP Language course:

oh, this is really interesting and I actually want to keep reading it. I think it was when there was a letter from Perry's sister included in the book [*In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote] and I was like, oh, so this didn't just affect the family of the people who were killed, but it affects the family of the murderers too. And that was like, okay, let me keep reading to see how else it affected her.

Interest can result from a break in the routine of AP. For example, regarding AP World History,

Student 3 described a Socratic Seminar:

I had fun doing those because I felt like it was a break from the normal kind of learning about history from what do normally on a daily basis just learning the facts and the dates and it just made it more interesting.

Another experienced interest seeing the accomplishments of others in the sciences:

I know it was in Semester 1 this year in AP Physics. We were just learning general things about the universe, space, and that something that really interests me. And my teacher played this YouTube video about becoming an aerospace engineer and stuff. And I don't know, it kind of hit me at that moment that STEM was something I wanted to do... And I think at that moment I was kind of like, why can't I do this? So, I don't know, I guess it just instilled some perseverance or inspiration. I think a lot of the inspiration came from that I was seeing someone of the same gender as me in that position. That was just really a powerful message to me. (S5)

Other students discovered an interest between the content and future goals such as when Student 9 described her AP history course as

making the connections between those events and understanding its impact today, especially as someone who wants to go into [international relations], I think it was with AP world history where it was like, "Okay. I know nothing about this, but I know kind of what I could possibly maybe in the future know about this."

Further interest can also build off of current student interests, for example, Student 12 describes how

just when something is interesting, and I want to learn more. Oh, a good example would be we watched this video about PITX [Paired-Like Homeodomain Transcription] genes in fish in bio, and that was really cool because I like fish...It

was cool because we were seeing scientists explain their years of work in research and how it's important. We had learned about the concepts, but not people actually doing the research to figure out those concepts. So that was interesting.

Focus. As students made themselves open to challenges, their interest piqued, a few students described a sense of focus and control that helped them be successful in their course. Students used phrases like “just clicked” (S11), “locked in” (S5, S11) and “dialed in” (S7) about which Student 11, when asked about the word choice, laughed and mentioned “sounding like Generation Z”. This feeling of focus was described by students regarding all facets of AP: in class, homework, and AP exams. Several students described a feeling of not noticing time pass when in such a state, often referred to as flow. In her description of a conversation with peers, Student 10 described being so focused on the topic of discussion, they were not paying attention to the time they had to continue and experienced disappointment that they lost track of time and thus were unable to continue the conversation. This feeling of focus was sometimes equated with success and enjoyment: “I did end up progressing in that class because I kind of engaged a little more, locked in that class. And my test scores went up and I started asking more questions. And so that made the class more enjoyable” (S5).

Enjoyment. Some students described feeling joy and fun in their experiences in AP courses. These descriptions were not always connected to the themes above but related to other aspects of their experience such as a specific assignment unique to a course or a teacher, sharing the experience with family or friends outside of the particular class, when a particular struggle is overcome, or interactions with teachers. Several students equated the feeling of fun and enjoyment with doing well, either once they were doing well, the experience was fun, or the experience was challenging so they “might as well have fun” (S10). For example, Student 11

described a particular writing assignment: “there's these moments where it's like, I get to write about what I want and just about me. And it's also teaching me good writing skills. And I just felt super excited to go home and just write this.” Student 6 described feelings resembling a return to child-like fun when she recalled an AP Environmental Science class as, “we were just all in the water, just splashing around, trying not to get too wet. But it was fun.” Student 10 also recalled her time in APES with fun experiments taking place in nearby waterways and went on to include a description of time spent enjoying the class tortoise. The depth of content, at times, seemed to bring out fun experiences as Student 2 described, “that was really fun because we got to learn in depth about something that was interesting rather than just reading a textbook.” When compared to non-AP courses that students have experienced, Student 4 said about AP

Well, they're more fun because I get more out of them. I've gotten so much more out of AP Lang than I did last year in English, and I got a lot more out of AP Human Geography than I have in the last 2 years in history.

Perseverance. Some students described perseverance in their experience in AP courses. From language and cultural barriers to course workload and complicated concepts, students found ways to overcome the struggle of AP. For example, Student 1 realized that the long-term benefit of her success (the career goals and ability to help her immigrant family) was strong enough for her to keep trying in her AP class. She saw the skills as meaningful and more powerful than any barriers she faced. Student 11 would not let tears stop her from overcoming a setback, as she described

Sometimes I would be really confused because when we got to the last few units, it was super hard. I'd go home and shed a tear or two. And be like, ‘This is hard.’ But then it felt so good once I got over that.

Student 5 describes an AP teacher who inspired perseverance: “I have a great teacher and she's never made me feel like there's a dumb question, so it makes me want to keep going.” Still other students adopted a balanced perspective on the difficulties of AP, as Student 3 described his understanding of things outside of his control:

I want to do well, but I'm not going to cry if I don't do well. I don't know. I guess at this point, it comes to a point where I don't care if I don't do well. Because I'm kind of over it. So, I'm going to try my best, but if something happens and is out of my control and I do bad on a test or I just don't understand something, then I just have to keep going.

Similarly, Student 2 described her coping mechanism when faced with obstacles by focusing brain breaks:

If I'm feeling frustrated, sometimes I'll just give up and say, "I'll work on it tomorrow." Which I guess isn't really giving up if I still decide to work on it at a later time. Sometimes I take a break and I watch a video or go downstairs and eat a cupcake or something.

Research Question 2: How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?

Advanced students found value in AP courses in myriad places, from in the moment realizations to preparing for college and beyond. These values reflected and related to several of the affective descriptions above including connections to peers and content, the benefits of stress, and many of the more positive experiences.

Table 9*Research Question 2: Value*

Student #	Immediate	Short Term	Long Term
Student 1			X
Student 2	X	X	
Student 3	X		
Student 4	X		
Student 5		X	X
Student 6		X	X
Student 7	X		X
Student 8	X		X
Student 9	X		X
Student 10	X		
Student 11		X	X
Student 12		X	X
Student 13	X		
Total	8	5	8

Immediate

Most students found value in the immediate experiences of an AP course. These were described as a love of learning, finding value in particular moments, and sharing those experiences in the moment with others. Experiencing immediate value relates to the interest, utility, and attainment aspects of Expectancy-Value (Eccles et al., 1983), and the value itself is intrinsic.

A Love of Learning. Some students described the value of AP courses as a love of learning. Learning and acquiring knowledge were expressed as a valuable element of AP

courses, with some students mentioning the value of learning over other benefits of AP such as college credit. For example, Student 5, in their description related to the many assignments AP students had to complete, stated, “I think I would associate that with feeling productive, with feeling just like that feeling of going home and feeling like I learned a lot that day”. Student 9 looked at how the immediate acquisition of knowledge would benefit them in the future:

there was also the knowledge acquired along the way, which I think made it, alongside the topic itself, it made it a lot easier to actually want to do the work, 'cause I felt like what I was doing wasn't just abstract or to learn something that I didn't want to actually use in the future.

Student 3 described how the environment and familiarity connected to the building of knowledge: “I like being in the same room as people who have similar ideas as me, or not ideas, but similar views for what they want to do in the future, being a knowledgeable person and not just getting a degree”. Student 7 echoed this when they said

I would say wanting to learn or being excited to actually gain understanding and not just taking an AP course so I can get into a good college, kind of, but going into a course and wanting to actually know the information and gain it so that I can use it to help me later on.

Here, Student 7 is also describing utility value.

In the Moment. Some students described the value of AP courses as in the moment. These moments varied, from teacher interactions to focus. Student 4 described watching a video and seeing attainment value in learning something new

After we finished watching it, we had a sheet to fill out questions how every teacher gives you a sheet of questions, so you pay attention. I had never really thought a lot about

a lot of the stuff that got brought up in it, just the prison pipeline and everything. And I was like, I should probably start thinking about this and start figuring out how to help so that it stops being like that.

Student 3, in his description of Socratic seminar, said, “I think that's kind of what I'm thankful for in that sense. I think the value I took out of the Socratic seminar was just the ability to kind of talk and that sort of thing. Yeah, I would say that's the value for me.” Students also expressed the value of the moment versus other benefits of AP, however some did acknowledge the long-term value as well, for example, Student 9 said, “So I'd say that meaning something for me was, this is something I would do even if it didn't add to the college resume.”

Shared Experiences. Some students described the value of AP courses as shared experiences. Collaboration and discussions within the classroom and, as previously described, the struggles of AP courses (when not in it alone) were described as valuable. Student 9 recalled the camaraderie of an AP that blossoms when everyone seems to be struggling as “I'm now realizing how much bonding in an AP course comes from talking about how much we dislike the AP course.” But not all shared experiences were in times of struggle:

My AP world class was actually very interesting because my closest friends were South Asian and this one Jewish guy, so we had some very interesting conversations about how history kept unfolding as we went through and processing our own history. (S9)

Student 10 described shared experiences in the moment as

And just really getting to share what I believe, hear what others believe, and just really work together to collaboratively learn and share. And I remember coming home after that and just telling my mom all about it because it was such a great moment for me.

Short Term

Some students described the short-term value of AP courses. These benefits include advantages related to college applications and acquiring college credits which relate to both utility and attainment value.

Grade Point Average/Strength of Schedule/College Admittance. Students described the value of AP courses in terms of grade boost and transcript strength to be more attractive to colleges. Students described a sense of *having to do* AP courses. Interestingly, though students hold value in this aspect of AP, it was not without cynicism:

I wanted the GPA boost. I want colleges to see I took all these AP classes and most general classes would just be boring. They would just be too easy. So, I just sign up for the AP classes, but it's not 'cause I care about the material. (S6)

Another student stated, “I have a really high tolerance for doing things I hate doing just so I can go to college” (S9)

AP Exams. Other students described the value of AP courses in terms of AP exams indicating that doing/not doing well is reflective of the overall value of the course. Students described the value as learning “at surface level so I can pass the exam” (S11), “dedication” (S2) and a reminder that the exam is the “big marking point” (S2) of the year. Student 2 viewed the AP exam as a return on investment:

If I'm going to take the whole class and do well in the class, whatever, and then do bad on the exam, then it's you feel kind of gyped. You're like, ‘Well, I put all this into it and this is all I got back?’

Long Term

Most students found long term value in their AP experiences. This manifests in being inspired to follow various college majors or career paths, feeling prepared for the challenge and rigor college classes, and real-world applications—relating to interest, utility, and attainment aspects of Expectancy-Value.

College Major. Some students described the value of AP courses in terms of college majors and career preparation. For example, Student 11 noted, “I think AP calculus really was the first one where it made me realize, “I don't know, this might be something that I want to end up doing when it comes to college.” Not only did students express how experiences in their AP courses helped shape their potential interests in various college majors, but they also indicated how the workload, stress, and preparation for AP exams will benefit them in college:

teaching me how to prepare for an exam at the end of the year and to actually, and not necessarily teach me the actual content, but teach me how to handle a course that's hard and does take a lot of effort. And I think it definitely is preparing me for after high school when I go to college. (S3)

Student 7 saw the benefits reaching far into the future as they described how their AP Lang teacher's writing instruction

has also tied into our college application process. And then I can very clearly see how that will help me in college as well. Just, I mean, even just her teaching us how to make a resume and just things I think will help me in professional life.

Career. Students described the value of AP courses in terms of career interests. Students saw career paths open up based on their experience in AP. Student 9, interested in International Relations, mentioned “I think it was with AP world history where it was like, ‘Okay. I know

nothing about this, but I know kind of what I could possibly maybe in the future know about this’.” Another discovered her interest in a possible STEM career after viewing a video about a female aerospace engineer: “it kind of hit me at that moment that STEM was something I wanted to do” (S5). Student 1 related how her experiences in AP will further her career goals in political science.

Real World/Future Applications. Students described the value of AP courses in terms of real-world applications. From understanding how society works to course specific skills useful in the real world, students seemed to see the most value in this sub-theme. For example, Student 9 applied an experience in AP Lang to how one might view journalistic bias:

We were doing a rhetorical analysis about Hurricane Katrina, and first of all, the subject material was interesting and good to know about because it's like current recent history. And then also being able to analyze how a journalist writes about their piece is important and presents information to you. Because when you're reading news, you need to know what they're using, how they're telling the story so that you can understand maybe their perspective and their biases and how it's influencing it.

Student 1 described how the communication skills she was learning in her AP course will benefit her family coming from Afghanistan.

Beyond the AP exam or college credit, students saw how what they were learning was “conducive to understanding more of the worldview” (S9). Student 6 had this to say about AP History: “it's important that I guess someone brings up some dumb president. I'm like, I know who that is. I could apply to that and I could actually seem intelligent on the subject, which I feel like is important.” Whether held deep within or simply at surface level, students view the content of AP as something that has potential use in the future. The environment and mental health

(through APES and AP Psychology) seemed to resonate with students the most in terms of real-world application. Learning about mental health, Student 3 said, “It seemed like such an important part of my life, and I realized that it definitely is important knowledge for everyone to have and I felt bad that I didn't learn it before then.” Regarding the same course, Student 7 acknowledged, “I think about a lot when I'm just observing people socially interacting or just, there's a lot of applicable information in that class.” Student 2 described the importance of learning about the environment: “the concepts that we learn are more applicable to life. So, I think as we've been learning stuff in the class, I've been tying it back to my own life.” Both the environment and mental health have been forefront in the eyes of young people the last few years.

Summary of Findings

Although these young people recalled their experiences as individuals, phenomenology collects the repeated concepts and themes and categorizes them into potential experiences. In other words, while these experiences are true for these particular individuals who participated, their common elements can be collected into themes that future AP students have the potential to experience upon enrollment while the themes also fall into broader categories that all students experience in affective ways—Others, Stress, and Inspiration. While all students have the potential to affectively engage in school in ways related to these categories, and all students have the potential to affectively engage in school in ways related to the themes, the findings presented represent the potential experience of students in AP courses at. In other words, non-AP students potentially may experience competitiveness, for example, in their classes in similar or different ways or not at all. From the data collected about advanced students in AP, these potentialities include positive feelings such as finding comfort in familiarity, finding joy and interest when

things are out of the norm, finding confidence and feeling connected to at least some aspect of the course. At the other end of the spectrum, students have the potential to feel competitive or disappointed, and they have the potential to experience negative feelings such as isolation, frustration, and stress toward the environment of an AP course as well as the workload. In terms of value, students can potentially experience the expected and the unexpected; however, it might not always align with their motivation to enroll. How future AP students experience these themes will and can be as unique as the individual who experiences them.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Major Findings

This phenomenology of affective engagement experienced by advanced students in AP courses at RCHS was conducted to better understand the potential affective experience of all enrolled and future students in AP courses. Additionally, I sought to improve negative affective experiences as needed and continue to enhance positive experiences of all students in advanced (TAG) programming which includes AP courses.

The overall categories of Others, Stress, and Inspiration are revealed through potential themes (see Figure 4). Students experience affective engagement relating to Others through both positive and negative interactions. In a crowded school community, it is expected that other people will influence the affective experience of students; yet, within the AP program, *how* is the question. The presence of others creates competition, connection, and variations on comfort. Others can disappoint students and isolate students physically and metaphorically. The other two categories—Stress and Inspiration—relate to progress or movement. Stress impedes or slows down; it can break a student. Others may directly influence Stress such as through competitiveness, disappointment and isolation. Affective themes grouped under this category show that we need to do more to support students who experience them. Inspiration propels students forward. These are the affective experiences we want to encourage in AP programming.

Figure 4

Affective Engagement in AP Courses: Categories, Themes, and Sub-Themes



Note: AP = Advanced Placement; GPA = Grade Point Average

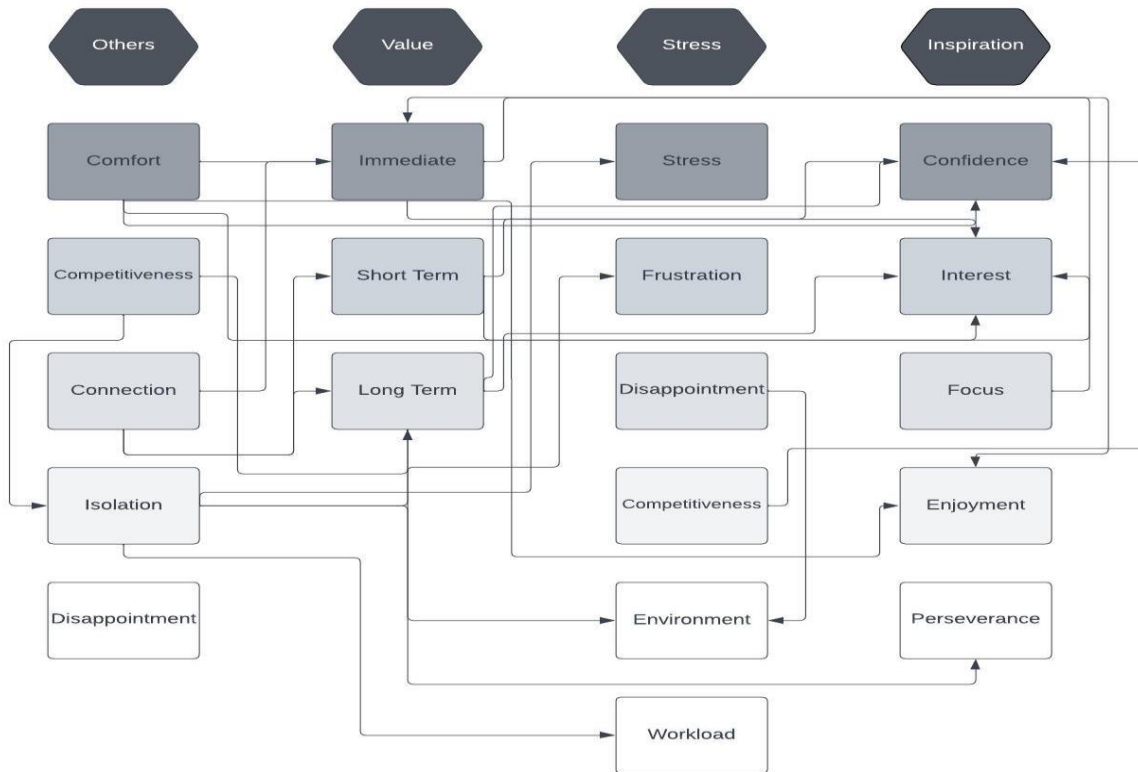
The potential themes of affective engagement revealed by this study could also be exhibited in other components of the programming such as honors courses and DE courses, particularly as students may enroll in all types and levels of courses throughout their high school experience. However, research on AP indicates that a better understanding of how all students (both TAG identified and non-TAG) experience affective engagement can help improve the experience for all who enroll and may help better align the demographics of advanced programs with the actual demographics of a school if needed. This is important as both the College Board and an increasing number of school districts encourage access for all who are motivated to enroll. This phenomenology also shows evidence of affective disengagement and the

complicated relationships between both potential positive and negative emotions experienced in AP courses (See Figure 5). In turn, the affective experiences can influence the value students hold in their AP experience.

