

The Experiences and Perceptions of African American Males and Their
Elementary Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological research investigation explored the African American males' perceptions of activities and learning opportunities that take place in the classroom and how these experiences influenced their academic success. Using the theoretical lens or perspective of critical race theory (CRT), the researcher examined the capital second-, third-, and fourth-grade African American male participants bring into the classroom setting and how this capital relates to the structure of the social and academic realm within the school environment. Additionally, the researcher examined the instructional practices of these students' teachers and how these practices matched and supported the perceptions of this group of students or possible when the instructional practices indicated a disconnect or mismatch to the student's academic or social needs. The researcher utilized four salient questions to examine these issues: (1) What are the perceptions/interpretations of African American male students and their teachers about their school experiences?; (2) How do the teachers interpret their own teaching practices, particularly with regard to these children?; (3) How do the needs of African American male students influence the teaching practices of their teachers; and (4) How do their perceptions and interpretations mirror each other and differ? The following four themes emerged from an inductive analysis of data: (1) *teacher and student perceptions of their learning experiences*, (2) *teacher practices*, (3) *teacher needs superseded those of the students*, and (4) *misaligned perceptions and interpretations*. Implications for K-12 teachers and administrators as well as for teacher educators are included, and future research questions are proposed for research scholars.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my loving mother, Ethel Faye Hill-Hairston. I miss you dearly and wish that you could have taken this journey with me; however, I am sure you are looking down right now with a smile on your face. I know that you have been with me spiritually the entire time, and I often reflect on one of your final thoughts, “The will of God will never take me where the grace of God will not protect me.” Thank you for giving me love, support, and guidance, which has made me the woman I am today. I will forever carry you, our memories, and those words in my heart.

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In honor of my father, Alexander Erwin, I dedicate this dissertation. Without your influence and nurturing, I would not have had the strength to complete this journey successfully. You have always loved and believed in me unconditionally, and you taught me to believe in myself. I love you.

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“...My soul looked back and wondered how I got over...”
Negro Spiritual

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Prologue

Byron, a seven year old African American male, is full of energy, life, and excitement. He has four younger siblings and lives with his grandmother because his mother has a chemical dependency that has rendered her incapable of parenting effectively. Bryon does not know his biological father; however, he knows the men who are the fathers to his younger siblings. By virtue of life circumstances, Byron has not been in the same home environment for an extended period of time. He moves every six to eight months when money is not available. He has lived with his grandmother for the past two years, which is the longest time he has lived in one place. His grandmother's home is very neat and everything is always in place; however, the apartment is small for six people. There is only one bathroom, a small kitchen that includes a table with four chairs, a living room area, and two bedrooms. His grandmother shares her room with Byron and his sister, and the three brothers share the other bedroom. While it is small in size and somewhat crowded, Byron has grown to love and respect the community around him.

Byron's community is located within the buildings and blocks of the public housing apartments. There is a community center that is centrally located among the apartment buildings, and there is a gas station/auto shop that is one block away from his apartment building and beside the corner store. A church that many of the residents of the public housing apartments attend is located across the street from the apartment and adjacent to the community center. The community center operates on a very small budget and works with limited materials and resources. Through the commitment of the community center's director and many volunteers, the center offers a variety of services, working with individuals and families. The community center services include athletic preparation, creative arts activities, counseling sessions, and academic support. Byron takes advantage of most of these services on a weekly

basis. His favorite activities are the athletic preparation sessions because he loves sports, but he also enjoys the creative arts activities. Byron especially likes learning how to play the drums and tambourine, since both were recently donated to the community center.

Byron spends most of his time at the community center when he is not home; however, he visits the community gas station/auto shop at least once a week if not more. The visits are mostly to check in with Mr. Kenny, the owner, and the other mechanics and to listen to their stories and conversations about politics, religion, social issues, and the latest community happenings. Byron's grandmother does not own a car, so Byron likes to watch and question the mechanics about their work so that if his grandmother gets a car he will be prepared to keep it in good running condition. During his visits to the station, he shares his weekly activities, explains how his family is doing, makes sure the magazines and books (especially the comic books) are straightened, empties the trash around the customer waiting area, and refills the snack box. He enjoys helping the mechanics and appreciates the bag of chips and bottled juice he receives as compensation from the shop's owner.