Based on the experiences of 13 AP students from 2020-2023 (which does include the year of virtual learning due to Covid-19), future students have the potential to experience both positive and negative emotions related to Others, Stress, and Inspiration that can affect engagement in the course. Positive emotions include comfort, confidence, connection, enjoyment, focus, interest, and perseverance. Negative emotions that may be experienced include competitiveness, disappointment, stress, frustration, isolation. Additionally, negative experiences in- and outside the course (due to workload) may lead to more extreme negative affective experiences. Negative emotions, as will be discussed in the sections that follow, might not always disengage students. Many of the potential emotions influence how and to what extent students value AP though that is not to say that other emotions not included in this phenomenology do not contribute to the potential value.

Figure 5

Affective Engagement in AP Courses: Categories, Themes, and Relationships



Research Question 1: How do advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses?

For purposes of discussion and practicality, discussion of the findings will be organized by positive and negative affective experiences. As the negative impede and the positive propel, shaping the discussion around those ideas helps to separate those experiences we need to better support versus those we need to continue to encourage.

According to students at RCHS, advanced students may experience common forms of affective engagement that are positive in nature when enrolled in an AP course. Students might experience a sense of comfort or a sense of familiarity in an AP course, however, they may also experience being out of their comfort zone. This can mean experiencing an aspect of the course

that is not what they have experienced previously or what they may experience every day such as breaks from structure, unexpected activities, surprising content, or collaborating with new people. Students may also feel a growing sense of confidence in an AP course. Students may find a desire or inspiration to learn or do more upon grasping a skill or concept. Or, students might develop a sense of confidence from struggle, persevering when the course proves difficult. Confidence can also come from focus, tuning out distractions, and zeroing in on a goal or task. Feeling connected to and within an AP course is another potential affective experience students may have in an AP course. Students may feel connected to the teacher, content or instructional methods of a particular course. Students may also feel a greater connection to their classmates which may be due to familiarity, meeting new people and better understanding their unique perspectives, or sharing in a positive or negative experience. Finally, students might find joy, fun and interest in several aspects of an AP course. Activities that break with routine might be viewed as more memorable and therefore more fun than a typical day in AP. However, interactions with classmates may also elicit feelings of joy.

Students also have negative affective experiences in AP classes which may, at times, disengage them from the course. Although, from the findings, there is evidence that some negative affective components may increase engagement whether that is directly relating to emotions or indirectly relating to social, cognitive or behavioral engagement. Participants also indicated that students may experience competitiveness among both their AP and non-AP peers. Though it may not always be extreme, students may often compare themselves to others regarding grades, AP exam scores, college ambitions, sharing aloud in class, thought processes, and quality of work. With that in mind, students may experience disappointment, not only in themselves for perhaps not measuring up to peers or their own expectations, but in the course

itself whether that is in the instruction, coverage (or lack) of content, grades, exam scores, or with the attitude, efforts, or behavior of peers. Disappointment can run the spectrum of outright annoyed to feeling slightly stifled. Other negative affective experiences may relate to the day-to-day existence in AP classes: feelings of isolation, boredom, confusion, feeling bombarded or pressured with messaging. These feelings can follow outside of the classroom as well, as students may experience negative affective moments when working on assignments for AP: stress, overwhelmingness, pressure, frustration, and doubt may lead to more troublesome feelings of apathy, hopelessness, melancholy, and intimidation.

Research Question 2: How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?

As the affective components of engagement relate to the value a student perceives, many of the positive and negative affective experiences also have the potential to influence the value future AP students will find in RCHS. However, as evident from the findings (See Table 8), every student interviewed found something of value in their experience, which holds promise for future AP students. Whether that value is in the immediate experience, related more to college admittance, or benefitting college and career, is a valuable component of programming for advanced students.

Immediate value for students can relate to a love of learning which can be broken down into learning new content, skills, or sharing what one has learned. In-the-moment experiences that challenge students, alter perspectives, or are unusual all may resonate with students. Many of these experiences involve class discussion and collaborative projects, or they might be shared experiences that allow students to feel they are not alone in a struggle. For some students, this immediate value will also evolve into short term values such as grade weighting, impressive

transcripts and preparation for AP exams which could provide early college credit, while others will only see those short-term values. Students may feel this is the *only* reason to enroll in AP, something they *have* to do in order to be successful or attractive to top schools. However, this is, perhaps, a value dictated by society and history and may cloud the true value a student finds in AP. However, it is also important to note that if that is all a student finds valuable about their experience, that is also acceptable, so long as it aligns with their motivation to enroll and expectations for the course. Many students will find multiple areas of value in their experience, some of which, like many facets of a good education, may not be realized until much later in life. Though some students will recognize this value in the experience and use that as potential motivation, values such as being prepared for college level courses, establishing and meeting career goals and applying to real-world situations may continue to benefit students in ways the student may not even know, long past their technical education.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: How do advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses?

Positive Affective Experiences

Although affective engagement is often associated with positive components such as interest, motivation and meaning (Subotnik et al., 2011), it is important to consider both the positive and negative affective experiences (Rimm et al., 2018; Ronksley-Pavia & Neumann, 2020; Shernoff et al., 2016) of students in AP and how those might not only influence each other but also how they might influence the value that students perceive in their experience.

Comfort and being taken out of one's comfort zone in an AP course maintain both benefits and detriments to students' affective engagement and thus, as affective engagement is

just one small part, to general engagement as well. Comfort itself is familiarity—from peers to routine to safe spaces, and when a student feels comfortable in an AP course, engagement is likely to increase particularly if that comfort is due to a culturally relevant sense of community (Kolluri, 2018). Being surrounded by students of similar skill, interest, ambition, effort, and character creates an environment with fewer interruptions, more support and a more favorable attitude toward learning. Students are freer to be themselves and more likely to engage with classmates. This creates a more positive and enjoyable experience overall. However, too much comfort, or over familiarity, whether that is regarding peers or content—is that removing students from a more challenging environment? Does it remove students from those moments of disequilibrium that often foster actual learning? Seeing similar students in the AP program at RCHS, even though a student may mean relating to intelligence or motivation, may imply White and/or socio-economically advantaged. This relates back to access and who controls the gates to advanced programming (C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019a; Hertberg-Davis et al., 2006; Maina et al., 2020; Roegman & Hatch, 2016). One student in the study, with no ill intent, casually remarked about seeing all the familiar White kids from her middle school. Another, with a far more critical eye, pointed out there were more blonde people than black people in her AP Research class. These stories are illustrative of the gifted to advanced programs pipeline for White students (Ford et al., 2020). Diversity is too great a benefit to young people to fail to acknowledge the lack of its existence in AP programs. The lack of diversity not only reinforces the comfort of being around similarly shaded skin (Kolluri, 2018; Tabron & Chambers, 2019), but creates discomfort for those few students of color who do take AP courses. Feelings of tokenism and the burden of speaking for one's tribe distance students of color from a place of safety and comfort, an issue that the College Board has yet to address as they continue to work toward access for all

(Kolluri, 2020). The feeling of otherness that advanced students may feel is heavier when you factor in skin color (Rimm et al., 2018). In these ways, comfort and being removed from one's comfort zone perhaps belie a positive affective experience. Furthermore, a lack of students of color in AP likely contributes to the hesitation of other students to potentially enroll. Still, opening up access, others believe, will negatively impact who the program was originally designed for (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2004; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b; VanTassel-Baska, 2001). However, as the findings show, at RCHS at least, advanced students are supportive of sharing the AP experience with more diverse students, acknowledging the affective benefits for those who would likely enroll in AP and those students who might not think (or were advised) it is an option for them. These benefits include feeling a greater connection to students who have a different perspective; diversity in students participating in the programming increases and evolves that feeling of connection.

One can argue, of course, that breaking those barriers is a sign of strength, a positive attribute of going outside one's comfort zone. If we can argue that of our students of color, we can argue that of our White students as well. Many students in this study support more diversity in their AP courses; hearing the perspectives of others was often cited as a positive side of the AP experience. Not only is there opportunity for establishing new relationships, working with various strengths and weaknesses, and developing empathy, but these skills are applicable to college, career and functioning in society. The world is diverse; students must know how to function in it. This is not without challenge of course, but we want to challenge students.

Other ways that remove a student from their comfort zone can benefit students is by breaking routine. School can often feel like a ritual of bells and buses, lesson plans that are too long and lunches that are too short. Interruptions to routine—whether that is a change in location,

unusual projects, or enrichment activities—are memorable. They are fun; they are talked about later and often recalled fondly and as a positive aspect of AP (Kolluri, 2018). Structure is important and removing structure can impact students who are more comfortable knowing what their day to day is going to be like. Structured routines are established early in education and for good reason. Some structure is necessary. The structure associated with AP is necessary to cover material in time for the AP exam, but it is clear from the findings that there is a desire for some differentiation. Differentiation could mean using more challenging texts, digging into content that is otherwise glossed over yet is actually interesting to students, getting outside the classroom, breaking up table groups so students collaborate with a variety of peers, or incorporating more creativity into subjects we do not often associate with creativity such as the STEM courses. However, AP was not designed for advanced students; it was designed for motivated college bound students which includes far more today than just the typical student with gifts and talents (Dixon, 2006; Gallagher, 2009). The suggested means of differentiation is the responsibility of the teacher of the AP course, not AP itself.

Although some students in this study implied negative aspects about both comfort and being outside of their comfort zone, with caution and balance, future students can greatly benefit from each. From this balance of comfort and discomfort, the potential for growth is outstanding. From this study, being able to work with and get to know other students, taking on new challenges and succeeding, and finding enjoyment outside of one's comfort levels builds confidence. So how do AP stakeholders create an environment that builds confidence? Students in this study mostly experienced confidence in silos, though of course there were outliers. For example, students who were inspired to learn more about a subject or to pursue a career experienced confidence inwardly while others, in a more outwardly way, experienced confidence

by expressing themselves in group discussions or taking on a leadership role in a project. Most students, however, will experience a growth in confidence by overcoming the rigor of an AP course. Students who struggle found ways to overcome through recognizing a need for breaks, developing a healthy perspective on the task, or learning to better focus. Several students in the study described feeling flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Eccles et al., 1983; Shernoff et al., 2016), wherein their interest and focus align as to make the passage of time unnoticeable. Each of these is an inward experience that connects to achievement. These social-emotional types of skills however need to be better addressed by advanced programs (Eckert & Robins, 2017). At RCHS, social-emotional aspects of learning lessons have been a loosely required daily activity post-pandemic; however, it is not consistent from teacher to teacher, nor are they geared specifically to high achieving students. The generalization of such lessons for an entire population does not address the needs of unique learners, regardless of skill level. One must ask what other structures can be put in place to address the social-emotional needs of more specific groups of students.

When students are confident in an AP course, the short- and long-term values are clear: confidence connects to cognitive engagement and achievement. When so much is attributed to AP exam participation and scores, the more confident a student is going in, perhaps they are more likely to do well. Furthermore, confidence will greatly serve students as they continue toward their academic and career goals. Confidence also may increase how one enjoys college and career.

Though it has been discussed how being around like-minded peers can increase affective engagement, making actual *connections* to others strengthens engagement (Appleton et al., 2008). Diverse perspectives are valuable, but there is a difference between *hearing* a different perspective and *listening* to a different perspective. This is how a sense of culturally relevant

community is strengthened through engagement (Kolluri, 2018). Connecting to others at depths greater than surface level creates empathy, something arguably lacking in society. Feeling connected to others, even in times of struggle, can help maintain motivation. Students recognize the shared aspect of a negative experience; being in it together can alleviate some of that bad experience. Bonding over a lackluster teacher, mammoth amounts of homework, or the stress of upcoming exams can increase engagement through the formation of study groups or managing social-emotional surprises through a supportive network of classmates. Research has recently explored, however, the tightrope act of bonding to support social emotional health and distraction from rigorous study (Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick, et al., 2018). High achieving students are likely to power through, many suffering silently, but having a safety net of peers to share in the misery (as one participant implied) makes it, at times, less miserable—even fun on occasion.

Another component that contributes to greater affective engagement in AP courses is through a connection to content (Appleton et al., 2008). We know students will often take AP because it looks promising on a transcript (a short-term value; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Maina et al., 2020), however, for a student to experience something meaningful in the content is why many of us go into education. We want to impact lives, so the more we can make what we teach meaningful to who we teach, the greater the system (AP, schools, communities, society) benefits. This requires, however, constantly updating content in a highly and quickly evolving world. Education is notoriously slow to evolve, and some teachers are too comfortable with their content so that it never changes, thus disconnecting students who would rather connect to content programmed for them in their phones and social media. Teachers are not algorithms, but we can try to provide meaningful content in order to

build skills. When students see something relevant to their lives or who they want to be, interest, enjoyment and, consequently, overall engagement increases, and value becomes more immediate as well as long term (Kolluri, 2018).

When students feel comfortable or experience meaningful moments outside their comfort zones, when they feel growing confidence in what they can do and who they can be, and when students find significance in relationships and content, the more students enjoy AP, the more they are inspired, and the stronger AP programming can be. Course lore gets passed down from grade to grade, through siblings and friends, babysitters, and cousins. At RHCS, for example, what to take and who to take it with is often discussed among families and neighbors it seems. But if we can better provide these positive affective experiences throughout all of AP programming, and ideally, throughout schools, we can better meet the needs of all students.

Negative Affective Experiences

The more we can encourage and support the positive experience in AP, the more we can focus on changing the negative affective culture of AP. Though not always completely disengaging students, these experiences can derail, distract, or distance students from their motivation to enroll or desire to do well, creating a cycle of positive and negative engagement (Appleton et al., 2008; Fatou & Kubiszewski, 2018; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Newmann, 1992; Wiseman et al., 2016). In other words, the stresses of AP impede students from progressing in timely, effective, and meaningful ways. While not all students are at a point they can view negatives as positives, we see from the findings that it is possible. This is the key to combating the negative affective experiences students may undergo.

When it comes to high achieving students, comparison and competitiveness appear as a natural part of AP, high school, college, career, and life. Students who are college oriented know

they are competing to get in. College students know that they may be competing for various jobs upon completing their degree. Career folks compete for advancement. We compete in traffic, for the best offer on a home, and then some of us raise tiny competitors who follow our examples. It is not surprising to find that competitiveness is so prominent an experience in AP courses. From grades, to the number of AP courses taken, to who has the most homework, to who has the worst or most social-emotional issues, students are prone to compare themselves to their peers both in and outside of the AP classroom which may feel threatening in some ways to students (Rinn et al., 2010). Competitiveness can be a motivator, but it can also destroy self-esteem, as it can add an additional layer of stress to an already stressful course. When you factor in open enrollment and the increase in students enrolling due to grade increases and AP exam scores (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016), unprepared students will naturally see the performance of others which causes additional stress and other negative emotions in an AP class (Kolluri, 2018). Competitiveness, like the experience of disappointment to be discussed later, is not always expressed externally which makes it difficult to observe. Of course, kids will often compare with their friends who has the most, least, best, or worst of this or that, but the effects of that are often kept to oneself. Students may feel lost, left behind, or like a failure when they see their peers surpassing them. Imposter syndrome is common among advanced students (Manning et al., 2010; McIntyre, 1992). Or, they might feel disappointed but not devastated. Still others may feel indifferent. This competitive nature of AP classes contributes to further feelings of otherness, loneliness, apathy, or depression (Rimm et al., 2018). The findings in this study are interesting in that many students shared this feeling of competitiveness; however, several saw the positive aspects of it as well. The success of their peers can be a motivator for students to also succeed. Comparing their struggles to each other perhaps lessens feelings of isolation.

Advanced students may find themselves disappointed in their experience in AP. It has been implied of this particular generation, who grew up instantly gratified by technologies and nursed by algorithms, that if something is not exactly how they want it exactly when they want it, they can experience everything from an eyeroll to (perceived) severe harm. In AP programming and school in general, nothing will consistently meet student expectations. Course lore, as previously mentioned, contributes to those expectations. Being told what to expect varies source to source. At RCHS, when course selection begins, teachers review all possible choices within their content areas that a particular grade level may select from during a school-wide day of emphasis. For example, as a 10th grade English Honors teacher, I discuss AP, DE, Honors, and standard level courses available for English 11. Students should have an honest idea of what they are signing up for. Not every student will trust a teacher or counselor however, and not every teacher and counselor will provide an honest review of available courses, and the bias of adults could also dictate how a course is described, so the mythology that gets passed from older students is often the factor that greatly impacts a final choice if a student is susceptible to outside influence. Adults contribute to the disappointment of students whether that is gatekeeping during course selection, making the few students of color singular in their AP existence by discouraging other students of color to enroll, or, as one student experienced, by gatekeeping content discussed in class, deeming a topic too sensitive to discuss among mixed company. Teacher training is an impactful component of AP and can greatly influence how a student affectively (or generally) engages in the course (Clark et al., 2012; C. Finn & Scanlan, 2019b; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Klopfenstein, 2003; Winebrenner, 2006). Additionally, student prior performance in advanced courses (such as going from honors to more challenging AP), prior relationships with teachers, and the ease of previous coursework all raise expectations that

students may have when deciding to enroll in an AP course. Expectations can relate to course, content, instruction, demographics, peers or self. Expectations evolve over the course of a school year. When those expectations are not met, students can feel everything from “*meh*,” as one participant stated, to disappointed, to outright annoyed.

Competitiveness and disappointment are not confined to a classroom or passing time in the halls of the school, as the AP experience occurs both in the classroom (the environment) and outside the classroom (the workload). Students experience affective disengagement unique to each.

Within the classroom students may feel isolated, and isolation can come in several forms. The most obvious is in the demographics. AP in RCHS is not reflective of the actual demographics of the school or the district. Demographics are more in line with the demographics of those students identified as TAG. What makes you different isolates you; students may feel the effects of tokenism, giving up parts of their identity or having to carry the burden of representing their tribe (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Tabron & Chambers, 2019). Students can feel internally isolated as well (Rimm et al., 2018), such as when ideology does not match that of their peers or when they feel they are not understanding what the teacher is doing or talking about. This may lead to feelings of boredom (Kolluri, 2018). Students can feel lost, left behind or forgotten, especially when they know that a teacher can have as many as 150 students in their care. At the other end of the spectrum, students may feel isolated because they are so far advanced compared to their peers. This too can lead to boredom (Rimm et al., 2018). Isolation also comes as a result of enjoying school, caring about your education and being a responsible student. Students may feel isolated from their non-AP peers. Isolation, confusion, and boredom lead to feelings of frustration when there is no support or attention brought to the issue. Students

sometimes suffer in silence because they are the school's high achievers; they are supposed to be *fine*. Many emotions associated with affective engagement (and disengagement) are not observable which makes identifying them difficult (Eccles et al., 1983; Suldo, Storey, et al., 2019). When compounded with the comparison to others, students trap themselves in a fairly vicious cycle. But why speak up when you are not a priority in the system?

So much hinges on a successful performance in an AP class. After all, the messaging is loud and clear to students: this is all for the AP exam. Students may feel bombarded with this messaging, as the pressure advanced students already put on themselves is often made worse by this looming test and its treasure trove of potential college credit. The pace of instruction and the coverage of content add to the stress students feel. To paraphrase one student in her interview, how can we cover all of U.S. history by the exam when history is happening every day?