Byron's multiple visits to the auto shop are sometimes the result of a detour he takes when going to the corner store for his grandmother. The corner store has a little of everything since most people in the neighborhood have limited transportation and are dependent upon public transportation, which is not convenient when there is an immediate need. The corner store has a variety of grocery items from paper towels and light bulbs to "fat back" meat and canned vegetables. There are sections for clothing items, schools supplies, hardware items, and Byron's favorite section of comic books that have not made it to the magazine racks at the gas station. Byron takes pride in going to the corner store because he has the responsibility of carrying money to purchase needed items. He really likes to count the money for the cashier (if

the store is not busy) when paying for a purchase, not realizing that his grandmother always makes sure he has the exact change so that he can count the money without having to worry about the change he should receive. The errand to the corner store to purchase small items (mostly grocery) for his grandmother gives Byron the opportunity to visit with the mechanics and to see who is at the gas station. Byron's grandmother and the mechanics praise him for being a great helper.

Byron's good deeds and work extends to the church he attends with his grandmother. While his grandmother makes his attendance at church mandatory, Byron enjoys playing the drums during services, which gives him extra practice beyond the community center activity. Byron plays the drums because he is in control of the tempo; it is something he does well, and he knows what to expect and what is required of him. He takes pride in playing the drums; it is something most of his friends cannot do in the neighborhood or at school.

Unfortunately, the success Byron encounters while playing the drums, helping in the auto shop and participating at the community center does not translate to his school experiences. Byron's school experiences have not afforded him the same level of success that his community has. This mismatch is very troubling to Byron and his grandmother. Whenever he came home with a bad report for the school day, his grandmother would ask, "Why, Byron? Why?" His grades had suffered, and his teachers always reported that he does not pay attention during class. Regardless of the activities in which Byron's teachers reported he was not engaged in the classroom, he would always move his head and shoulders in class, bobbing them up and down, back and forth. When his teachers asked Byron what he was doing, his response was simply, "Feeling the beat, feeling the beat." Byron's love for the drums was his escape when he did not understand the lessons and activities in school. Therefore, he would begin to play them whenever

he felt the need to escape an uncomfortable situation. When he needed to feel good about himself and do what others always praised him for doing, he would “feel the beat.” After a discussion with his grandmother concerning his behavior, Byron continued to ‘feel the beat’ at school, resulting in even more reports from his teachers of misbehavior and defiant acts. He was not making a connection to school or his teachers.

Byron is in the second grade. As he continues to grow, he will likely face obstacles at home and school. As a young African American male, his potential for a positive outlook may change. Based on statistics reported in the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), 30% of African American males like Byron in the fourth-grade read at the basic level as opposed to 59% who read below the basic level. When these percentages are compared to their White student counterparts, 36% of fourth-graders read at the basic level, and 26% read below the basic level. Forty-six percent of White males in the eighth-grade read at the basic level, and 22% read below the basic level. Ten percent of Black fourth-grade males and 29% of Whites read at a level of proficiency, a difference of 19%. By the eighth-grade year, the gap is larger with 8% of African American students reading at proficient and 30% of White students reading at proficient, a difference of 22% (NAEP, Schott Foundation, 2008).

African American males who were identified as struggling readers were reported to have behavioral problems that resulted in disciplinary actions and high dropout rates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). School administrators reported that the disciplinary actions taken resulted in the suspension of 26% of African American males from school as opposed to a 10% suspension rate for their White counterparts (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). These suspension rates correlated to a higher dropout rate. The dropout rate for the African American males is 8.7% as opposed to 5.4% for Whites, a difference of 3.3% (NCES, 2009).