To cover so much content in an AP course, much is completed outside of class. Students may not be prepared for the amount of work and time outside of class their AP courses will occupy. Course lore is one thing, but reality is another. Perception is an important layer of engagement and how students perceive an environment or workload can change how engaged a student may be (Fatou & Kubiszewski, 2018; Griffioen et al., 2018; Xerri et al., 2018).

Advanced students who often breeze through their regular and honors courses before enrolling in AP may discover that they are not prepared. This workload leads to students feeling even more stress, pressure, competitiveness, and frustration. It is arguable that clarity regarding coursework may discourage students from enrolling, however that transparency will support students, counselors, and parents in making sound decisions during course selection. And though many will have camaraderie in the struggle, others experience amplified isolation. Without support and strategies, students may experience an overwhelming sense of doubt, dread, or apathy. Worse,

some may completely give up or wallow in melancholy and hopelessness. Not all students will experience these emotions all the time; many may never experience any of these. Some students, with support and strategies, will turn the negative into positive. They will view stress and struggle as building character, perseverance, and preparation. As discussed previously, overcoming struggle builds confidence, and confidence contributes to success. Social emotional awareness and positive feedback on academic emotions can combat these negative feelings and improve engagement (Arguedas et al., 2016; Lovelace et al., 2017).

Research Question 2: How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?

The value of an experience is often tied to expectation, enjoyment, usefulness or meaning, and from these, students gain interest, achievement, and engagement (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). While this study did not specifically inquire about student expectations regarding AP, value was described in both expected and surprising ways. Though students may experience a rollercoaster of emotions along the way, there seems to be some value found in AP, at some point, for most students. It is yet to be determined whether that is solely due to the success of the College Board's Advanced Placement program, the result of specific teachers at RCHS, or a combination of the two. AP is not without criticism, though for the most part, it is held in high regard. From the moment they arrive in an AP classroom, opportunity to discover value begins and may last for an indeterminate length of time, though research emphasizes the value of short-term benefits such as grade weighting and exam scores as motivation to enroll (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016; Maina et al., 2020).

For those students who have a natural love of learning or an interest in the subject of an AP course, the value is often found in the moment as an experience occurs. This can be in the

form of appreciating content, the realization of developing skills, evolving perspectives, building a relationship with a teacher, or sharing a fun experience with peers. For advanced students who often feel isolated for enjoying learning, AP courses counter that by allowing like-minded students to learn together. While advanced students do not always outwardly display the conflict between fitting in and enjoying school, some internalize the conflict that like-minded grouping can address (Silverman, 1997). With open enrollment, RCHS, like many other schools, does not limit who may take AP, so more students can take up the opportunity. This can lead to fewer feelings of isolation by being in a course with similar students, as they find a sense of comfort in familiarity, camaraderie in shared struggle and enjoyment working with others. However, that does not necessarily mean all students who enroll will expect or discover value in the moment. Finding unexpected moments of value, on the other hand, are not harmful, as any meaningful in-the-moment experience supports building more long-term values. For example, a student who does not yet know she is interested in a STEM career and who only takes AP Chemistry for the grade bump or to impress colleges discovers she actually is interested in learning more due to some activity or lesson presented by the teacher, thus her engagement in the course and desire to do well increases. Hence, we see an in-the-moment value inform her short-term goals related to grades plus potential long-term value as her career goals begin to take shape.

What is disappointing, however, is the student emphasis on grades, transcripts, exams and college credit over or as a reward for learning for learning's sake. As Klopfenstein and Lively (2016) explain, an open enrollment into AP is likely due to access to and the potential for weighted grades, higher GPA and exam scores that reward with college credit. The value for many may not actually be the building of knowledge. While students shared several experiences in which their affective engagement was increased by teacher creativity, negative affective

elements likely detracted from finding real value in those experiences. For example, the stress that students experience in AP might, for some, inform some long-term value about perseverance, but for others, may detract to the point that the negative outweighs any positive aspect of the experience. Not all students love school; most educators are not so naive as to think they do. Even our most advanced students often do not love school. Is this a societal problem—that learning for the sake of learning is not held at the same value as a score on the AP exam? As the student perspective evolves about the value of AP, is this evolving so that in the future there is less value in the moment and more toward short- and long-term values? Or might we as educators be able to reverse this? Perhaps the student perspective is evolving *away* from those short-term values of grade bumps and AP exam scores especially as school systems do away with ranking students by GPA and as universities re-evaluate the reward for top AP exam scores. From the findings of this study (Table 8), it is noteworthy that most students interviewed described value as immediate or long term.

That is not to say that there is no value in the short-term elements of grade weighting, AP exam scores and impressive transcripts. Research shows that these components of value are held above interest and engagement (Chatterji et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2018; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016). Students are not naive either and know that top colleges are competitive and costly. Therefore, for many students, the value of AP will be how it supports them getting into college with as much credit as possible. Students perceive the struggle and hardship as worth it because it gives them a better chance to access top universities. Perhaps that is where they believe real learning takes place. Perhaps that is where they expect to find more immediate value in their experience, and AP is just a part of the system to get them there. One of the interviewed students described tolerating a subject that she hates in order to look attractive to colleges. *Tolerate* and

hate. Should we be dismayed that this is potentially where our advanced students currently exist? Or impressed that they know the game and system so well that they do what they must to achieve their goals? It is both impressive and saddening. As adults, we understand this perspective because we do it in our careers and improving life for our families. Furthermore, if these short-term values are here to stay, we must better support students who may be new to AP, who struggle in AP, or who do not hold these values as important.

AP is not only a means to achieve college credit (short term value), but it also prepares students in many ways for college and beyond (long term value). Again, referring to the findings in Table 8, the rigor, stamina, and interesting content of AP are valuable as students move into college and career. Students recognize those values, even when the immediate experience is difficult, as preparation for the difficulty of college classes, college schedules, and narrowing career fields. Beyond that, AP is valuable in the sense that a lot of what students learn has real world application such as argumentative writing, understanding how the government works, and understanding psychological development. Critical thinking, empathy and understanding the perspectives of others are also important life skills that several students described in their experiences in AP.

Ultimately, we want all students to gain something of value from their experience in AP and in the broader advanced academic programming including DE and honors. Immediate, short- or long-term, all are valid if they are meaningful to the student. If a student's goal is to score a 4 or 5 on their AP exam, and that is the value they get from the course, then that is valuable, and whether they acknowledge it or not, so is the process that helped them to arrive at that score. From the findings of this study, the student voice is telling us that they will determine what is valuable to them, and as educators, we must be mindful of what we emphasize and how that

impacts student experience. For example, one student described a countdown on the board in the front of the classroom: ___ *days until the AP Exam!* Imagine being a student in that room, watching that number tick down each day, constantly reminded of what you *think* matters most to that teacher. Your eyes drift to that number often, removing you from the moment, the lesson, the experience. That countdown may alter your potential experience every day; your experience in turn alters the value you may discover.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The purpose of this study is to examine student affective engagement in advanced courses and understand the potential student experience. The findings discovered through the lived experience of students at RCHS show that some improvements or balance needs to be made to the programming for advanced students at RCHS and potentially other schools. However, the findings also show that there is much that is respectable about the programming and should be continued and supported. As this study focused only on the affective engagement experience of a sample of student stakeholders, the findings illustrate how the affective component of engagement corresponds to the student's sense of well-being which may have an impact on both learning behaviors and achievement (Geertshuis, 2019). From these findings, there are several recommendations to be made that support and encourage the positive potential affective experience of advanced students and some that address the more negative aspects of the experience. As previously stated, this study is not a critique on open enrollment policies, or the encouragement of open access supported by the College Board and only hopes to improve the affective experience for all students who choose to participate in advanced programming. The recommendations outlined in Table 10 are targeted toward adult stakeholders who have the

power to support students, however, student voice matters. Ask students about their experience and let them share their voice in meaningful ways.

Table 10

Recommendations

Findings	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
Positive affective experiences	AP (and other teachers of advanced subjects) should attain gifted endorsement	Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2018; Suldo, Storey, et al., 2019
Negative affective experiences	AP (and other teachers of advanced subjects) should attain gifted endorsement	Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick, et al., 2018; Suldo, Storey, et al., 2019
Stress levels of AP students	Targeted SEAL lessons for advanced students; provide resources and awareness for teachers	Arguedas et al., 2016; Eckert & Robins, 2017; Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick, et al., 2018; Suldo, Storey, et al., 2019
Value/affective experience of AP courses	Provide consistent and clear reviews and recommendations regarding advanced course options prior to enrollment	Chatterji et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2018; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2016

Note: AP = Advanced Placement; SEAL = Social Emotional Aspects of Learning

Recommendation 1

The positive affective experiences of comfort, connection, confidence, interest, focus, and perseverance as potential experiences of advanced students in AP programming should be encouraged and supported. For many advanced students, these experiences may be what keep them in advanced courses and should be considered strengths of the program. By creating a comfortable environment, yet also thinking outside the norm, increasing collaboration so that students may better connect with peers familiar and new, exploring content that relates to student lives, and positive reinforcement of struggle and perseverance in order to build confidence are

ways in which we can continue to affectively engage students. While many AP teachers work with advanced students year after year, as of the recent evaluation of the district's TAG programming, very few staff members have an endorsement or higher in gifted education, and it is implied in the evaluation that RCPS views AP training as sufficient for teachers of advanced learners AP course training, however, does not train teachers to work with advanced students. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers of AP (and other advanced courses) are provided the opportunity to participate in an endorsement in gifted education.

Asking teachers to implement district curriculum and goals and maintain AP structure and pacing often results in routines which can, from a student perspective, appear stale. Teachers are relied on to differentiate for students which can come in the form of tiered lessons, creative breaks from typical AP structure, and more student choice to explore meaningful content. To support students feeling comfort (and feel outside of their comfort zone) in AP, teachers should be encouraged to find that balance of structure and out-of-the-box thinking that allows students to enjoy their experience. That skill to differentiate to better affectively engage students, as previously stated, is not developed in AP training.

Teachers should also continue to provide opportunities to work collaboratively, increasing the feeling of connection, as that appears to increase affective engagement by allowing students to work with like-minded peers, discover new points of view through working with diverse students, and adopt leadership roles in projects. It is also recommended that teachers continue to provide opportunity to connect to content, even if that content is controversial or heavy or uncomfortable. Finally, a better understanding of the needs of advanced learners, can soften the struggle, so to speak, and help inspire and fortify confidence in students. An

endorsement in giftedness is a great resource to help teachers increase these (and other) experiences of affective engagement.

Recommendation 2

A gifted endorsement will additionally help stakeholders address the more negative affective experiences of advanced students. Awareness of how advanced students develop psychologically will go a long way in addressing the potential feelings of competitiveness, disappointment, and stress. By addressing those, we may better support those students who experience more extreme feelings of hopelessness, melancholy, and apathy. By increasing, for example, the feelings of comfort, connection, confidence and enjoyment (again, among other positive feelings), we can counter the more negative feelings.

Ultimately, we do not want to be ‘jackhammer’ educators, clearing the path of any potential struggle, obstacle, harm, or hardship, as some parents do for their child. But we also do not want students to burn out, to fall into depths of despair because they (or their parents, teachers, colleges, peers, or society) put them under such pressure to achieve (Suldo, O’Brennan, et al., 2018). A gifted endorsement will better help educators balance rigor with more positive experiences, allowing more students to develop the perspective that several participants described, being able to understand how hard work, perseverance, and focus are beneficial to future success.

Recommendation 3

It is also recommended to specifically target the stress levels of students in AP using consistent Social and Emotional Aspect of Learning lessons designed for advanced students and a tiered process and referral form for identifying advanced students who may be at-risk emotionally. From the findings, it seems that much is connected to the intense pressure students

find themselves under whether that is at the hands of themselves, their peers, their teachers, or society. “More frequent stressors associated with academic demands predicted greater school burnout. This trend is consistent with other studies with AP/IB samples, which found stress due to academic requirements posed greater risk to mental health (i.e., lower life satisfaction, greater psychopathology) than to grades (Suldo et al., 2009; Suldo et al., 2015)” (Suldo, Shaunessy-Dedrick, et al., 2018, p. 363). As stated in the literature review, educators are not as adept at identifying emotionally at-risk students (Suldo, Storey, et al., 2019), therefore the provision of resources and strategies for parents, teachers and other stakeholders in the identification of emotionally at-risk students is recommended. A gifted endorsement attained by teachers and other stakeholders would support increased identification of emotionally at-risk students in advanced courses and the development of specific support structures and systems that could be incorporated to existing multi-tiered supports. It is also important to provide students with resources to help them identify the positive and negative aspects of their increased workload due to AP, as “39% of students emerged as at-risk based on self-report of emotional indicators and school academic records” (Suldo, Storey, et al., 2019, p. 222) which was higher than the percentage identified by teachers. One way to do this, for example, is to have an honest discussion about the number of AP courses (or other advanced courses) a student would like to participate in and the value, effect, and ability of a student to do so.

Additional Recommendations

Prior to the course selection window, before, for example, RCHS teachers prepare for the day of emphasis on the courses students can opt to take the following year, teachers should be knowledgeable and clear on what the experience may be like in their content AP courses and be able to clearly and consistently communicate that to students. In other words, content and grade

level cohorts should construct a common review of courses so that all students are receiving the same information. This knowledge will increase through communicating with teachers of those courses to provide an honest review of how students might engage in the course and the emotions to be prepared for especially as a result of the rigor of the course. Additionally, teachers and counselors should more clearly discuss with students what they want and expect to get out of enrolling in AP. Clarity about the varied levels of value and potential affective experience will better help students and families make the best choice for that student. As previously stated, clarity could discourage some students from enrolling, so it is important to make students feel encouraged and supported at the point of decision should they choose to enroll.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research relate primarily to expanding the timing of the study or altering it altogether. Foremost, interviews were conducted from the end of April 2023 to the end of May 2023, which includes the AP exam testing window (the first 2 weeks of May). More students may have been willing to participate in an interview had the exam window not conflicted with their interest in doing so. Another notable consequence of the timing of interviews is how any stress of the AP exam window during and after which some of the interviews occurred may have shaped the descriptions that stood out to students about their experience. In other words, the stress of AP exams may have acted as a lens through which students recalled their experiences, though no participant blatantly stated they felt stressed immediately leading up to the interview.

Another recommendation is to expand the number and time frame of the interviews: an interview at the beginning and end of the academic year. This way, data can be collected on both

student motivation to enroll and expectations of the affective experience in their specific AP courses for that year and compared to descriptions of their actual experience and perceived value of that experience.

Furthermore, it would be informative to hear from students outside of advanced programming to better understand their affective experience. Often, with the general population, gap groups, or struggling students, we use numerical data like grades, attendance, discipline referrals, and test scores to illustrate what we already know—there are problems. But perhaps hearing from a small number of students in a similar phenomenological study—not just a massive survey sent out to apathetic students who are overly surveyed—but taking a real opportunity to listen to students, will allow us to make connections between these groups and better understand the root affective issues in their experience as students at RCHS. In this way, the needs of all students are prioritized.

Summary

The experience of affective engagement and value in AP courses, as evidenced by the participants at RCHS, has the potential to be both negative and positive, however, an increase in positive emotions can greatly offset the more negative ones. Understanding how the experiences fit in the broader concepts of *Others*, *Stress*, and *Inspiration*—concepts that all students experience at school and that adult stakeholders seemingly have much control over—will allow us to better address these experiences for all students by reducing impediments as students progress. This study shows that listening to students is most important in determining what that experience is actually like for learners in advanced programming. We simply cannot assume they are always fine because they are advanced students. What some students may view as a positive may more negatively affect another and vice versa. Each of these potential affective elements

can affect how and in what aspects of AP students find value. As the saying goes, knowing is half the battle, so the more we can prioritize advanced learners—or at least bring equitable attention to—the better we can support all students. Once we know student experience, we can place supports, resources, and awareness front and center.

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APPENDIX A

Parent Permission Form

Parental Permission for Student Participation in Research

Title: *A Phenomenology of Affective Engagement in Advanced Placement Courses*

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to let your child participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to let your child be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose of the Study

If you agree, your child will be asked to participate in a research study about their experience with affective engagement in AP courses. Affective engagement is defined as positive and negative emotions, interest and value associated with school. The purpose of this study is to determine how satisfied students are with their experience in AP courses and how to best meet the needs of diverse learners in AP programming.

What is my child going to be asked to do?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to participate in one 30-60-minute interview regarding their experience in AP courses as it relates to affective engagement.

What are the risks involved in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, by sharing their experience in AP programming, students will help stakeholders better meet the needs of all students, thus improving the experience of participating in an AP course.

Does my child have to participate?

No, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

What if my child does not want to participate?

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If your child does not want to participate, they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study, they can change their mind later without any penalty.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your student's participation you can contact me at **571-215-0033** or send an email to matthew.henry@acps.k12.va.us or mwhenry@wm.edu for any questions or if you

feel that you have been harmed. This study has been reviewed and approved by William & Mary's Protection of Human Subject Committee and the study number is **EDIRC-2023-03-07-16224-tlcross**. **Please note this study is a cumulative project as part of my program of study in William and Mary's Executive Planning, Policy, and Leadership (EPPL) Doctorate and not part of my responsibilities as an employee with Alexandria City Schools.**

Thank you and sincerely,

Matthew Henry

Signature

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to **allow** them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study you may discontinue his, her or their participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

NOTE: Include the following if recording is optional:

- _____ My child MAY be [audio and/or video] recorded.
- _____ My child MAY NOT be [audio and/or video] recorded.

Printed Name of Child

Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

Date

**Please include a parent/guardian contact email here _____
So that the interview date and time can be shared with you once scheduled.**

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2023-04-15 AND EXPIRES ON 2024-04-15.

APPENDIX B

Interview Interest Form

Interview Interest Form

If you would like to participate in an interview regarding your experience in AP courses, please provide your email address below. This is not required, but may help the researcher better understand the affective engagement and experience of students in AP courses. You will agree to participate in one 30-60-minute interview during school hours (or over Zoom if there is a conflict), to take place in April of 2023. Indicating interest does not necessarily guarantee you will be selected to participate.

- Question One: Student first name: _____
- Question Two: Student last name: _____
- Question Three: Student school email address: _____

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2023-04-15 AND EXPIRES ON 2024-04-15.

APPENDIX C

Student Assent Form

***to be sent to student email prior to scheduled interview AND provided in person in order to sign.**

Research Participation Informed Consent Form

Education Department

College of William & Mary

Protocol #: EDIRC-2023-03-07-16224-tlcross

Title: *A Phenomenology of Affective Engagement in Advanced Placement Courses*

Principal Investigators: Mr. Matthew Henry and Dr. Tracy Cross

By signing below, I certify that I have been given the following information with respect to my participation in this study:

1. Purpose of the research: The purpose of this research is to determine the experience of advanced students in AP courses as it relates to affective engagement in order to better serve advanced students in AP programming.

2. Procedure to be followed: As a participant in this study, I will be asked to participate in one 30-60 minute interview either in person or via Zoom.

3. Known risks: There are no known risks associated with this study.

4. Potential benefits. There are no known benefits of participating in the study. However, my participation in this research will contribute to the development of our understanding about the nature of the study.

5. Statement of confidentiality: My data will be anonymous. My data will not be associated with my name, nor will it be coded so that my responses may be linked to my name in any way. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

6. Voluntary participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. I may choose to skip any question or activity.