These data prompt one to question what happens to the “Byrons” of the world? When young African American males start at an early age on the ‘right track’ by working hard in their communities and schools, what happens between the early ages and the age of 18 that takes them off the track? Why are the statistics not on the positive side of higher reading abilities and higher graduation rates as well as lower suspension, dropout, and incarceration rates? Scholars have suggested that there is a need for extensive research to address the mismatch between the home and school environments. The success that Byron experienced in his home and community did not help him with his experiences at school. Consequently, scholars must question what types of experiences elementary-aged African American male students encounter within their schools. More specifically, scholars must explore how these students perceive their teachers, and how they meet their instructional needs. Additionally, scholars must examine how classroom teachers structure their instructional practices to respond to the needs of African American male students who bring capital into the classroom that may not easily or readily translate to the traditional public school context.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale

African American male children face many challenges. They must attempt to overcome mainstream society's stereotypes of them as deficient in social interaction and educational attainment. In an effort to "raise" these young males to become active and productive citizens, a high-functioning support system is required (Children's Aid Society, 2006). Little research has explored how young African American male children use their capital to support the learning activities they experienced at school.

The term capital has many meanings and forms to address the expectations and experiences of societal constructs (Lin, 1999). Lin (1999) described capital as, "...a surplus value...a product of a process; whereas capital is also an investment process in which the surplus value is produced and captured...it is an investment with expected returns" (p. 29). Lin (1999) explained the description in terms of the investment being education, and the expected returns as future earnings. For example, learning in general is an investment whereby one gains knowledge and skills to obtain a better job or unlimited opportunities for accomplishing goals that bring the expected returns for success. Bourdieu's (1986) description of capital is similar to that of Lin. Anheier, Gerhards and Romo (1995) referenced Bourdieu's concept of capital as "...generalized resources that can assume monetary and nonmonetary as well as tangible and intangible forms" (p. 862). Bourdieu (1986) based his idea of capital on three general forms, including economic, cultural and social capital. Also, Bourdieu (1986) stated that acquiring capital is different based upon family ties (class) and culture.

All humans are situated in an historical and a cultural process that is continually unfolding. Any understanding of the African American male is predicated on an understanding of African American history and culture (Richardson, 2006). Young African American males in contemporary society face many challenges that have impacted their development (Fashola, 2005). African American males run into greater difficulty as they grow older and become stronger. It is important for educators, parents and communities to come together to ensure that African American males develop strategies that help them establish a better balance between their home and school cultures. As communities and schools attempt to guide these young men in productive and positive directions, Carter G. Woodson's (1933) words ring clear: "...every man has two educations: that which is given to him and the other that which he gives himself; of the two kinds, the latter is by far the more desirable" (p. 124). Ultimately, African American males determine what opportunities they pursue or education they obtain. Nevertheless, society's role is to nurture these young males and provide genuine support as they learn and develop, so they will be well prepared to make informed decisions.

Many opportunities seem to be out of reach for African American males. Based on the Condition of Education 2009 in the National Center for Education Statistics Report (2009), Black students were suspended from school at a rate three times higher than White students (15% as opposed to 5%). Also, inequities within the educational systems were substantial, particularly in the areas of suspension rates and reading abilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Out-of-school suspension policies removed African American males from their structured routines and allowed them opportunities to make decisions that were not in their best interest. Moreover, student reading performance differed by race, with 45% of Black students

scoring at the basic level as compared to 75% of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

The national graduation rate for African American males was 47% and for White males it was 75%, a difference of 28% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). There was a correlation between lower high school graduation rates that lead to higher unemployment, a lack of medical insurance and increasing health issues and a higher rate of crimes committed (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). Further, as Howard (2008) stated, “there is an increasing correlation between African American males who perform poorly in school, many who ultimately dropout and their subsequent involvement in the penal system” (p. 3).

The involvement of African American males within the penal system was overwhelming. The United States Department of Justice (2008) reported a total of 2,103,500 men within the prison system; of which 846,000 were African American males (40%), although African American made up only 12.8% of the total population (U.S. Census, 2007). An astounding 37,100 (43%) of these men were between the ages of eighteen and nineteen out of the total male population for this group of 86,300. The graduation rate of African American males at the age of seventeen as reported earlier was 47%; by the age of eighteen, 43% were incarcerated. These numbers indicated that the prison system could be the college experience for many of these young men (Howard, 2008).

Many researchers have studied the academic performance for African American males, as well as the decline in academic performance and social acceptance for these young men. Some of the most significant research focused on the learning preferences of African American young men. Ellison, Boykin, Tyler and Dillihunt (2005) discussed their findings in terms of learning

preferences as communal, similar to the findings of Jones-Wilson and Caston (2004) for cooperative learning as the leading preference for African Americans.

Limited research has examined cultural practices of African Americans males and educators. Research conducted by Nasir and Saxe (2003), Honora (2003), Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005), and Ryan and Patrick (2001) defined how the roles of African American males were accepted in school based upon their sense of belongingness. Similarly, Mooney and Thornton (1999) and Reeves (2006) conducted studies on students' sense of belonging based on teacher-student relationships. The results of these studies indicated that students, especially African Americans, felt that relationships with their teachers had a significant influence on their ability to be successful both academically and socially.

Further, Muller (2001) argued that teacher-student relationships influenced the level of engagement a student displays within the classroom and school setting. These relationships played a significant role in the attainment of capital within the school environment. However, there had not been significant research to explain or interpret the perceptions students had related to the capital with which they entered school and how they gained additional capital through their experiences and relationships at school. More importantly, there is a need for a clear understanding of if and how the capital students brought to school was valued or recognized.

Understanding the perceptions of African American males in regards to their school relationships, specifically with teachers and in the context of learning activities was crucial in gaining understanding of the capital they possessed and obtained. Critical race theory (CRT) was used by scholars as a lens for understanding the crucial nature of their perceptions. Often, students of color are left vulnerable to various educational tactics such as academic tracking or are discouraged from taking rigorous coursework to promote advanced placement due to their

lack of capital, specifically at school. CRT framed how the African American male is positioned academically and socially in the classroom and school environment.

CRT is a framework that seeks to identify, analyze and transform structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that marginalize people or groups. Ladson-Billings (1998) explained the notion of CRT as being founded on the notion that racism is normal. CRT did not begin in the realm of education. It began as a reaction to racial cruelty and unjust rulings in the court systems in the legal realm of society. CRT in education asks questions such as: What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender inferiority (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research was to explore African American male students' perceptions and their teachers' interpretations of their needs during classroom activities and learning experiences. This research informed the field not only about significant learning experiences which impacted student needs, specifically African American males. It also provided descriptions and perceptions of the instructional practices presented to African American male students and their teachers' perceptions of their own instructional practices, particularly with regard to these students.

The decline of academic and social success of many African American males begins in elementary school and is a critical problem as it relates to producing successful and productive citizens. The theory that drove this research looked at race as a critical component affecting the social and academic development of African American males. The researcher needed to understand all aspects of this problem; therefore, the research questions were:

1. What are the perceptions/interpretations of African American male students and their teachers about their school experiences?
2. How do the teachers interpret their own teaching practices, particularly with regard to these children?
3. How do the needs of African American male students influence the teaching practices of their teachers?
4. How do their perceptions/interpretations mirror each other and differ?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical lens for examining the ways in which elementary-aged African American males develop social competence within their own cultural communities and the mismatches they may encounter related to social competence within school contexts.

Guiding questions include the following:

What are the perceptions/interpretations of African American male students and their teachers about their school experiences?

How do the teachers interpret their own teaching practices, particularly with regard to these children?

How do the needs of African American male students influence the teaching practices of their teachers?

How do their perceptions/interpretations mirror each other and differ?

Initially, the chapter addresses critical race theory as a lens that opens and reveals the needed discussion about race and gender as the centerpiece for an analysis to understand how the African American male is positioned academically as well as socially within the school, home and community (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Relevant theories of learning with a special focus on social learning theory as discussed by Bandura (1977), Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1916). Next, an overview of learning theories is

provided, with a control focus on how learning takes place, including: (a) “community funds of knowledge” theory (Moje, 2008; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll, Velez-Ibarne & Greenberg, 1989), (b) Boykin and Toms’ (1985) “triple quandary” theory of Black child socialization, and (c) Wenger’s (1998) “communities of practice” theory.