7. Incentive for participation: Participants will not be compensated for their participation

8. I am aware that I must have parent permission to participate if I am under 18 years of age.

9. I may obtain a copy of the research results by contacting Mr. Henry at mwhenry@wm.edu or matthew.henry@acps.k12.va.us

10. Termination of participation: Participation may be terminated by the experimenter if it is deemed that the participant is unable to perform the tasks presented.

11. **Questions or concerns** regarding participation in this research should be directed to: Dr. Cross at 757-221-2210, tlcross@wm.edu.

12. I am aware that I may report dissatisfactions with any aspect of this study to Dr. Tom Ward, the Chair of the

Protection of Human Subjects Committee, by telephone (757-221-2358) or email (jward@wm.edu).

I agree to participate in this study and have read all the information provided on this form.

By signing below, I confirm that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Student Signature

Date

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2023-04-15 AND EXPIRES ON 2024-04-15.

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview Questions

Data Collection Interview Questions

As phenomenology asks one to consider lived experience or life as we live it, it is important that the interview begin with open ended questions about the student experience as close to immediate as possible so that the responses remain pre-reflexive. A one sheet with a definition of affective engagement can be provided to students. Student friendly language such as “emotionally” rather than affectively may also be substituted.

- Warm up questions:
 - How is your year going so far?
 - What grade are you in?
 - How many AP courses are you taking?
- Please describe a moment in which you felt affectively or emotionally engaged in your AP course. Can you describe the experience to me? What were you aware of at that time? How did this/these moment/s affect you?
- What feelings were generated from this/these experiences? What thoughts stood out to you?
- How did these feelings and/or thoughts affect your engagement in the class?
- What does it mean for you to feel emotionally engaged in an AP course?
- How do you know when you are emotionally engaged in an AP course?
- Can you describe a time that you felt either particular value in your AP course or when you felt value about an experience or component in the course?
- Please describe a time when you felt an AP course held some amount of value for you.
- Overall, how would you describe your experience in your AP course(s)? You may speak freely about one or more of your courses.

APPENDIX E

Thematic Coding Spreadsheet

Interview Name	Theme	Theme	Theme	Theme	Theme	Value	Theme	Theme	Theme	Theme-Environment	Theme-work	Outliers?		
Student 1	ELL	Comfort	Pride/Overcomi	Connection	Impact	Confidence	Long term value							
Student 2	TAG	Comfort		Connection			Short term and Control							
Student 3	TAG	Comfort/Out of Relief/Overcom	Connection			Confidence	Immediate							
Student 4		Comfort/Out of comfort zone	Connection				Immediate	Fun						
Student 5			Persistence	Connection	Inspiration	Confidence/cool	Long term value	Fun						
Student 6	TAG	out of the room		Connection to peers/lack of connection to course	Long term (real Fun if interests)	Confidence	Immediate and long term							
Student 7				Connection	Focused	Confidence	Immediate and long term							
Student 8	Spectrum	out of the room		Connection			Immediate and real world							
Student 9	TAG						Immediate and Control							
Student 10	TAG	out of comfort zone/out of room	Connection				Immediate	Excited/Love/feeling like a kid a	Disappointment	Isolation	Stilled?	Reflective	Perspective/aw	sanitized, overly sensitive
Student 11	TAG	out of comfort :Overcoming struggle	Connection				Immediate	Excited	Pressure	Isolation	Meltd	Reflective	Perspective/aw	hunger, student produced engagement
Student 12	TAG	out of the room	Connection				Short term and long term value	curious/desire to Confidence	Pressure/Competitiveness	Isolation	Confusion/Frustration	Reflective	Perspective/aw	pressured, feel bombarded
Student 13	TAG						Immediate value		Comparing to questioning	Isolation	Bored/Stressed/overwhelm	Reflective	Perspective/aw	pressured, feel bombarded with messaging

APPENDIX F

Analysis: Thematic Coding and Categorization

Research Questions:

- How do students experience affective engagement in AP courses?
- How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?

Affective engagement

● **Positive**

●

Comfort	Confidence	Connection	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Environment ● In peers ● Taken out of comfort zone ● Outside of routine or norm of class structure or activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overcoming struggle to see benefits ● “Locked in” ● Focused ● Perseverance ● Relief ● Desire to learn more ● Inspired ● Productive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To peers ● To content ● To teacher ● To real world ● To goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Excitement ● Fun ● Interested ● Like a kid again ● Control

Advanced students experience POSITIVE affective engagement in AP courses:

- Through feeling comfortable and being taken out of their comfort zones
- By feeling confident or developing confidence when they are challenged
- By feeling connected to components and extensions of the course
- By simple enjoyment

● **Negative**

●

Competitiveness	Disappointment	Toward environment	Toward work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bitterness ● Resentment ● Comparison ● Pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In expectation ● Doubt ● Apprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Boredom ● Painful/Dread ● Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ With 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frustration ● Lost ● Overwhelmed ● Daunting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Worry ● In content, delivery, depth ● “Mourning for lost opportunities” ● Apathy ● Questioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● in and from non AP peers ● Melancholy ● Annoyance ● Tension ● “Meh” ● Stifled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Heavy ● Intimidated ● “In hell together”
--	--	--	--

Advanced students experience negative affective engagement in AP courses:

- Through competition
- When expectations are not met or are met
- Related to the environment
- Related to the class activities

● Neutral or emotional processes (?)

●

Reflective	Perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Of self ● Of others ● Of course ● Of content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive to negative ● Negative to positive ● On self ● On others ● On world

Advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses:

- By develop affective-reflective skills
- By gaining perspective on self
- By gaining perspective on others
- By gaining perspective on the world
- By gaining positive perspective on negative experiences
- By gaining negative perspective on positive experiences

Value

● Value

●

Immediate	Short Term	Long Term
-----------	------------	-----------

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Love of learning ● In the moment ● Shared experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GPA ● AP Exams ● College admittance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Career ● College major ● Real world applications
---	---	--

- **Outliers**

-

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disinterest ● Satisfied ● Sanitized/overly sensitive ● Humorous ● “Student produced engagement”

-

Advanced students find value in AP courses:

- Through immediate or in the moment experiences
- Through experiences related to short term goals
- Through discovering how experiences will impact long term goals and life.

APPENDIX G

Analysis: In-Vivo Coding

Themes and Illustrative Quotes

Research Question 1: How do students experience affective engagement in AP courses?

*numbers assigned to students; student 1 was not able to be recorded so specific quotes are not available

Theme: Positive Emotions

- Sub theme: comfort
 - Out of the norm: “I was doing research and seeing the actual results. I was testing a hypothesis in a way that felt very science, because bacteria and stuff is all very microscopic, and **it’s not something you talk about in your everyday life**. But in a science setting, that’s where you hear about it most often, probably. So I think that was probably the coolest part, just doing something that worked and that **was very 140science.**” (12)
 - Stepping out of typical home/school environment to a coffee shop: “ I was like, “I’m just going to go there, **escape**. I’m going to try it again.” I went there and then, I don’t know, I just tried to look at it from a different perspective and just tried different methods of solving it, the boring. But I did, I tried a bunch of different ways. And I finally just found a way that worked. And I started doing it on multiple different of the equations and it all worked. And I was like, “Oh, here we go.” **Yeah, maybe it’s the change of scenery**. I don’t know.” (11)
 - Out of the norm: “ a lot of it is spent focusing on AP exams. But then there’s these **moments where it’s like, I get to write about what I want and just about me**. And it’s also teaching me good writing skills. And I just felt super excited to go home and just write this” (11)
 - Out of the norm: “I guess that moment as well as it’s going to sound rather morbid, but I remember cracking a lot of jokes when we were dissecting a cat last year in AP bio, which was another moment that I felt pretty engaged in just because **it was so unique and I had never gotten to do something like that before.**” (10)
 - Out of the norm: “It was **just so foreign** to have a preserved corpse of a cat in front of me and I tend to use humor kind of as a coping... but that wasn’t really what it was used for here. It was more just, I think in this case I actually **wasn’t familiar with a lot of my lab partners** so it was kind of a way to be like, “Hey, this thing is kind of gross, but also kind of cool and we’re going to have to name all the muscles by the end of it, so we might as well have fun while doing it.” (10)
 - Out of the norm: “And we just **took a walk in the woods** and even though I feel a lot of my classmates would not admit it, I think everyone had a pretty good time just

- outside. And then we got back in and there's the turtle in the APES classroom and my teacher took out the turtle and just kind of set him on the table. And we just watched the turtle for a really long time and nobody said anything. And it was an interesting moment because I feel like a lot of the time I would overhear these same people being like, "Oh my gosh, I hate this class. I should have dropped it when I could have." But then in that everyone just having fun in the woods and then just watching a turtle afterwards just sit on a lab table. It was in the least cheesy way I can phrase this kind of did show how maybe there's something everybody can find and connect with an environmental science and just..." (10)
- Out of the norm: "Well, it was the first time the class actually split up into four larger groups and actually **got to meet people outside of my table group**. I felt like my table group at the time was kind of weird and whatnot, **so got to branch outside of that.**" (8)
 - Out of the norm: "We've done a lot of **fun outside labs** that I thought were interesting. We would go out into the water and like in Trinkapen, the creek, and we would do labs where we found the species inside, found the pH of the water, how much runoff got into the water. And it was really interesting 'cause I was like, I walk past this water every day, but I've never actually thought of it in terms of how much pollution is in this water and how is it affecting the forest around it." (6)
 - Out of the norm: "Yeah, I'm trying to think. I think probably something that I would think of would be, probably in World last year where we would do, I don't know what it's called, a Socratic seminar where we would all talk about a certain passage that we spent the last week reading and we would all kind of sit in a circle and talk about the historical significance of it was, and we all had different opinions on it and it was pretty funny when people would kind of disagree on certain things. And I always thought that was very interesting and I had a fun time doing those because **I felt like it was a break from the normal kind of learning about history from that we do normally on a daily basis just learning the facts and the dates** and it kind of just made it more interesting and I thought it was a cool way to learn about history while also having fun with it, yeah." (3)
 - Out of the norm: "I think it was fun because it was typically about a more, **it was about a niche topic or a topic that wasn't widely discussed**. And so it was kind of fun to learn about something that **we wouldn't normally have learned about**. And it's interesting to see how other people feel about that sort of thing and see other people's opinions and not just learning this is what happened and when, but how do you feel about what happened this time? And it gave me a better perspective of everyone else in the class and their views on things." (3)
 - Out of the norm: "And I think that in physics class, you have to take a step back and compare things. And that's **not something that I do in real life** because I just take things like one at a time in real life, and I don't really compare them. But in physics,

- you do have to compare them. So that was neat for me to take a step back and think of things in relation to each other. And that was really neat to me because **that's not something that I do normally**. So it forced me to think in a different way.” (2)
- Comfortability: “I think the main value for me is that I know that most people who choose to take an AP course is because they are somewhat interested in the subject matter and they **want to be surrounded by other people who are also interested in it to a certain degree**. And just being surrounded by people who have something and who will contribute it to the course. Because I guess with AP courses there's like this, I mean they are technically I guess more challenging, but I feel like a part of that challenge comes from more **student produced engagement**, I guess.” (10)
 - Comfortable/relaxed: “But it was a smaller class size, which always changes the **vibe of the class** entire entirely in my opinion, where it's, at least I feel more willing to speak in a class with fewer people because **it feels more intimate, more relaxed**.” (10)
 - Comfort/Familiarity: “And I also feel like in an AP course you're **surrounded by more like-minded people**. I feel like most of the fights in the school and the stuff like that, they don't happen in AP classes. In AP classes, you're with **more smart people who are actually there to try. Everyone in that class is trying**. So that's kind of good because you're surrounded by **people who think like you**.” (6)
 - Comfort: “Definitely I was **relieved to be done** speaking and have gotten my point across, and it gives you more confidence to hear what everyone else has to say because that you already did your part, and you made your statement and contributed in my way. And it kind of **puts me at ease** so I could just listen to everyone else talk and think about what they said. Just definitely **relief** that I was done with what I had to say, but also maybe giving me the confidence to continue to talk again after hearing what other people have to say.” (3)
 - Comfort: “But I also think in school, I think you are surrounded by the people you take classes with. And I think taking classes **with people who want to challenge themselves kind of makes me feel like the people I'm surrounding myself with are important**. And so I want people in my classes who want to succeed just as much as I do. And **I don't want to be in a class with people who don't want to go to class or don't want to go to school because I do**. And **I want the people around me to want to do good in a class and do good at something because that's what I want for myself**.”
 - Comfort: “And I think, like I said before, I like being in the same room as **people who have similar ideas as me, or not ideas, but similar views for what they want to do in the future, being a knowledgeable person and not just getting a degree**.” (3)
 - Comfort: “And I felt very comfortable in that class.” (2)

- Comfort: “And also the fact that you know you’re going to be in classes where people **also want to be challenged**. So it is a **good atmosphere** and I think that’s fine.”
- Comfort and out of the norm: “I’ve enjoyed them. I think they’re fun for the most part because it makes **you do things that you normally wouldn’t do and it challenges you**. And I think that’s related together. I also like the people because I feel like... **I went to GW Middle School and a lot of the people from GW take Aps because it’s the white kids. So they all go there. So it’s people I’m familiar with which is nice**. I guess in some ways, that’s nice. Some people, I’m like, “I don’t want to see you again.” (2)
- Comfort: “Because I think when you’re doing something, you can definitely gauge how well you’re doing in a moment. Sometimes if you know you’re failing miserably, then you can feel that feeling. But then once you start to not fail as miserably, then **you feel more comforted**.” (2)
- Sub theme: confidence
 - Desire to learn more: “but just when something is **interesting and I want to learn more**. Oh, a good example would be we watched this video about PITX genes in fish in bio, and that was really cool because I like fish...It was cool because we were seeing scientists explain their years of work in research and how it’s important. We had learned about the concepts, but not people actually doing the research to figure out those concepts. So that was **interesting**. Yeah. I don’t think I have a specific feeling just when **I’m curious** about something. I know it, I guess.” (12)
 - Desire to learn/do more: “ And I think we were taking so much time just dissecting it piece by piece that **I hadn’t gotten to say all I wanted to say. And I felt like it was one of those almost, it was a collaborative aha moment. But we were called to stop before the aha had actually happened. So it was that feeling of “No, we’re onto something here and I want to keep getting at it until we put it into words.”** (10)
 - Desire to learn more: “Yeah. In Cold Blood. The first two parts I was like, this is really boring, I just want to get this book over with. And then I totally forgot to read part three. So I read parts three and four together within the same day and **I was like, oh my God, I should have been interested in this way sooner. It’s really interesting to read** about their motives, what they were thinking when they entered the house and everything, and how it affected the rest of the community. So that was really interesting. And then when we watched an interview with the people in the town and how they’re... Some of them hadn’t even read the book because they didn’t want to relive it and they also didn’t like how kept getting brought up every 10 or so years and it was just a constant reminder of it. I was like, maybe we shouldn’t be interested in true crime anymore. And **that was really interesting to think about and I was like, kind of want to learn more about this.**” (4)

- Desire to learn more: “Yeah. When I was like, oh, this is really interesting and **I actually want to keep reading it**. I think it was when there was a letter from Perry’s sister included in the book and I was like, oh, so this didn’t just affect the family of the people who were killed, but it affects the family of the murderers too. And that was like, okay, **let me keep reading to see how else it affected her.**” (4)
- Confidence: “AP Lang has helped me be a **bit more confident** in my writing skills because I’ve **learned things about writing that I didn’t know before.**” (12)
- Confidence: “calculus **inspired** me just to go out and **find out more** about it. I don’t know. I think, if that’s going by the definition, yeah. Yeah. It made me me just, I felt **really productive** when I was doing it, and I felt like, “Okay, **I’m figuring stuff out that I can do well.**” (11)
- Confidence: “Yeah, I think I’ve always been pretty wary of going on to the next level with STEM or something, but when I hear someone who’s pretty accomplished in her field say that, **it makes me feel pretty confident, at least prepared to take on the challenge.**” (5)
- Confidence/overcoming struggle: “ But sometimes I would be really confused because when we got to the last few units, it was super hard. I’d go home and shed a tear or two. And be like, “This is hard.” But then **it felt so good once I got over that.**” (11)
- Confidence/Perseverance: “I have a great teacher and she’s never made me feel like there’s a dumb question, so it **makes me want to keep going.**” (5)
- Confidence/overcoming struggle: “Yeah, probably typically, I wouldn’t say it was something I enjoyed when I was in the moment or I had to prepare for the Socratic seminar, I’m probably be like, “Dang, don’t really want to do this right now.” I think it’s silly or anything, but I think now looking back at it, **I think now that I can say that I really am thankful that our teacher had us do that.** And I think it really was a good **learning experience for me to learn how to talk to people and disagree and agree with people without being disrespectful and being able to tell people my ideas.** And I think definitely in the moment I didn’t like it as much, but maybe after, and especially now after much longer that I **definitely can appreciate it** and I think it was a really nice experience
- Confidence/Inspiration: “And I think it just made me **feel like I could do it.** And prior to that, I had just ruled out doing anything STEM. So I think at that moment I started thinking like, oh, maybe **I can do this and maybe it’s going to be really hard.** But after seeing someone who’s gone down that path, that just seems like a level of expertise in science and math that I would love to reach. And I think at that moment I was kind of like, why can’t I do this? So I don’t know, I guess it just **instilled some perseverance or inspiration.** I think a lot of **the inspiration came from that I was seeing someone of the same gender as me** in that position. That was just really a **powerful message** to me” (5)

- Confidence: “Definitely I was relieved to be done speaking and have gotten my point across, and it **gives you more confidence** to hear what everyone else has to say because that you already did your part, and you made your statement and contributed in my way. And it kind of puts me at ease so I could just listen to everyone else talk and think about what they said. Just definitely relief that I was done with what I had to say, **but also maybe giving me the confidence to continue to talk again** after hearing what other people have to say.” (3)
- Confidence: “In the moment, I think it depends **how confident I am that I will overcome it**. Because I think specifically in calculus, I just do AB, but I think that it’s a more straightforward class in the way that there are specific rules and steps. So if I’m stuck on a problem, **I know that I will figure it out eventually, and it might take me more time, but I’ll figure it out**. So if I’m working through the problem or something and I’m struggling, then I know that eventually I’ll figure it out. Whereas something with, let’s say English, if I’m struggling on a concept or writing an essay or whatever, I think it’s harder to learn that skill. So **then it becomes easier to get frustrated when you don’t have as much confidence that you’re going to end up learning it or end up knowing how to get that skill**.” (2)
- Focused: “ I just was **focusing**, sitting there, I both was, okay, thinking about the AP exam because that’s **all that’s planted in my mind**. I’m like, okay, wait, I can maybe pass this. I can do it. I just have to **eliminate other distractions** and just **lock in** on that. And that felt pretty valuable.” (11)
- Focused: “ I just found something that **clicked for me**. And it’s something that my **distractions, they don’t get to me** when I’m doing it. I don’t know. It’s just something I can **focus** on. And I don’t know. It’s just something that, it’s the one thing I can **control**. Just **everything else is not there**. If that makes sense.” (11)
- Focused/in control: “ But it was something that I could... With math, there’s really only one answer. I mean, there’s different ways to get to it, but it was something that I could just **control**. It was just something **that clicks**. And so I just was like, it’s something I can just **dial in on** and forget about what else was going on because I’m just solving this really extensive equation. And it’s like, wow, I actually **want to know** what the answer is. I don’t know.” (11)
- Focus/Control/Confidence: “You **have to do** this. It’s going to feel a little hard getting into it, but let’s **lock in** and just sit down and do it and you can do it. And that’s worked so many times ago. I just told myself, “**Focus in**, you can do it.” And I just am, **lock in**. All right, here we go. And so, I sit down. Once I get myself into it, I can do pretty much anything. It’s just in that initial getting over that moment of, oh my God. I have to sit down and do this and **try to ignore** everything else that’s going on.” (11)
- Focus: “I think I mean just in the world. I feel like I’ll put my phone away, I’ll put my electronics away. And it feels like, I feel like everyone feels this, but there’s