Based on the foundation of critical race theory and social/community learning; the chapter then takes up theories that focus on the intersection of African American males’ out-of-school and school-based learning. These intersections are examined from multiple perspectives that include cognitive strategies of the African American male child, the range of competencies for negotiating school-based learning expectations, his centers of cultural strength, as well as what may be possible for the male’s school-based learning if educational resources make use of recognized cultural learning strengths.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is an analytical framework used to study racial inequality. Legal scholars of color originally developed and utilized it to critique social structures and uncover different types of oppression in legal studies (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). It is through this analytical framework that Delgado (2009) urges all individuals regardless of their connection to the educational arena to support and focus on providing students of color equal access and opportunities to educational experiences. Educational experiences in today’s society focus primarily on norms of mainstream America, the views of dominant ‘White’ Eurocentric culture (Hartlep, 2009; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter & Dillihunt, 2005).

The educational experiences of the P-12 schools are tailored by the hidden curriculum (Hartlep, 2009; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003), or a curriculum that does not take into account the experiences, heritage, voices, concerns, or issues of ethnic minority students (Eisner, 1985).

Scholars (Hartlep, 2009; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003) assert that this curriculum leads to educational policies and practices that serve and benefit White student groups; marginalized groups—often students of color—are left vulnerable to various tactics such as academic tracking or are discouraged from taking rigorous coursework to promote advanced placement. At heart, these types of educational policies and practices view students of color and of low socio-economic family status in a deficit manner (Hartlep, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The extension of critical race theory in the field of education is defined by Lynn (1999) as a:

... set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of students [of color]. What roles do schools, school process, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial...subordination?
(p. 610-611)

It is within the critical race framework that historically marginalized populations within school settings and society as a whole can be evaluated and examined by focusing on race and racism in education (Hartlep, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). Critical Race Theory has four useful components for analysis of the implications of marginalization, frustration and dissatisfaction when the issue of race is the focal point. These four components or tenets are: (1) the notion that racism is normal, or embedded so deeply within the social order that it is viewed as natural or ordinary; (2) the concept of interest convergence; (3) the social construction of race; and (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009).

The first tenet is the notion that racism, or the belief that race accounts for differences in human character and ability resulting in the misconception that a particular race is superior to others (Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999), has been enculturated as normal or ordinary. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) describe this component as the life context that most people of color routinely face; it is 'business as usual' for today's society. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) illustrate by using a scenario of a fourth grade student who raises her hand repeatedly in class to be acknowledged. Racism in this instance is viewed as dependent upon the student's race and the teacher's race. If the student is Black and the teacher is White, then the reaction is most likely considered to be due to the color of the student's skin and the teacher is viewed as racist. If the student is White and the teacher is White, it is possible that the student feels the reaction of the teacher is an oversight or the teacher may have a lot on his or her mind. If the student is Black and the teacher is Black, racism is not perceived to be possible; instead, the teacher's reaction may be viewed as rude or a lack of valuing the student's idea (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While the scenario addresses different responses based upon the race of the participants, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) note that responses based on racism include "...small acts of racism, consciously or unconsciously perpetrated...from the assumptions about racial matters most of us absorb from the cultural heritage in which we come of age in the United States" (p. 25). There are many everyday life experiences that society has accepted where racism is accepted as normal or ordinary (Hartlep, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The second and related tenet is interest convergence. Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) definition for interest convergence refers to Bell's notion that the majority group tolerates the increasing progress of racial justice only when it benefits their interests to do so. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) use the experience of a young African American male to explain interest

convergence. The African American male attended a predominantly White school with a small population of African American students. The African American male possessed what his community considered great leadership qualities and athletic abilities. The leadership qualities demonstrated by this student were not noted or encouraged as far as the school was concerned. The school's faculty had a strong interest in this student because they wanted to assure that the school's athletic program continued to be successful. The academic skills of the student were never questioned or discussed; however, the young man was aware of the school's interest in how fast he could run and what his athletic talent would do for the team. The interest convergence factor in this experience was that the African American male student was one of few who attended the school, and he had the opportunity to get a 'better' education (equated to grades and support opportunity for the student of color) only because his athletic ability and the potential success and prestige he would bring the athletic program (tolerating the student of color in order to obtain a better athletic standing). The student was aware of the schools true interest in him as only an athlete and not a scholar; yet, in reality the opportunity for a high quality education was most important to him (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Interest convergence is emphasized when results are more advantageous for privileged Whites (dominant group) than a desire to help those of the marginal group (people of color) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The third tenet is the social construction of race. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) state, "...race and races are products of social thought and relations....rather races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (p. 7). In essence, most people only see the physical traits of others, which make up a small portion of the true person. While race is always noticed, there is negation of the distinctly human, higher-order traits, which include personality, intelligence and moral values/behaviors (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The social