- always a ton of thoughts in the head. Always everything. Reminders. Oh, remember you have to do this, stress. I feel physically like, oh my God, I'm stressed out. But when I **lock in**, whether it's at a race or when I'm doing my AP exam, when I **lock in**, I'm only thinking, I'm only reading what's on the paper. There's **only one focus** on my head. And it's like everything else is just quiet. And that's what it feels like. Just **only focusing on one thing**. And just not even what the long term goal is. Just **in the moment, living in the moment** and **focusing on this one thing** you're doing. Yeah." (11)
- Focus: "And the teacher plays into that a lot, but she has a very lecture style teaching with a presentation, and she just kind of goes, which normally I feel like I would fall asleep, but that class, I don't know, I'm **always so dialed in and everyone is too**" (7)
 - Focus: "And that's one class where I've always felt like everything **just kind of clicks** and **makes sense to me** because, I mean, that's why I've always liked history." (7)
 - Focus: "Just **focused**. It's so much easier for me to **focus and not be distracted by classmates or even just zone out**. I have it last period. So I feel like a lot of the times last period, I'm very distracted, but I find myself, I'm **listening to every word I'm thinking about every sentence versus times when I would maybe be staring into space**." (7)
 - Focus: "I did end up progressing in that class because I kind of **engaged a little more, locked in** that class. And my test scores went up and I started asking more questions. And so that made the class more enjoyable. But so I think the value is that it contributed to my short term success in regards to grades, but also my long term drive." (5)
 - Focus: "when I'm **locked in**, I was actually thinking about this last week, what does that mean to me? It's a certain feeling. It can be kind of hard to describe, but I just feel **super focused** on my schoolwork. It's kind of a feeling of **embracing it** rather than dreading it. Typically, when I'm **locked in, I'm like go, go, go**, getting all my assignments done. I don't really procrastinate. So when I'm locked in, for example, in physics, I just **feel super ready to take on challenges**, I guess." (5)
 - Control/Perseverance: "I want to do well, but I'm not going to cry if I don't do well. I don't know. I guess at this point, it comes to a point where I don't care if I don't do well. Because I'm kind of over it. So I'm **going to try my best**, but if something happens and is **out of my control** and I do bad on a test or I just don't understand something, then **I just have to keep going**" (3)
 - Sub theme: connection
 - To course/content: "If a teacher is engaged in it makes it a lot **easier to be engaged** in it too, I would say." (12)
 - To content: "That was that. But reading that transcript, I was like, "**Oh, this is something I would actually want to research and look into**." And they wrote it in a

- way where you could see into, it's so lame, the psychology of the characters or whatever, the people." (9)
- To content: "**making the connections between those events and understanding its impact today**, especially as someone who wants to go into IR, I think it was with AP world history where it was like, "Okay. I know nothing about this, but I know kind of what I could possibly maybe in the future know about this.'" (9)
 - To content: "I will say textbooks are sometimes over-villainized. I think sometimes they can be **quite enthralling** if they're well written and not about math" (9)
 - To content/depth of content: "I'm not really sure. I Part of the reason was how Jesmyn Ward wrote it and there was a lot to draw from and a lot... I don't know, there's just a lot to talk about in relation to the book, especially **how she makes you feel the emotions that she was going through and you're kind of like, oh, this sort of happened to me in a different sense, but also kind of the exact same.**" (4)
 - To content: "Yes, absolutely. I think with Psychology, there's certain phenomenon, or that's how you say it, that people have been experiencing their entire life and **now they get what it means** and what it is like, oh, this is how sleep works and I've been sleeping every day, every night for my entire life, and now **I'm just now learning why** I feel better in the morning after sleeping. And I think absolutely that everyone is like, "Wow, that's crazy." When I'm talking to my classmates about it last year, everyone would be like, "Dang, I didn't know that, I didn't know that about this." And **it definitely was interesting.**
 - To content/others: "I would probably say when we were reading Men We Reaped and just the entire time when we were reading and our essay test on it was just **a very interesting book to read and I got a lot out of it learning about the experiences of Black women**, particularly in the deep South, Louisiana specifically. It was very **interesting to read and definitely one of my favorite books** now." (4)
 - To peers and content: "Okay. Voice threw me off a little bit. Okay. And the two others I had been in classes with before but hadn't really gotten a chance to work with them before. Actually no, that's a lie. One of them, I had become friends in ninth grade and then we had sort of fallen apart during COVID since it was a weird time. Anyway, so I was **at different degrees of connection** with all of them. But I just remember whatever it was we were discussing, there was just this feeling of **wanting to just keep going and dive in deeper.**" (10)
 - To peers and content: "And it was like I was **familiar** with all the people, but also it felt like the perspectives they were bringing to this work of literature were something that I hadn't considered before. And it was really... **we had agreements, we had disagreements.** It was just a very productive conversation about something that I can't remember now. But I remember too, just having the time of my life and when Mr. [inaudible 00:01:25] said, "Okay, we're coming back together", I almost was like, "No, I'm having so much fun." And just really getting **to share** what I believe,

- hear what others believe**, and just really **work together to collaboratively learn and share**. And I remember coming home after that and just telling my mom all about it because it was such a great moment for me.” (10)
- To peers and content: “It was an unhappy surprise I think. Because normally you know how it goes whenever it’s “Discuss in your table groups” and then it’s like, “What did you think?” And the conversation is really stale and you’re essentially just waiting for the teacher to say, “Okay, let’s come all back together.” And conversation dies down way before. But this one, I think it was just the **conversation** about it kept just going and going and kept going further and it was just you kind of **lose track of time when you’re actually having a conversation** that you’re really engaged in and it didn’t feel like time was passing. So I don’t think I was aware of the time because I was very engaged in the conversation at hand and not...” (10)
 - To peers and content: “Yeah, just every time we would discuss the book in class, it was really **interesting to see and hear how everybody else connected**. It’s set up in her current life, well not her current life, but her past life, like her childhood and then the five men in her life who died. And it was **really interesting to see how people drew connections** from her past into those chapters about the men...Just kind of noticing how everybody’s experiences were so different, but had a lot of the same lessons, I guess. **They all kind of learned the same thing from it and even though they were different, there was still a common ground for them.**” (4)
 - To peers and the real world: “Mainly real world, but also the class and **how there’s so many different ways to think of so many different things**. And **what I think about something is not how somebody else is going to think about something** and that even if how we think about it is totally opposite, that doesn’t mean either one of us is wrong.” (4)
 - To peers and content: “I think it was fun because it was typically about a more, it was about a niche topic or a topic that wasn’t widely discussed. And **so it was kind of fun to learn about something that we wouldn’t normally have learned about**. **And it’s interesting to see how other people feel about that sort of thing and see other people’s opinions** and not just learning this is what happened and when, but how do you feel about what happened this time? And it gave me **a better perspective of everyone else** in the class and their views on things.” (3)
 - To peers: “if ever we are learning about a topic and then people start asking questions and discussion, sometimes, teachers don’t always, but sometimes teachers kind of let the discussion go in different directions, and I think that kind of shows that we’re really engaged and interested because **we’re building off each other** based on this topic.” (12)
 - To peers: “Well, it was the first time the class actually split up into four larger groups and actually **got to meet people** outside of my table group. I felt like my table group at the time was kind of weird and whatnot, so got to branch outside of that...a little

- because my social group's not really all that big. And also like I said, my table group at the time was kind of **awkward and anti-social, and I didn't really like that at the time.**"
- To peers: "being outside was nice. **Hanging out with the people in my APES group.** And I was definitely aware of how dirty the water was because I feel like everyone is, we were just all in the water, just splashing around, trying not to get too wet. But it was fun."
 - To peers: "I think the main value for me is that I know that most people who choose to take an AP course is because they are somewhat interested in the subject matter and **they want to be surrounded by other people who are also interested in it** to a certain degree. And just **being surrounded by people** who have something and who will contribute it to the course. Because I guess with AP courses there's like this, I mean they are technically I guess more challenging, but I feel like a part of that challenge comes from more **student produced engagement**, I guess." (10)
 - To peers: " I'm now realizing how much **bonding** in an AP course comes from talking about how much we dislike the AP course or at least for a lot of other people. So I'm kind of like people who want to be there, maybe not so much, but I mean in the end they are kind of very much engaged." (10)
 - To peers: "Everyone cared. I've done projects like that in classes that aren't APES, and most of the time you get stuck with at least one person who's like, "I don't care. I'm not going to try." **But in an AP class, I feel like it's more likely that you're going to get put with people who care and want to try.**" (6)
 - To peers: "Everyone in my classes seemed really sleep-deprived and everyone was talking how little sleep they got last night. It was like a competition, who got the least amount of sleep from staying up late studying for these classes. And I don't know, there was **definitely still a camaraderie. We were all in hell together.** I don't know. It was just all very rushed because they all need to pick up at the same time. And we get that as students, but it's just like a lot." (6)
 - To peers/awareness of others: "We just kind of talked about it freely. But since the first discussion with Men With Reaped, everybody was kind of more delicate and light with it and more... What's the word I'm thinking of? We were careful to not, I don't want to say offend anybody because that's not really the right word, but **we were more conscious of everybody else's experiences** and didn't want to go in too deep." (5)
 - To peers: "In freshman year for Human Geography, we had a group project and it was about cultures. So there was **a group of three of us**, and each group chose a different culture. So it could be a country or it could be just a group like the Amish or something. And we chose the Netherlands, and that was a really fun project because **I made two friends**, and that was virtual year, so I knew these people vaguely because we all went to say middle school, but I never really talked to them. One of them I

didn't like. And then I was like, "Oh, great, I'm a group project with her." But then **we ended up becoming friends and now we wave to each other in the hallway and stuff.**" (2)

- Sub theme: enjoyment

- " a lot of it is spent focusing on AP exams. But then there's these moments where it's like, I get to write about what I want and just about me. And it's also teaching me good writing skills. And I just felt **super excited** to go home and just write this" (11)
- "But also kind of **excited**, I guess, to share what we had talked about with the class because I think there is **joy** in pointing out stuff and hearing what other people have to say as well." (10)
- "I think, I mean I feel like, I don't know. I'm a person who laughs a lot, but I think I tend to laugh more in those moments just because I'm so **overjoyed** to be engaged with my classmates and with the content." (10)
- " But then in that everyone just **having fun** in the woods and then just watching a turtle afterwards just sit on a lab table." (10)
- "We've done a lot of **fun outside labs** that I thought were interesting. We would go out into the water and like in Trinkapen, the creek, and we would do labs where we found the species inside, found the pH of the water, how much runoff got into the water. And it was really interesting 'cause I was like, I walk past this water every day, but I've never actually thought of it in terms of how much pollution is in this water and how is it affecting the forest around it." (6)
- "being outside was nice. Hanging out with the people in my APES group. And I was definitely aware of how dirty the water was because I feel like everyone is, we were just all in the water, **just splashing around**, trying not to get too wet. But **it was fun.**" (6)
- "I know it was in semester one this year in AP physics. We were just learning general things about the universe space, and that's something that **really interests me**. And my teacher played this YouTube video about becoming an aerospace engineer and stuff. And I don't know, it kind of hit me at that moment that STEM was something I wanted to do. And that class at the moment didn't really feel like the obstacle that it was, it kind of felt like **enjoyable**. I don't really know how to describe it, but ever since then, it's been a **pretty fun class** for me." (5)
- "I did end up progressing in that class because I kind of engaged a little more, locked in that class. And my test scores went up and I started asking more questions. And **so that made the class more enjoyable**. But so I think the value is that it contributed to my short term success in regards to grades, but also my long term drive." (5)
- "I didn't remember much, but my teacher offered study sessions at lunchtime or before school or after, and that was really helpful and I **enjoyed the class a lot**, even though there were so many notes to take, it was fine because the stuff we were learning was very **interesting**. I do, however, prefer my experience in AP Lang just

- because the books we're reading are **so much more interesting** compared to anything else I've read in school. And I feel like they're not Shakespeare like we read last year and I don't know. And they're not a bunch of short stories like we did in ninth grade. I feel like, I don't know, they're just a lot more **interesting**. And **overall the class has been really fun** and the way that my teacher has us apply what we've learned is **very interesting**... Well, they're **more fun** because I get more out of them. I've gotten so much more out of AP Lang than I did last year in English and I got a lot more out of AP Human Geography than I have in the last two years in history." (4)
- "Yeah, I'm trying to think. I think probably something that I would think of would be, probably in World last year where we would do, I don't know what it's called, a Socratic seminar where we would all talk about a certain passage that we spent the last week reading and we would all kind of sit in a circle and talk about the historical significance of it was, and we all had different opinions on it and **it was pretty funny** when people would kind of disagree on certain things. And I always thought **that was very interesting and I had a fun time doing those** because I felt like it was a break from the normal kind of learning about history from that we do normally on a daily basis just learning the facts and the dates and it kind of just made it **more interesting and I thought it was a cool way to learn about history while also having fun with it, yeah.**" (3)
 - "Yes. But that was **really fun** because we got to learn in depth about something that was interesting rather than just reading a textbook. And also, we were working out as a group, so we were all **bouncing ideas** off of each other and talking, and I really wanted to do well on that project just because, I don't know, I had **a good time doing it, so I figured might as well try**" (2)

Theme: Negative Emotions

- Sub theme: competitiveness

- Comparison: "And **everyone else** just takes notes and copies the problem down from the board and uses all these colored pens and whatnot to show the steps you take to solve the calculus problems. But I just don't take notes. I just listen to him and just have it ingrained in my head mentally. And the same is true with physics because I don't really take notes **as much as everyone else does.**" (13)
- Comparison: "I felt like I was probably **pretty nervous**. I think a lot of people have a lot of really good ideas, but I think also a lot of people have a lot of pretty bad ideas. And I think usually when I see someone with a bad idea and they say it, I'm kind of like, "Well, that was a bad idea. Why did you say that?" So **I'm always hesitant to say my idea because what if other people think it's a bad idea, but yeah, definitely nervous about saying something and contributing**, but also I felt like it was different than other things, talking to other people in your table group or something, because it really was the entire class at times. Maybe it was half of the class, but it's, I felt like there was **a lot of people watching what I was saying and it**

- definitely felt like I had a voice kind of, and people could take my opinion into consideration just in the large group.” (3)**
- Comparison: “No. If any, I like not from my family or friends or anything like that, but maybe part of me being disappointed is **if my friends do well and I don’t do well, then that makes me sad. I’m like, “This is terrible.” (2)**
 - Competitiveness: “ I have a **group chat** with one of some of my **closest friends**, and we’re basically all just texting about how stressed we were and how we really wanted to get a five because we’ve done well. And we feel like this test shows that if we **do well**, that it shows that **we did the class well too**, which might not necessarily be the case if you’re not a good test taker or whatever the circumstance may be. But probably in the **crunch time** especially, I feel like you feel **the pressure** a little bit.” (12)
 - Competitiveness/Comparison: “And the only thing about that in the moment, because, I don’t know, I feel like, not just the school, but in general, **I feel like a lot of these students are just wanting to pass AP exam**. Not even just to pass it because they want to get into a **prestigious college**...And I’m subjected to that. Even though I don’t want to be, I don’t know. All I’m reminded of is **do well in AP** so you can **do well in the exam** and **then you can go to Harvard**, whatever. And it’s like, **it’s all I think about.**” (11)
 - Competitiveness/comparison: “At the beginning of the year I’d be asking all my friends, “**How many Aps are you taking?** What clubs are you in?” And then **it just comparing** and stuff, but not as much anymore, I think because we’re all at this point too busy to care about that. But **definitely comparing, “Oh, what did they get on the test?” “Oh, so that means they’re going to get good on the tests again this year, and they’re probably smart, so I’m going to be competing with them.**” And then.
 - Competitiveness: “Everyone in my classes seemed really sleep-deprived and everyone was talking how little sleep they got last night. **It was like a competition, who got the least amount of sleep from staying up late studying for these classes.** And I don’t know, there was definitely still a camaraderie. We were all in hell together. I don’t know. It was just all very rushed because they all need to pick up at the same time. And we get that as students, but it’s just like a lot.” (6)
 - Comparison: “But I was like, I’m a little scared, but whatever. Let’s just do it. Again just for that main goal if I want to go to college. I was like, **everyone else is taking five Aps**, I’ll just do it too. And then I was doing fine. First quarter, got all As pretty much.” (11)
 - Competitiveness: “And I’m not really blaming my teachers or anyone like that. But I think sometimes **me and other kids probably**, we just get so caught up in the constant flow of assignments and the constant, you have to do well in this. **You have to do well or you’re not going to college or whatever**” (11)

- Competitiveness: “I mean, the one negative thing I think about when I think about Aps is just even within my friend group, **the competitiveness that comes with the number of Aps you’re taking and how they help you get into colleges**. I have friends who want to go to in-state schools that maybe aren’t as competitive, and so they take maybe one AP **versus** those who take five. And just even hanging out, “Oh, I’m super stressed about my AP exams.” And that causes **negative emotions sometimes with other kids who feel like you’re maybe bragging** about how you want to go to... I don’t know, sometimes I feel like there’s **tension between my friends who don’t take a lot of Aps and my friends who do**. Because I think there are **connotations with, being super ambitious** and, I don’t know.” (7)
- Competitiveness: “I think that feeling of, “Oh, well, **you guys did well and I didn’t do well**.” It makes you, I guess, **a little bit bitter**. But beyond that, it’s like, “Well, what else am I going to do? Dwell on this for the rest of my life?”” (2)
- Competitiveness: “I think because Aps are so closely tied to college admissions and oh, “The more Aps you take, the higher your GPA is, et cetera, and that’s going to get you into more colleges.” I think **that aspect of it is very competitive**. And that’s not something that is bred in classes or anything. I just think the culture of just kids compare or not the culture, it’s not like it’s a subculture of school, but.” (2)
- Competitiveness: “I think it depends on the person who **I’m comparing myself to**. But if they’re two people, or in my view, me and my friend are both putting the same work into the class, and maybe one of us is **doing better** at some points in the class, and one of us is **doing better** at the other points, and then on the big final exam or whatever, they get better than me. Then I would feel, **maybe not resent, but I’d feel a little bitter because, well, not bitter towards them, but just bitter in general because you know that it was probably on the edge or something, or I don’t know, just the feeling of they did better than me.**” (2)
- Sub theme: disappointment
 - Stifled: “ And I think we were taking so much time just dissecting it piece by piece that **I hadn’t gotten to say all I wanted to say**. And I felt like it was one of those almost, it was a collaborative aha moment. But we were called to stop before the aha had actually happened. So it was that feeling of “**No, we’re onto something here and I want to keep getting at it until we put it into words.**”” (10)
 - Stifled: “I think it made people more conscious of what other people were going through. And at other times I think **it kind of slowed down the discussion because people were afraid to say what they wanted to.**” (4)
 - Disappointment: “I think it was honestly equal parts sadness, or not necessarily sadness. I don’t think I’ve ever felt that dismayed at something like that. Perhaps not as strong, but a little not even disappointed, **just a little “Aw”, like lightly upset, gently upset** that I couldn’t keep discussing it with my table mates further.” (10)