construction of race is based upon certain assumptions that inform the system of images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings and scripts that, for critical race theorists, send messages that people of color (marginalized groups) are less intelligent, reliable, virtuous and hardworking than dominant (White) groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The social construction of racism has been documented by what was known as the “one drop rule.” The “one drop rule,” an artifact of the Jim Crow Law, indicated that if there was a single drop of Black blood in the body of an individual, it made the individual “Black” or a person of color, subjecting them to the treatment of the marginalized group. The Social construction of racism is also noted in the original Social Security Act, which denied social security benefits to people of color. Due to this act of social construction, people of color were denied union rights and guaranteed income for future retirement. This prevented people of color from holding higher paying jobs, and obtaining medical care and job security. With the implementation of this federal law in the twentieth century, people of color were marginalized by Whites and the dominance they enforced (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009).

The fourth tenet is storytelling/counter-storytelling. This form of communication provides a unique voice to people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This power of voice is persuasive, providing explanatory ability, demystifying beliefs that are commonly believed to be true based upon society’s dominant social order (Hartlep, 2009). Storytelling has been a long tradition within the African American culture and is used to convey the stories and struggles of their people passed from generation to generation (Howard, 2008). Ladson-Billings (1998) asserts that stories provide the venue for understanding and interpreting the historical and contextual nature of the fact that today’s society is deeply structured by racism.

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) define counter-storytelling as a process of exposing or putting to rest the racial stereotypes that may plague the thoughts of those outside of the particular racial group. Counter-storytelling helps marginalized groups share what their life is like as opposed to having the dominant culture of power and majority group provide the experiences of the disenfranchised groups in research literature or media. Counter storytelling draws explicitly on the experiential knowledge of members from the marginalized group (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Howard, 2008; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). Howard (2008) notes, “it is necessary to recognize that race and racism have been and remain central cultural and structural forms of oppression that permeate every social, economic, and political institution in the U.S.” (p. 4). Storytelling and counter storytelling provides a venue for individual and group exploration of oppression, making it possible to better understand the omitted voices and points of view for people of color (Howard, 2008).

Many people may have the assumption that schools have become neutral spaces where everyone is treated equally (Hartlep, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998). As an example of counter-storytelling, Howard (2008) shares the thoughts of young African American males and their schooling experiences in the environment that many felt was unfair due to their race. The responses were similar in nature beginning with the major question, “What are they thinking about me”? The responses ranged from being seen as wanting to be a gang banger, a rapper, or just acting stupid. The males countered this perception by doing the opposite; they obtained honor roll status, which they reported surprised everyone. They also felt the dominant group perceived them as being good at playing sports. When they had good grades and joined student government groups, the responses from some teachers were, “you’re not like the rest of them.” The young men reported frequently encountering teachers who had the mindset, “Why should we

care, when they don't." Because of this perceived mindset, the young men felt that they were not being given a chance and that the teachers felt they were a lost cause and did not want to put the effort in to helping them. If they attended predominantly White schools, the worst reported experiences involved having something go wrong in the school and being immediately blamed for it. If the incident was caused by a Black student, then the rest of the Black students could never live it down because teachers always remembered and referred back to it.

The Black males in Howard's (2008) study ultimately felt that race was the only characteristics that teachers and administrators truly viewed. Equality is not found in schools, as evidenced by experiences reported and the achievement gap between Whites (the dominant group) and Blacks or people of color (marginalized groups). Ladson-Billings (1998) asserts that curriculum, instruction, and assessment contribute to the achievement gap. Through the lens of critical race theory, curriculum is viewed as culturally specific and designed to maintain a White ambiance. In essence, a curriculum design can silence the stories of African Americans, especially if these viewpoints oppose the dominant authority. An examination of instruction from the lens of CRT reveals that current instructional practices deem African American students as lacking academic intellect, leading teachers to focus on remediation instead of acceleration (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). An example of these inconsistencies was shared by Howard (2008) reporting the experience a Black male had with his teacher. The student referenced that during class discussions; if the White students disagreed or challenged content within the lesson they were being viewed as critical thinkers and were praised for such insight. However, if he disagreed or challenged the discussion, the teacher would declare that he was being disrespectful or did not understand the lesson. Subsequently, the student questioned the value the teachers had of his opinions and responses.