- Disappointment: “I will say though that I come into it with some background knowledge on that, ‘cause I do research on Black history myself, and it was somewhat **disappointing** to see my classmates not get that.” (9)
- Disappointment that more people don’t take AP: “And I think that that sometimes **disappoints me**. I will say, though, in comparison to a standard level course, it’s insane. The dissonance between even the modicum of truth that we do learn is so much larger-
... than what I have seen of my friends who don’t take those level courses, because I do have friends who could very well do an AP history course who don’t, just because of course rigor and schedule balance. And will talk about what we’re learning in our respective classes, and **it’s worlds apart**.” (9)
- Disappointment in course content: “I guess **the disappointment** comes in terms of how our teacher handled it. I’d say that my most **disappointment** hasn’t even been how teacher... It’s either been what they’ve chosen **to just gloss over**, which I think has been really interesting. And sometimes they say it’s for a manner of time, but I sometimes think it’s not because of that. I think some of that is **too focused on, this sounds horrible, but sensitivity**, I think.” (9)
- Disappointment in course content: “So I think sometimes we try to **sanitize** things, and that’s **not great**. So I guess that would be **the disappointment**.” (9)
- Disappointment in connection with real world: “that water source just gets so much pollution run off from human activities. And I guess I’m **just disappointed** that humans haven’t figured that out yet and tried to prevent it from happening. Because there’s just so much pollution in that water and it’s **pretty disappointing**.” (6)
- Disappointment/annoyance: “Yeah, yeah. So usually when we’re doing something that I think is **redundant or time-wasting typically**, or that sort of the thing I would usually, I’m just thinking, why would we do this when we could just do this and learn the same stuff? Or why is the lesson structured this way when I think it should be structured this way? It’s like, I think, wow, this is **a silly way to teach this**, I would probably do it this way. It’s usually about me thinking that I could probably structure the lesson **better than the teacher**, which is obviously crazy, but I don’t know. It’s just usually, **I’m just thinking about how I would do it instead**.” (3)
- Disappointment in AP scores: “with the exam itself, I don’t know. Now it feels like I’m going back against what I said, but I don’t care. I don’t know. I think now I’m at the point where just the exams in general, if I do well, I’ll do well. But then if I don’t, then I won’t. But I think I **definitely would feel disappointed**. Like I said earlier, the potential has been lost because I feel that I have the potential to do well, but that doesn’t necessarily mean I’ll reach that potential.” (2)
- Disappointment: “I think by disappointed, I mean that **I’m upset**, but then it’s also like, “What am I going to do?” So you give up, or not necessarily give up, but you can only **dwell** on it for so long. So you’re just like, “Well, **this sucks**.” But what else are you going to do about it?” (2)

- Disappointment: “No. If any, I like not from my family or friends or anything like that, but maybe **part of me being disappointed** is if my friends do well and I don’t do well, then that makes me sad. I’m like, “This is terrible.”” (2)
- Annoyance: “I thought the way that it was taught, I just would find myself kind of either talking to my mom and saying, “Yeah, I like it, but I **don’t like the way that I’m being taught** it per se.” I always had **a complaint** or I couldn’t even focus on what was being taught because I thought it was being taught, my opinion on how they were teaching me the information was I was like, I don’t even want to learn this anymore because it was just **annoying**, certain things, yeah.” (3)
- Annoyance: “Yeah, I wouldn’t say that, but I think definitely there’s hard stuff to learn, absolutely. But I think with certain things, especially in the beginning couple quarters of the year, I felt there was just, we would have certain things that, my teacher would explain what these terms meant or what these certain things did in the computer or something and we would do this big, lengthy, I don’t know what maybe lesson or something that had to do with those things. And maybe my style of learning is different than the other students or something, but I just would get... **annoyed that this thing that I thought could be just completely simplified and didn’t have to take this long on a little thing.**”
- Sub theme: negative toward environment
 - Isolation: “I’m **so different** from other people. So my writing was **so very different** from the writings of other people that she read.” (13)
 - Isolation: “I kind of got that sense because, so I told her, oh, So I think I did it wrong. Everyone else, I’m seeing it this way and I did it this way, which is **I’m completely different**. But then she was like, so maybe you didn’t do it wrong. So maybe this actually reflects something about you. Which I think it does.” (13)
 - Isolation: “So I think through those classes and probably some others so **I realize how I’m different from other people** in that way, I guess.” (13)
 - Isolation: “ I feel like just no one, I mean, the people who I hang out with aren’t really, I don’t know. I not to be like, I don’t know. But **I take harder classes than them and have more educational values**, if that makes sense. I don’t know, a lot of my friends to go out and party all the time.” (11)
 - Isolation/lost: “ I felt like I could easily just get **lost** out here and **nobody would care**” (11)
 - Isolation/lost: “And it was all piling up definitely. But I was able to work some stuff down. I mean, I did have to do it **on my own**. I feel like, especially in the school, it’s huge. And I think I am close with my teachers, but it’s the sense of, I feel like they might have that same relationship with 50 other students. And I feel like you can just really **easily get lost** and you can **easily get left behind**.” (11)
 - Isolation: “But I will say the courses that I have found less enjoyable was one I took in junior year, and it was one where my teacher basically didn’t really do live

- lectures, she just gave us videos to take notes on and then we would read the textbook and we would do that in class basically and then finish it up for homework. And it was a lot of work, but I don't think it was the volume of work that [inaudible 00:21:19]. Eventually I adapted and I got used to that sort of stuff for learning. And I mean I was able to do fairly well on the exam, but I feel like maybe there was a feeling not necessarily of a very high energy negative emotion, but more of a soft, I wonder what I [inaudible 00:21:39]. It was almost like **mourning for the experiences I didn't get to have because the work was so self-paced**, which again has its benefits. It's easier to catch up since it wasn't live lectures that, "Oh, you missed one now you don't know what's going on." So all the work was there, but there is something to be said for the natural experiences that come out of the unique live lectures and time to actually discuss with your table instead of just writing down a response to a warmup question in your notebook just **by yourself**. And I feel like, yeah, it's that kind of, "I wonder what we could have done if the class wasn't structured like this and how many more rewarding experiences I would've had had there been more **student-to-student engagement and student-teacher engagement**." (10)
- Isolation: "I took AP research this year and was **one of two Black people**. There were more blonde people in that class than people of color. That's **a problem**, and that does **drive away students**" (9)
 - Isolation: "I've been **shunned** out of the room by those classmates." (8)
 - Boredom: "I'm so presenting me just minutes ago, but I guess it would be, so I'm sustaining focus and actively, I'm still paying attention to what the teacher is teaching on a deeper level on some of the things **I'm so beyond what the teacher is teaching** and just saying some, I guess actively, I'm so thinking about it, **I'm so beyond what the teacher is teaching right now**." (13)
 - Boredom: "If it's just a topic that I'm **not super interested in** and that I just don't feel like I can personally **get a lot of depth out of**. There was one about tea, which I thought overall it was cool. I don't know. It wasn't tea. Alcohol. Overall, it was pretty cool to learn about how, again, something small had a big historical significance, but it was just **kind of the same story** because it was colonists being upset about taxes, so **it was kind of like, oh, okay**."
 - Boredom: "They're pretty just like **you're there**...And teachers **don't really do that much interesting stuff**. They're just like, "**Here's a book you don't care about and you should read it**." And I'm like, "**All right**." (6)
 - Boredom: "it's not 'cause I care about the material. I **don't need to learn about lang** for the billionth time. I **already know** where the commas go. I know what this vocabulary is. I know how to use satire. I **don't need** this class. You have to be in the class so your attendance doesn't like plummet. So you kind of just **go to sit there**." (6)

- Boredom: “I feel challenged studying for some of the tests and stuff, but most of the stuff in class is **just busy work**. Teachers just kind of need stuff to throw in there to keep their students occupied. So then they just give us **a bunch of busy work that we don’t really care about and that they don’t really need to teach us**. But we **just sit there doing the dumb busy work**” (6)
- Boredom: “it’s just kind of like **meh**” (6)
- Boredom: “then I go to my next **AP class or whatever**, I’m just sitting there and the teachers like, “Discuss this chapter.” My whole table just **will sit there and just be, meh. We don’t really care. No one wants to discuss this book. We just sit there just waiting it out.**” (6)
- Confusion: “We learned about it beforehand, and it was **confusing** at first because, I don’t know, there was just a bunch of different variables. And this was a lab, I’d never done a lab where we actually really, really do stuff because in honors cam last year it was just flipping coins or something and measuring the probability.” (12)
- Confusion: “And then I would say in my AP French course, I’ve had some negative emotions just because sometimes I think for language courses... Actually, I won’t say for language courses, I think there are some AP courses that seem to have less structure, and so then that gives a teacher more leeway to do things that **might not make sense** to the students. Sometimes I feel like in my AP French course, we’re not following the unit structure and everything, and that’s obviously specific to the teacher.” (12)
- Confusion/lost: “It’s just like **being lost and not knowing what you’re doing**, or... For me, not that you would be doing this because I’m a student and you’re not. But in math class, if the teacher is doing something and she’s writing on the board and she’s just writing these random numbers and **I have no idea**, I’m like, “Where did that number come from? Where do these numbers?” Suddenly there are letters and I don’t know what’s happening. And just **feeling lost and having literally no clue** where, how someone got from point A to point B, and you’re still at point A and they’re at point like C now” (2)
- Pressure/bombarded: “even though I do enjoy all my classes, honestly. But I’m **constantly**, they’re reminding, we have this big thing on the board saying, “AP exam in,” whatever days. It’s just there’s **constant reminders** and it’s **constantly**, “Let’s practice these skills for the AP exam.”” (11)
- Pressure: “It seems like it’s **piling up** and it looks **scary**. But it’s all these things, if I had just earlier on, just I wish I had realized in second quarter, I guess that I do enjoy these things. It’s just the **speed and the independence** of it all takes away the enjoyment of it. And I feel like I’m not really blaming myself for losing focus... And I’m not really blaming my teachers or anyone like that. But I think sometimes me and other kids probably, we just get so caught up in the **constant flow of assignments and the constant, you have to do well in this**. You have to do well or you’re not

- going to college or whatever...if you would've asked me three years ago to write an essay on something I like, I would've sat down and done it immediately and would've been obsessed with it. But it was like, I don't know, I think it's just **this pressure** of it all that makes it different.” (11)
- Anxious: “Yeah, so I guess it just feels like... Yeah, I don't know. Probably I was **worried** that I would maybe say the wrong thing and people would think that I didn't really know what I was talking about or maybe, and I was kind of **having anxiety** about it. I don't know.” (3)
 - Anxious: “Yeah, I guess, yeah, so **waiting for your turn**, maybe. **Sweaty palms**. I don't know, maybe **butterflies in my stomach** kind of.” (3)
 -
 - Sub theme: negative toward work
 - Stress: “I remember feeling just a little bit **stressed** as I also didn't know what to write about because she told us, so don't put your pen down. You can't put your pen down. So it was, you had to do that. But I wasn't supposed to be stressed, obviously, because this was a very calm exercise. But honestly it did actually come pretty, I mean, so fairly easily to me.” (13)
 - Stress: “I mean, in terms of **stress**, yes. Because the workload is very high. And definitely a couple of weeks ago before AP exams, I kind of was asking myself why I took five classes. But I think even that I can see as has helped me with time management and **just managing stress**. And I'm sure I'll have a lot of work next year and in college as well. So I feel like that's only helping me prepare.” (7)
 - Overwhelmed: “I feel kind of **overwhelmed** because there's a ton of stuff I have to do, but I just start writing and eventually, so I get it done in time, but I'm **so deeply overwhelmed** when I initially get the prompt.” (13)
 - Stress/Overwhelmed: “I would probably say **the stress** of it. I remember last year, AP World History was the first in-person AP that was **really overwhelming** at times because there was a lot of work and a lot of material, and I had to **balance it with everything else**.” (12)
 - Stress: “I guess the last few weeks, right before AP exams and during AP exams, all the classes really need to pick up at the same time. It's all of my teachers **started rushing and doing everything**. But it was like if you're in a lot of AP classes and all your teachers are starting to rush, then you **really feel that**. And then everyone started getting **really stressed** out in all my classes and everyone was just really pushing to the AP exams. Now we're kind of done. So it was kind of worth it.” (6)
 - Stress: “that was difficult because I was freaking out. But it turned out okay” (2)
 - Stress/Overwhelmed: “Everyone in my classes seemed **really sleep-deprived and everyone was talking how little sleep they got** last night. It was like a competition, who got the least amount of sleep from staying up late studying for these classes. And I don't know, there was definitely still a camaraderie. We were all in hell together. I

- don't know. It was just all **very rushed** because they all need to pick up at the same time. And we get that as students, but it's **just like a lot.**" (6)
- Overwhelmed/stressed/pressure: "So in an AP sense, **overwhelming to me is a great deal of homework and just overall assignments and fast-paced concepts**, learning stuff, just **superfast** throughout the year. Sometimes I **get worried** about **not having enough time** on one subject to understand it completely, because **we move on so fast.**" (5)
 - Overwhelmed: "Yeah. So before that moment, I remember I had been in physics for a couple of months and I wasn't really enjoying it because I'm not a big math person, and it was **just overwhelming and I didn't really know why I was taking it**, but, sorry, I lost my train of thought." (5)
 - Pressure: "sometimes a lot of **pressure** to get five"(12)
 - Pressure: ". I would say probably the Sunday before the AP Calc exam. And I don't know, it's not like **the pressure** is really coming from somewhere else. It's probably **just messaging that you hear over time that compounds.**" (12)
 - Pressure: "I have a group chat with one of some of my closest friends, and we're basically all just texting about how **stressed** we were and how we really wanted to get a five because we've done well. And we feel like this test shows that if we do well, that it shows that we did the class well too, which might not necessarily be the case if you're not a good test taker or whatever the circumstance may be. But probably **in the crunch** time especially, I feel like you feel **the pressure** a little bit." (12)
 - Pressure/bombarded: "I just was sitting there and I was like, "Oh my God, I'm never going to be able to get past this." I just was, I feel like, I don't know. I just thought, "Okay, I'm just going to, when the AP exam comes," because that's all I think about really, being honest. **That's what we're just told to think about when we're in AP classes at this point.**" (11)
 - Frustrated/annoying: ". I mean, you can get **frustrated** about how standardized tests formulate questions, because that can be **annoying** sometimes" (12)
 - Frustration: "Yeah. There were some nights where I was like, "Oh my God, **I'm losing my mind** because I can't figure this out." (11)
 - Frustration/giving up: "Then I just was like, "Oh my God, I'm not going to know this on the AP exam, **whatever** at this point. Let me just **put it away**"...And so I got **really upset**" (11)
 - Frustration toward instruction: "I think sometimes it's like, "Well, we want students to feel safe and we don't want to have to discuss this. And I understand there's only one or two Black people here, and I don't want them to have to carry the burden of having this conversation." But the people who need to understand this isn't us, it's the other people here, and if **we gloss over it**, you're not protecting me if they don't know, because we're going to end up having these conversations again in the future-" (9)

- Frustration: “And for physics, I’d say, **cut down on the work**, but then again, I think that’s just kind of an inherent problem with the class. Some people kind of take that **anger** out on Ms. Simon saying, “Oh, she gives **too much work**.” Well, there’s only so much you can do in physics, it’s just **a complicated subject**.”
- Confusion/Frustration: “ But sometimes I would be **really confused** because when we got to the last few units, it was **super hard**. I’d go home and **shed a tear or two**. And be like, “**This is hard**.” But then it felt so good once I got over that.” (11)
- Frustration: “ Whereas something with, let’s say English, if **I’m struggling on a concept or writing an essay or whatever, I think it’s harder to learn that skill. So then it becomes easier to get frustrated when you don’t have as much confidence that you’re going to end up learning it or end up knowing how to get that skill**.” (2)
- Frustration: “If **I’m feeling frustrated**, sometimes I’ll just give up and say, “I’ll work on it tomorrow.” Which I guess isn’t really giving up if I still decide to work on it at a later time. Sometimes I take a break and I watch a video or go downstairs and eat a cupcake or something.” (2)
- Doubt: “I think before any exam in that class and especially getting an exam back is when **I question my knowledge** because I’m pretty good at understanding concepts or I’ll think I am. And then when I get a test back and I see I didn’t get the grade I thought I would, especially in math or science, it always **makes me feel a little less confident**. So that can build up to just **overall wariness of like, is this for me?**” (5)
- Melancholy: “ I remember we have this office in my house. And it’s technically my dad’s but I took it over this year. I remember it was just adding **to the mood**. I remember it was **raining** and I was **just sitting**. There’s this huge window right next to the desk, and I was **just sitting there**. And I remember it was, yeah, it was our last unit of calc, and it was the series.” (11)
- Melancholy (toward content): “There was **a lot of sadness involved with the book** since it was about death really and coping with grief. So **grief, sadness, sympathy and empathy**. Both of them. It was just overall **very heavy**, but it was very interesting to talk about. It kind of **weighed on you** for a couple days after it was remembering what everybody was talking about and what you might’ve brought up” (4)
- Melancholy (toward content): “There are times where you go out of class feeling really happy and upbeat because of what we talked about. Even if the subject matter was **dark and heavy**, but the discussion made it in feel lighter because everybody else was talking about it too. And their perspectives were like, oh, well I found this to be more of a happy memory for this person rather than a really sad one. But then there are other times where you kind of leave the class and you’re talking with your friends and you’re like, **that was really heavy. That kind of just sticks with you for a couple days or until the next class or whatever**.” (4)

- Intimidated: “Looking at the class before going into it, I was even the word, just the name AP calculus BC **sounds so scary**. I was like, I’m going to **hate** this” (11)
- Intimidated: “But I was like, I’m **a little scared**, but whatever. Let’s just do it. Again just for that main goal if I want to go to college. I was like, everyone else is taking five Aps, I’ll just do it too. And then I was doing fine. First quarter, got all As pretty much.” (11)
- Intimidated: “I was **scared** at first” (7)
- Intimidated/daunting: “So when I sign up for an AP, a lot of times I don’t know a lot about it. At least that’s been the case this past year, and it can just seem like when I look it up and see what it’s about or see how the majority of students rate it with that as my only knowledge **it can seem kind of scary**, but the only way I can find that out for myself is just by taking it...To me, **scary in an academic sense** means I wouldn’t be able to pass the class, a feeling of I can’t do this, or just a feeling of great challenge. It’s going to be a lot of work, but...” (5)
- Hopelessness: “. And I feel like the classes, I was like, **I don’t see a point in doing this right now**. Because I’m just like, **why am I doing this?** Okay. **I don’t even care** about the exam anymore. **I don’t care or whatever.**” (11)
- Hopelessness/Apathy: “When it’s like, I don’t know, I would get distracted by that. Because I’m like, **why do I even need to know this?** Let me just learn at surface level so I can pass the exam.” (11)
- Hopelessness/apathy: “ But it’s also, I feel like I’m growing up really fast because of it. And not even just because of it, but just in general. **Everything feels like why?** Sometimes I’m like, “Why am I taking all these college classes when I’m going to be in college for four plus years anyways? Yeah, I get it’s preparing us. But can we do more of a soft launch maybe?” I don’t know. I don’t know. And there’s so many expectations for these kids who, I don’t know, aren’t even there.” (11)
- Apathy: “Up until the point, I really enjoyed the English class. And I was like, okay, I reading, I doing all these things. Yeah. But it felt just **one assignment after the other, one assignment after the other**. I **didn’t really care** what I was doing. It just was like, let me **just get it done**” (11)
- Negative perception into positive: “I mean, in terms of stress, yes. Because the workload is very high. And definitely a couple of weeks ago before AP exams, I kind of was asking myself why I took five classes. But I think even that **I can see as has helped me with time management and just managing stress**. And I’m sure I’ll have a lot of work next year and in college as well. So I feel like that’s only **helping me prepare.**” (7)
- Negative perception into positive: “Yeah. I think for me it’s **a matter of perspective because sometimes I know challenges are good for me**. I’m someone who likes challenging myself, especially in school, but **a lot of times it can get kind of overwhelming and I’ll still classify it as a challenge, but I don’t know, just in a more negative light.**” (5)

- Negative perception into positive: “There are times where you go out of class feeling **really happy and upbeat because of what we talked about. Even if the subject matter was dark and heavy**, but the discussion made it in feel lighter because everybody else was talking about it too. And their perspectives were like, oh, well I found this to be more of a happy memory for this person rather than a really sad one. But then there are other times where you kind of leave the class and you’re talking with your friends and you’re like, that was really heavy. That kind of just sticks with you for a couple days or until the next class or whatever.” (4)

Theme: Emotional processing (not including in study)

- Sub theme: reflective

- “And I think that, I think also reflects **the way I see life** because I think, so I see it as I’m more action packed and more I’m so narrative and action, I guess.” (13)
- “So I think through those classes and probably some others so **I realize** how I’m different from other people in that way, I guess.” (13)
- “When it’s like, I don’t know, I would get distracted by that. Because I’m like, **why do I even need to know this?** Let me just learn at surface level so I can pass the exam.” (11)
- “ But it’s also, I feel like I’m growing up really fast because of it. And not even just because of it, but just in general. **Everything feels like why?** Sometimes I’m like, “Why am I taking all these college classes when I’m going to be in college for four plus years anyways? Yeah, I get it’s preparing us. But can we do more of a soft launch maybe?” I don’t know. I don’t know. And there’s so many expectations for these kids who, I don’t know, aren’t even there.” (11)
- “I was paying very close attention to my responses, in terms of I was really trying to read between the lines, and in doing that **I realized I was synthesizing things I had learned before**. So I was using my knowledge of history and African American history to interpret the text. I was **aware that that knowledge was from somewhere, and I was also aware that I was applying it for an end goal that**, even though it might be small, had some meaning to it, at least to me personally. And although I wouldn’t say I ever got the overarching feeling of, “Oh, this mattered,” which it does, but perhaps not unless I present it to someone more than my teacher.” (9)
- “So for me, **I was aware** that, for the first time, reading that, or not the first, but one of the times, I liked that textbook. But for one of the times reading that textbook, I could actually picture it as if it was a story going out. And **in that moment** I was like, “Oh wait, history isn’t just a list of events that we need to memorize. **It’s happening and it’s something that happened, and it’s still affecting us and it’s reciprocal.**” So I was aware of... I was looking at the painting and I was trying to identify what the text corresponded with that. I was **also aware that this was not what I had to learn and it would never come up again in that course and the exams.**” (9)
- “I think it allowed for a bit **more space to think about things deeper** because you weren’t so focused on the wrote memorization aspect most of the time.” (9)
-

- Sub theme: perspective
 - “So we had the reading. I don’t know, I guess I think it’s really cool **when something that seems so small has a bigger significance**, and that was a pretty big example of that.” (12)
 - “ I was like, “I’m just going to go there, escape. I’m going to try it again.” I went there and then, I don’t know, **I just tried to look at it from a different perspective** and just tried different methods of solving it, the boring. But I did, I tried a bunch of different ways. And I finally just found a way that worked. And I started doing it on multiple different of the equations and it all worked. And I was like, “Oh, here we go.” Yeah, maybe it’s the change of scenery. I don’t know.” (11)
 - On her teacher: “Yeah, we are practicing for this exam, but it’s like, it’s his job. It’s not like he wants to. It’s not like he’s just doing this for no reason.” (11)
 - “because it’s the **transformation and the humanization** of that information, I think that ends up being a lot more of a productive experience. I obviously end up memorizing it more, but I think more so than that, I can use it as **framework** more, which I think is a really **useful way of learning** for me, being able to take information and then **understand it as a form of theory for looking at something**, that, for me, has been very productive.” (9)
 - Perception of others: “People really get different things depending on how much they’re thinking about it and what **framework they come at it with**. So for her, she’s probably reading about this, like, “Oh, she’s stopping lynching.” She just probably skipped over that word.” (9)
 - Perception of privilege in AP: “It makes me feel a variety of ways about it, ‘cause on one hand, I’m glad that we still went over who Malcolm X was, we still... And no, not in detail, and I knew more about it, but we did go over it and that’s something. But considering that’s happening at a level of **students who already probably need more access to that information, and someone who can really self-research it, that is concerning to me.**” (9)
 - Perception of local environment: “I walk past this water every day, but I’ve never actually thought of it in terms of how much pollution is in this water and how is it affecting the forest around it.” (6)
 - Perspective: “Even though you would have a guess which one would fall faster, but I never actually set out to find the truth. And I think that in physics class, you have to **take a step back and compare things**. And that’s not something that I do in real life because I just take things like one at a time in real life, and I don’t really compare them. But in physics, you do have to compare them. So that was neat for me to **take a step back and think of things in relation to each other**. And that was really neat to

me because that's not something that I do normally. So it forced me to **think in a different way.**" (2)

Research Question Two: How and to what extent do advanced students value their experience in AP courses?

Theme: Immediate

- Sub theme: love of learning
 - "That's hard to say because I'm a person who really **loves learning.**" (10)
 - "There was a goal in the end, and there was also **the knowledge acquired along the way**, which I think made it, alongside the topic itself, it made it a lot easier **to actually want to do the work**, 'cause I felt like what I was doing wasn't just abstract or to learn something that I didn't want to actually use in the future." (9)
 - "there's a lot of other non-related stuff that was trying to be shoved down our throats. And as a result, we don't really spend a lot of time learning that much French. I mean, if you don't like the class, it's good for you, but **if you want to learn, that's not so good for you**" (8)
 - "So a lot of times I'll think about **how I've learned so much throughout the year, and I even learned so much in each class that I feel a lot of value in that.** I feel like it's really **worth my time coming to class** because we're doing multiple assignments, I'm getting feedback, and I'm just getting a lot done rather than lots of downtime or just doing one assignment per class...I think I would associate that with feeling productive, with feeling just like that feeling of going home and **feeling like I learned a lot that day.**" (5)
 - "And I think, like I said before, I like being in the same room as people who have similar ideas as me, or not ideas, but similar views for what they want to do in the future, **being a knowledgeable person** and not just getting a degree." (3)
- Sub theme: in the moment
 - "I also consider the teachers, I'm also on a teacher by teacher basis. I don't really pay that much attention, like the credit at colleges or whatever. **It's just more individual.**" (SE)
 - "I just was **focusing**, sitting there, I both was, okay, thinking about the AP exam because that's all that's planted in my mind. I'm like, okay, wait, I can maybe pass this. I can do it. I just have to eliminate other distractions and just **lock in on that. And that felt pretty valuable.**" (11)
 - "So I'd say that meaning something for me was, this is something I would do even if it didn't add to the college resume." (9)
 - Immediate/long term: "but I would say **wanting to learn or being excited to actually gain understanding** and not just taking an AP course so I can get into a

- good college kind of, but going into a course and wanting **to actually know the information and gain it** so that I can use it to help me later on.” (7)
- In the moment, application to the real world: “After we finished watching it, we had a sheet to fill out questions how every teacher gives you a sheet of questions so you pay attention. I **had never really thought a lot about a lot of the stuff that got brought up in it**, just the prison pipeline and everything. And I was like, **I should probably start thinking about this and start figuring out how to help so that it stops being like that**. That’s not the right phrasing.” (4)
 - “Yeah, definitely. I think when I say **thankful** about that, I think I later can, when I’m doing certain things, if I am talking to my friends or people that I know, I can articulate myself better and I think manage what I’m saying in my opinions, like I said before. But also, yeah, I think that’s kind of what I’m thankful for in that sense. I think **the value I took out of the Socratic seminar was just the ability to kind of talk and that sort of thing**. Yeah, I would say that’s the value for me.” (3)
 - Sub theme: shared experience
 - “ I’m now realizing how much **bonding** in an AP course comes from talking about how much we dislike the AP course or at least for a lot of other people. So I’m kind of like people who want to be there, maybe not so much, but I mean in the end they are kind of very much engaged.”
 - “ But then in that everyone just **having fun** in the woods and then just watching a turtle afterwards just sit on a lab table.” (10)
 - “And just really getting **to share** what I believe, **hear what others believe**, and just really **work together to collaboratively learn and share**. And I remember coming home after that and just telling my mom all about it because it was such a great moment for me.” (10)
 - “Because I guess with AP courses there’s like this, I mean they are technically I guess more challenging, but I feel like a part of that challenge comes from more **student produced engagement**, I guess.” (10)
 - “The only time I can really think of that was close to that is we had a Socratic seminar about the atrocities in the Congo, which, for me, reading that text, I put a lot of effort into analyzing and very difficult history, and we had some very difficult conversations. My AP world class was actually very interesting because my closest friends were South Asian and this one Jewish guy, so we had some **very interesting conversations** about how history kept unfolding as we went through, and processing our own history.” (9)

Theme: Short term

- Sub theme: GPA/strength of schedule/College admittance
 - “They just signed up for AP classes because I wanted **the GPA boost**. I want **colleges to see I took all these AP classes** and most general classes would just be boring. They would just be too easy. So I just sign up for the AP classes, but it’s not ‘cause I

- care about the material. I don't need to learn about lang for the billionth time. I already know where the commas go. I know what this vocabulary is. I know how to use satire. I don't need this class. You have to be in the class so your attendance doesn't like plummet. So you kind of just go to sit there." (6)
- "I did end up progressing in that class because I kind of engaged a little more, locked in that class. And my test scores went up and I started asking more questions. And so that made the class more enjoyable. But so I think the value is that **it contributed to my short term success in regards to grades**, but also **my long term drive.**" (5)
 - Grade/exams: "I think for me, it's **more about high school GPA and then just taking difficult classes** to show, "Oh, here we are." But with the exam itself, I don't know. Now it feels like I'm going back against what I said, but I don't care. I don't know. I think now I'm at the point where just the exams in general, if I do well, I'll do well. But then if I don't, then I won't. But I think I definitely would feel disappointed. Like I said earlier, the potential has been lost because I feel that I have the potential to do well, but that doesn't necessarily mean I'll reach that potential."
 - Have-to: "But I'd say I am somewhat of... I think people have different levels of how college oriented they are, and I have **a really high tolerance for doing things I hate doing just so I can go to college.** I think calculus is the first time it has actually tested me to the point of I cannot even begin with this—Rotating a integral graph, and I honestly would **rather just take a B** and just not have to study this for hours on end. And I took the **same attitude towards the AP test** this year." (9)
- Sub theme: AP exams
 - "When it's like, I don't know, I would get distracted by that. Because I'm like, why do I even need to know this? Let me just learn at surface level **so I can pass the exam.**" (11)
 - "And I think I was **invested in** that because I'd been dedicating so much to it, and I didn't want to see all that **dedication** go to waste because I didn't want to waste my own time. So I thought that, for example, **doing well on the exam** would make up for the time that I had spent working on the class the whole year previously and the review sessions" (2)
 - "Because in an AP course, because you do the whole class and obviously you want to get **a good grade in the class, but it leads up to the exam.** That's the **big marking point** at the end of the year. So if you don't do well on that last marking point, then it seems like, "Well, what did I do all the stuff previously for that for, because clearly that didn't do much?" In my way of thinking it, oh, didn't do much. If I'm going to take the whole class and do well in the class, whatever, and then do bad on the exam, then it's **you feel kind of gypped. You're like, "Well, I put all this into it and this is all I got back."** (2)

Theme: Long term

- Sub theme: college major
 - “I would say overall positive, because I definitely have learned things that are important to **my intended major.**” (12)
 - “But I think AP calculus really was the first one where it made me realize, “I don’t know, this might be something that I want to end up doing when it **comes to college** or whatever it is.” Because I just found myself constantly, we’d be taught the concepts in class, and then I’d go home and I’m like, “Okay, where does this come from?”” (11)
 - College/admittance and career: “Yeah, I would actually, AP Lang is a good example of that because our essay writing this year, a lot of what Miss [inaudible 00:07:13] has been teaching us has also **tied into our college application process.** And then I can very clearly see how that will **help me in college** as well. Just, I mean, even just her teaching us how to make a resume and just things I think **will help me in professional life.**”
 - “**teaching me how to prepare for an exam at the end of the year and to actually, and not necessarily teach me the actual content, but teach me how to handle a course that’s hard and does take a lot of effort.** And I think it definitely is preparing me for after high school when I go to college. And I think that is definitely the value I get out of AP classes.” (3)
- Sub theme: career
 - “making the connections between those events and understanding its impact today, especially **as someone who wants to go into IR,** I think it was with AP world history where it was like, “Okay. I know nothing about this, but I know kind of what I could possibly maybe **in the future** know about this.””
 - “I know it was in semester one this year in AP physics. We were just learning general things about the universe space, and that’s something that really interests me. And my teacher played this YouTube video about becoming an aerospace engineer and stuff. And I don’t know, it kind of hit me at that moment that **STEM was something I wanted to do.** And that class at the moment didn’t really feel like the obstacle that it was, it kind of felt like enjoyable. I don’t really know how to describe it, but ever since then, it’s been a pretty fun class for me.” (5)
 - “So the video was about **how to become an aerospace engineer** and the steps that you take, how to study correctly and how to not think of physics as a pain. And I don’t know, that just really impacted me. So I don’t remember all the details of the video, but I remember just seeing someone talk about what they do and their job and **how physics can be implemented in the real world.** And I kind of pieced together what I’m learning right now, will **one day make more sense to me or be more applicable.** So it wasn’t just a school subject to me at that point.” (5)
 - “I think I am extremely interested in computer science as a topic, and I think that I most likely it will **end up doing something like that, studying something like that**

- in college and probably having a job in that area** somewhere around that, maybe in engineering or something” (3)
- Sub theme: real world application
 - “I was doing research and seeing the actual results. I was testing a hypothesis **in a way that felt very science**, because bacteria and stuff is all very microscopic, and it’s not something you talk about in your everyday life. But **in a science setting**, that’s where you hear about it most often, probably. So I think that was probably the coolest part, just doing something that worked and that was **very 168science**.” (12)
 - “Specific moment is probably a bit hard to pinpoint. In AP Lang, there’s definitely, I think, a lot of value to what we’re learning. Because writing essays is something you have to do a lot in an academic setting, and just getting feedback on those essays too from our teacher is really helpful. Specific moments, probably when we were doing our... What was our first rhetorical analysis? Not our first one. We were doing a rhetorical analysis about Hurricane Katrina, and first of all, the subject material was interesting and good to know about because it’s like **current recent history**. And then also being able to analyze **how a journalist writes** about their piece is important and presents information to you. Because when you’re reading news, you need to know what they’re using, they’re how they’re telling the story so that you can **understand maybe their perspective and their biases and how it’s influencing it**. So I think that was useful, and I definitely recognized the value of that kind of analytic skill.” (12)
 - “And then also on top of that, what’s this topic that, in my case, was very niche and something that was pretty unexplored within high school. High school level would not have been explored on that level. So I think that, when it really came to the fact of feeling like you’re learning something for more than just taking an AP exam, or learning something for more than just having the knowledge for the college credit, but something that actually is **conducive to understanding more of the worldview**, which I definitely felt I’m AP research was the goal. And we were reading academic papers, so it felt like we’re learning something meaningful.” (9)
 - “I feel like the most valuable AP class, ironically, considering what I’ve just mentioned, is French. I mean, if you are in a foreign language, you can actually **use that and go out into the world**. Well, you can **visit all the French speaking countries and actually to know what they’re saying**.” (8)
 - “there are just terms and stuff that we learned about in that class that I feel like **I think about a lot when I’m just observing people socially interacting** or just, there’s a lot of **applicable information** in that class.” (7)
 - “. It’s actually interesting. I don’t really care about chemistry, but **the environment’s more current issue**. So I feel like **it’s valuable information**.” (6)
 - “I feel like **it’s important to know** about your history. So I don’t really know any of that. I don’t really care either. But **it’s important that I guess someone brings up**

- some dumb president. I'm like, I know who that is. I could apply to that and I could actually seem intelligent on the subject, which I feel like is important.” (6)**
- “Absolutely. I think last year when I took Psychology, we would be learning about, maybe it was mental illness or something like that, and it's kind of super simple way of just they would define what it meant about these mental illnesses and I thought it was just so interesting how these things... It was interesting to me **because they affect so many people**. And I thought that, well hey, everyone should know this. Why did I not know this before I took the class? It seemed like such an important part of my life, and I realized that it definitely is **important knowledge for everyone to have** and I felt bad that I didn't learn it before then.” (3)
 - “the concepts that we learn **are more applicable to life**. So I think as we've been learning stuff in the class, I've been **tying it back to my own life**, and I think that's been really interesting. Not like I'm just like, “Oh, if I drop a pencil then it's going to fall,” that sort of thing.” (2)

APPENDIX H

Sample Reflective Writings

6/8/23

Affective engagement

- Positive
-

Comfort	Confidence	Connection	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment • In peers • Taken out of comfort zone • Outside of routine or norm of class structure or activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming struggle to see benefits • “Locked in” • Focused • Perseverance • Relief • Desire to learn more • Inspired • Productive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To peers • To content • To teacher • To real world • To goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement • Fun • Interested • Like a kid again • Control

Advanced students experience POSITIVE affective engagement in AP courses:

- Through feeling comfortable and being taken out of their comfort zones
- By feeling confident when they are challenged
- By feeling connected to components and extensions of the course
- By simple enjoyment

Advanced students experience positive affective engagement in AP courses when they feel comfortable in the course. Comfort can come from being around like-minded students, often expressed by interviewees as those who care about their academics, have post-secondary goals, and are interested in the subject. As students find themselves in similar company, there is less distraction that removes them from the content and activities of the course. This is refreshing to hear as with an open enrollment course, all students are welcome to enroll in AP. For students to view their classmates as similar (compared to, say, an honors course or a standard course) and to find comfort in that, speaks well of the demographics of the program.

On the other hand, the experiences that most stood out to students, that they enjoyed or feel they experienced positive emotions such as enjoyment and excitement, are those that take students outside of their comfort zone. This might mean discussions of heavy or politically charged topics or topics that offer a chance for students to really look inward. Several students mentioned literature contributing to that experience. Other students cited experiences that are those that took them literally outside of the classroom—to nearby creek beds to explore microscopic life which made students feel like actual scientists. Other experiences took students to hallways and stairwells to conduct physics experiments. Still other students felt positive emotions within the classroom but outside of the normal AP structured activities such as deep discussions, brain breaks (the turtle story was interesting) or activities or elements in the classroom that made them “feel like a kid again”.

Advanced students experience positive affective engagement in AP courses by feeling confident when they overcome struggles due to the course. AP is a lot of work—that is a common perspective from all interviewees. But students expressed several positive emotions from tackling and overcoming that struggle (see negative emotions below). Many students said they felt confident when they encountered and overcame struggles in AP courses with several adding that they then can recognize the value in that struggle as a benefit to their future success. Other students talked about how focused they become particularly when the activity or even the struggle related to something that was of interest to them. The phrase “locked in” was used by several students (I don’t know if they were friends or shared a class or teacher or if this is simple jargon for their age group, though one student did refer to it as “gen z” language). Students felt perseverance and productivity in these experiences of struggle. Specifically, two students viewed struggle and overcoming the struggle as a launch pad to feeling inspired (in terms of career) or a desire to learn more about the topic while one student felt a sense of relief once the struggle was overcome. Two students felt in “control” in a positive way as they grasped concepts they struggled with.

Advanced students experience positive affective engagement in AP courses when they feel connected to the course. This can manifest through relationships with peers (as mentioned previously) even when the shared experience is negative. As one student put it, being “in hell together” strengthens the relationship with classmates, even those they might not have much in common with. Other students mentioned the role of the teacher in their positive experiences with several saying that they credit the teacher for their enjoyment of the class, not the course itself. Another student referred to the positive feedback from the teacher that helped increase their enjoyment and confidence within the class. Several students discussed their connection to the material or content of the course, and the experiences that stood out to them did so because they were able to connect to the content or were able to connect the content with other courses, future goals, or potential future real world experiences such as participating in the voting process.

- **Negative**
-

Competitiveness	Disappointment	Toward environment	Toward work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bitterness • Resentment • Comparison • Pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In expectation • Doubt • Apprehension • Worry • In content, delivery, depth • “Mourning for lost opportunities” • Apathy • Questioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boredom • Painful/Dread • Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Within and from non AP peers • Melancholy • Annoyance • Tension • “Meh” • Stifled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Lost • Overwhelmed • Daunting • Heavy • Intimidated • “In hell together”

Advanced students experience negative affective engagement in AP courses:

- Through competition
- Through disappointment
- Related to the environment
- Related to the class activities

Advanced students experience negative affective engagement in AP courses through competitiveness and sometimes view the negative as a positive. High achieving students know what they are competing against and for: grades, GPA, AP scores, college acceptance, and essentially, life goals. This desire to be the best, sometimes manifesting itself in perfectionism, is ingrained often in families, in cultures, in schools and strangely enough within the AP courses themselves. Students expressed being “bombarded” with messaging surrounding the AP exam—not only from the teachers, family, and friends but also from, so they say, the College Board. This leads to potential feelings of bitterness or resentment when students do not get the scores, grades, or strength of course schedules their friends may achieve. Students sometimes felt competitive, often comparing themselves to others, but also saw the competitiveness of others which negatively impacted them. On the other hand, several students who displayed a greater sense of self-awareness see that competitiveness in others and recognize their own strengths, values and reasons for being in an AP course. Many students expressed feeling pressured by the course as whole, by particular experiences or by family, school or societal expectations. Several students recounted taking breaks from this pressure (usually at home) using their own mental health strategies such as napping, eating, and watching videos. The ability to recognize and address the pressure in a healthy way again speaks to a positive outcome of a negative emotion.

Advanced students experience negative affective engagement in AP courses by being disappointed. Disappointment often came when expectations were not met for example one student lamented over missed opportunities in a class. She described an experience in which lynching was “glossed over” in her AP History course, and she saw that as something that would have benefited her peers more as she described a white student who didn’t know what a lynching was. Due to recent controversies in teaching history, the decisions by teachers to address or not address topics impact the emotional experience of students. However, depth was not the only thing about the course that disappointed students. The instructional delivery or the content of the course itself was also mentioned as disappointing. Some effective virtual strategies (during Covid-19 for example) that teachers decided to keep using such as video lectures were cited as disappointing. Sometimes the expectation of an experience, whether it was met or not, created a feeling of disappointment. This led to feelings of apprehension, doubt, and worry. The preconceived notions of the difficulty of AP courses often left students feeling intimidated or unsure of their ability, placement in the course, or their futures. The confirmation of this expectation may lead to feeling disappointed not only in the course but in oneself. When students may have had high hopes for an experience and it was not met, that too may lead to feelings of disappointment. For example, one student felt the lack of depth in a discussion made the experience feel overly sanitized, that it was not to the degree that she felt she and other students were ready for. It’s acknowledged though by several students that several factors may contribute to that including teacher, classroom environment, and their own lofty expectations.

Advanced students experience negative affective engagement in AP courses due to the classroom environment. Students expressed feelings of boredom, apathy, pain (not physical), melancholy and dread. One student described their experience as “meh” which is typically interpreted as neither good nor bad but may contribute to feelings of boredom or apathy. This reinforces the idea that the most memorable and pleasurable experiences were those that took students out of the norm of an AP course. Several students discussed feelings of isolation. This may be due to being an English Language Learner or being a student of color or due to political ideology. While many students expressed the positive aspect of connection with peers, many still felt moments of isolation both within and outside of the AP classroom. Several students described isolation at home due to the amount of AP work they had to complete, another described feeling isolated from her non-AP friends. Two students, one on the Autism spectrum, described feeling unique due to their differences from their peers and helped them learn more about how they learn. They did not express that their uniqueness made them feel isolated in a negative way however. Several students expressed annoyance, feelings of tension and feeling stifled in class due to not agreeing with how the teacher or the course itself was run. This could be due to a general personality conflict with the teacher or other students or due to not feeling challenged. This could also be due to expectations not being met.

Advanced students experience negative affective engagement in AP courses related to class activities. Students very often felt overwhelmed and frustrated with the work due to lack of preparation, clarity on the part of the teacher or the pacing of the course. Students, when tasked with assignments, discussions or homework felt lost at times, that the workload or the assignment was daunting or too heavy leading to feelings of intimidation and a desire to just give up. However, as previously noted, these feelings—the struggle and obstacle once tackled successfully often lead to positive emotions. As one student put it, they were “...in hell together”. This phrase of course can go beyond AP to high school itself or to simply being a young person in this world.

6/9/23

- Neutral or emotional processes (?)
-

Reflective	Perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of self • Of others • Of course • Of content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive to negative • Negative to positive • On self • On others • On world

Advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses:

- By develop affective-reflective skills
- By gaining perspective on self
- By gaining perspective on others
- By gaining perspective on the world
- By gaining positive perspective on negative experiences
- By gaining negative perspective on positive experiences

Advanced students experience affective engagement in AP courses by developing affective-reflective skills. This was illustrated in student experience in how they examined their own reactions and emotions in regards to the experiences described. They were also observant of how the emotions of others, particularly negative emotions including teachers, impacted their experiences. Additionally, students also showed characteristics of being reflective upon the course and content. From these reflective experiences, students adjust their perspective on several things related to that experience: themselves, others, and the world. They see the positive and negative aspects of an experience that alters their emotional response to it or alters their interest in or value of an aspect of an AP course.

Value

- Value
-

Immediate	Short Term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love of learning • In the moment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPA • AP Exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career • College major

• Shared experiences	• College admittance	• Real world applications
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Advanced students find value in AP courses:

- Through immediate or in the moment experiences experiences
- Through experiences related to short term goals
- Through discovering how experiences will impact long term goals and life.

Advanced students find value in AP courses through immediate or in the moment experiences. Several students shared that their experiences in the moment reflected their love of learning—either overall or about a particular subject. Some expressed that the value was due to something they were already interested in or brought about a new appreciation or perspective for. Students also valued the shared experiences in the moment—both positive and negative with several noting that even if they were miserable, they were miserable together and that shared experiences made the negative experience less negative.

Advanced students find value in AP courses related to short term goals. These goals can be a higher GPA, specific scores on their AP exams and college admittance. Students discussed how their experiences prepared them for these items. Many students saw the value in both immediate and short term goals and how one prepared for the other. For example, students who felt overwhelmed in the moment but overcame that struggle understood that they were building skills that would work to their advantage on the exam (and some even acknowledged how these become life skills).

Advanced students find value in AP courses through discovering how experience will impact long term goals and life. This could be found in students sharing an understanding of how the experience will serve to their benefit in the future whether that is in college, career or beyond. Several noted how the experience of AP—through content—is useful in real world situations outside of potential careers such as understanding how government works or how a general sense of psychology might help build empathy.

6/13/23

Met with Dr. Cross today. Some things to note:

- Pollio—4 things (time, body, etc)
- Feeling words for thought state and thought words for feeling state—student vernacular. “I feel like...”
- Re: Sarah—feedback round 2. (check)!

6/16/23

Today I completed pulling exemplary quotes from the interviews and ordered them by theme and subtheme. I have also asked a colleague to review the data to see if they are seeing the same themes from my data. I’m assuming I will include this data in an appendix along with some journal entries above. There are some concerns that I have expressed to Dr. Cross (and that even after are still stuck in my mind—for example, the processing theme that I have observed and categorized, I wonder if that should be included. I think it’s a tough sell and may have more to do with how students express themselves than act as part of their lived experience. I may just take that out. I don’t know if it answers my research question.

On Monday, I will begin setting up chapter 4 or at least reviewing what I need to include.

6/18/23

Research Question 1

Theme: Positive Emotions

- *Out of the comfort zone/out of the norm:* Students described experiencing positive emotions in AP courses such as joy and fun when the routine of AP courses and school are interrupted by doing something outside of that routine whether that is in location, instruction, structure, collaboration or ideology. Students recall these experiences precisely because they are out of the norm. From childlike play of being outside doing science experiments to the randomness of watching a classroom pet, these experiences were recalled as fun, interesting, different, enjoyable, and challenging. Several students indicated a changed perspective toward others, content or the world which can represent growth.
- *Comfort/familiarity:* Students described experiencing positive emotions in AP courses when they are in familiar environments that bring a sense of comfort. Many of the students described seeing familiar students—students whose academic efforts and values reflected theirs. Some students described challenging situations or assignments that, with overcoming them, brought a sense of comfort and relief. Feelings described include feeling relaxed and at ease due to the familiarity. A few students described how being taken outside of your comfort zone (in more negative ways) was made better by working with students who were similar to them.
- *Confidence:* Students described experiencing a feeling or developing a feeling of confidence in AP courses. This feeling manifested in a desire to learn more about a particular idea or subject, a sense of curiosity; as their interest grew, so did their confidence in tackling future study, even if it was challenging. As students made themselves open to challenges, their interest piqued, many students described a sense of focus and control that helped them be successful in their course. Students used phrases like “just clicked”, “locked in” and “dialed in” which one student, when asked about the word choice, laughed and mentioned “sounding like Generation Z”. This feeling of focus was described by students regarding all facets of AP: in class, homework, and AP exams. Several students described a feeling of not noticing time pass when in such a state, often referred to as flow.
- *Connection:* Students described feeling connected in AP courses through content, the environment, and peers (which may be due to the lack of social interaction due to the Covid-19 pandemic that pulled students out of in-person learning. The connection to peers also relates heavily to the comfort and familiarity mentioned previously though some students recalled meeting new people or hearing perspectives different from their own as positive experiences. One student used an interesting phrase, “student produced engagement” in reference to the fun she had getting to know students as they interacted with content. Another student mentioned the positive connection with peers in relation to negative aspects of the course: “we were all in hell together”.
- *Enjoyment:* Students described feeling joy and fun in their experiences in AP courses. These descriptions were not necessarily connected to the themes above but related to other aspects of their experience such as a specific assignment unique to a course or a teacher, sharing the experience with family or friends outside of the particular class, when a particular struggle is overcome, or interactions with teachers. Several students equated the feeling of fun and enjoyment with doing well, either once they were doing well, the experience was fun or the experience was challenging so they “might as well have fun”.

6/19/23

Theme: Negative Emotions

- *Competitiveness:* Students described feeling competitive in their experiences in AP courses. This feeling came in relation to peers and societal expectations regarding success. Students expressed feeling nervous in group discussions, worried that what they said may be misunderstood or looked down upon as not seeming very smart. Some of this may be due to the sensitivity students felt in today’s political and culture battlegrounds. Much of the comparison, however, relates to doing as well as peers—whether that is on specific assignments, grades, the number of AP courses

taken, the AP exam or in who may have more stress due to those items. This led to feelings of bitterness, sadness and tension, sometimes with friends outside of the AP courses.

- *Disappointment:* Students described feeling disappointment in their experiences in AP course. Much of this was felt when expectations were not met. Some students discussed the disappointment felt when interest was stifled—by time constraints, for example—when an enjoyable activity was unable to continue. This feeling of being stifled was also evident when difficult topics were glossed over. This was described as a “sanitized” (9) environment, one in which a student’s experience might have been made better by tackling these sensitive topics, but were not due to either the teacher or the lack of understanding on the part of peers. Other components that were described to disappoint students were lackluster exam scores, teacher instruction (sometimes described as annoying), and when comparing to the success of peers.
- *Negative emotions toward environment:* Students described feeling negative emotions in their experiences in AP course classrooms. Students described feeling isolated in several ways: how they were different from others in the room based on skin color, intelligence, political ideology, quality of work and learning styles, how they were different from their non-AP friend groups, feeling lost due to not understanding the content or not being able to keep up with the work, and, when teachers continued instruction from the virtual years which was very independent, students lamented about missed opportunities due to a lack of interaction. Students also expressed feeling bored due to lack of interest and challenge, the repeated structures of AP, over-dependence on textbooks, having already learned the material, or a general sense of apathy. Confusion was another negative emotion described in relation to student experience due to the newness of experience (for example, a first AP course or unfamiliar content), poor instruction, or the quickened pace of the course. Students also expressed feeling pressure, bombarded with the messaging of how important the exam was. Assignments and competitiveness contributed to feelings of pressure. This leads to feelings of anxiety, particularly if put on the spot such as in a Socratic seminar.
- *Negative emotions towards work:* Students described feeling negative emotions in their experience in AP course assignments and homework. Students described feeling stressed, pressured, overwhelmed, and frustrated with the amount of work for AP courses. These feelings are related to pacing, depth, lack of depth, and instruction or lack of instruction. These feelings then lead to feelings of doubt, melancholy, hopelessness and apathy. Some students described feeling intimidated by the amount of work they faced.

6/20/23

Research Question Two

Theme: Immediate Value

- *Love of learning:* Students described the value of AP courses as a love of learning. Learning and acquiring knowledge were expressed as a valuable element of AP courses, with some students mentioning the value of learning over other benefits of AP such as college credit. Others described feeling satisfied at the end of the day knowing they learned something.
- *In the moment:* Students described the value of AP courses as in the moment. These moments varied, from teacher interactions to focus. Students expressed the value of the moment versus other benefits of AP, however some did acknowledge the long term value as well.
- *Shared experiences:* Students described the value of AP courses as shared experiences. Collaboration and discussions within the classroom and, as previously described, the struggles of AP courses (when not in it alone) were described as valuable.

Theme: Short term value

- *GPA/Strength of Schedule/College admittance:* Students described the value of AP courses in terms of grade boost and transcript strength in order to be more attractive to colleges. Students described a sense of “having to” do AP courses.
- *AP Exams:* Students described the value of AP courses in terms of AP exams indicating that doing/not doing well is reflective of the overall value of the course.

Theme: Long term value

- *College major/career preparation:* Students described the value of AP courses in terms of college majors and career preparation. Not only did students express how experiences in their AP courses helped shape their potential interests in various college majors, they also indicated how the workload, stress, and preparation for AP exams will benefit them in college.
- *Career:* Students described the value of AP courses in terms of career interests.
- *Real World Application:* Students described the value of AP courses in terms of real world applications. From understanding how society works to course specific skills useful in the real world, students seemed to see the most value in this sub-theme. The environment and mental health (through APES and AP Psyche) seemed to resonate with students the most in terms of real world application.

APPENDIX I

IRB Approval

While you are employed or officially affiliated with William & Mary in a capacity that permits you to perform research, you may conduct this research, until it expires. If you are no longer a PI at W&M the protocol will be inactivated.

This is to notify you on behalf of the Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC) that protocol EDIRC-2023-03-07-16224-tlcross titled A Phenomenology of Affective Engagement in Advanced Placement Courses has been EXEMPTED from formal review because it falls under the following category(ies) defined by DHHS Federal Regulations: 45CFR46.104.d.2.

Work on this protocol may begin on 2023-04-15.

This protocol must be submitted for annual renewal on 2024-04-15, at which time the PI will be asked to indicate whether the protocol will continue as active, will continue with changes, or should be set to inactive.

Should there be any changes to this protocol, please submit these changes to the committee for determination of continuing exemption using the Protocol and Compliance Management application (<https://compliance.wm.edu>).

Please add the following statement to the footer of all consent forms, cover letters, etc.:

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2023-04-15 AND EXPIRES ON 2024-04-15.

You are required to notify Dr. Ward, chair of the EDIRC, at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC-L@wm.edu) and Dr. Jennifer Stevens, Chair of the PHSC at 757-221-3862 (jastev@wm.edu) if any issues arise during this study.

VITA

Matthew Wade Henry
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EDUCATION

The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va — *Doctor of Education*

June 2020 – January 2024

- Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership, Gifted Education Administration

The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va — *Talented and Gifted Endorsement*

January 2018 - June 2019, ACPS/William and Mary Cohort

American University, Washington, D.C. — *Masters*

July 2009 - May 2011, Washington, D.C.

- M.A.T. Secondary Education

The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va — *Bachelors*

August 1995 - May 1999, Williamsburg, Va

- English
- Film Studies (minor)

EXPERIENCE

River City Public Schools — *Teacher*

August 2011 - PRESENT

River City High School

- 10th Grade Honors English
- 12th Grade SOL Remediation English
- Film Studies Instructor
- PLC Leader 10th Grade English (2018-2021)
- Staff Leadership Team (2018-2022)
- Talented and Gifted Endorsement (2019-Present)
- Leadership Course Instructor (2015-Present)
- SGA Sponsor (2014-Present)
- ISTE NETS-T Certified (2014-Present)
- Social Media Liaison (2017-2021)
- Staff Representative for RCPS Advanced Academics Schoolboard Advisory Committee (2023-Present)
- Prior to teaching, have enjoyed freelance writing, performing stand-up comedy, and working in the bar/nightlife industry—all of which have proved invaluable to teaching.