Because of these kinds of interactions, students of color may be hesitant or unsure of their responses in school. The curriculum and instruction experienced by most students of color in formal school settings do not translate well when assessments are given to demonstrate knowledge (if students do not feel valued or if their knowledge is not valued). Ladson-Billings (1998) contends that assessment is a means to legitimize African American student deficiencies under the pretext of standardized testing. Ladson-Billings (1998) notes, “in the classroom, a dysfunctional curriculum coupled with a lack of instructional innovation adds up to poor performance on traditional assessment measures” (p. 20). Thus, these assessments are more troubling and may reinforce racist and classist stereotypes that students who perform poorly are less likely to achieve academically as well as socially (Howard, 2008).

Summary

The four components of Critical Race Theory provide a lens for understanding the status of education in today’s society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). Critical race theory (and the four components of CRT), provides a foundation for the exploration of the role played by racial oppression in society. While educators view themselves as part of the ‘nice place’ of American schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 22), education continues to be viewed and analyzed as part of the problem that plagues today’s society (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999). If education is to make a solid and lasting contribution in addressing racial and ethnic issues, researchers must continue to analyze the inequalities within education through the lens and framework of critical race theory. Such research provides a framework upon which all communities of practice across the nation may begin to recognize and thoroughly value the cultural heritage and funds of knowledge that students of color bring to the everyday classroom experience.

Social and Community-Based Theories of Learning

Definition and origins. Broadly defined, social learning theory addresses how people learn from each other in a social environment (English, 2006). Social learning theory is employed as a conceptual tool to analyze learned behavior that is deemed socially acceptable or unacceptable based on the norms of specific cultural groups (Taylor, 2003). Social learning is defined as identifying and utilizing necessary cultural knowledge to determine what behaviors should and should not be used in various social settings as well as the processes used to acquire such awareness (Taylor, 2003). American public school environments require the demonstration of specific social skills for successful entry.

Social learning theorists include William James, Neal E. Miller and John Dollard, and Albert Bandura. James led with the development of social learning theory in 1890 through his conceptualization of the “social self” as constituted through interaction between personal factors and one’s environment (Woolfolk, 2007). Dollard and Miller (1941) contributed to social learning theory with exploration on the topic of motivation, suggesting that behaviors could be learned as the result of observations that afford positive reinforcement with a valued reward.

Albert Bandura. Albert Bandura’s contributions to social learning theory are considered quite influential and are often referenced in current research (Ormrod, 2004). While Bandura agreed that behaviorist views were accurate, he argued that they lacked consideration of important components, specifically social influences. His focus on the social influences upon behavior expanded the concepts of reinforcement and punishment by adding the notion that learning can take place from observing the actions of others (Woolfolk, 2007).

Bandura’s (1977) theory placed importance on the value of modeling and observational learning. Bandura’s stance on modeling lent itself to the identification of three model types: (a)

the live model, in which a person demonstrates the behavior; (b) the symbolic model, in which an inanimate object such as a book, television show, or movie is used to provide the behavior to be learned; and (c) verbal instruction, in which descriptions only are given to inform the learner of the behavior expected (English, 2006).

Observational learning is the process of gaining knowledge and behaviors by watching others. Learners observe and make generalizations about what they see as they develop understandings of why, how and what happens. Bandura (1986) argued that four factors must be present for observational learning to take place: (a) paying attention, (b) retaining information, (c) producing the behavior, and (d) being motivated to repeat the behavior (Woolfolk, 2007).

Woolfolk (2007) used the example of a young child learning to brush her hair for the first time; holding a hairbrush and brushing one's hair is the behavior modeled. The model must be sure that the child is paying attention to the grip and direction to hold the brush (bristles touching the hair). When the child has paid attention, success should be expected. The attention the child pays will result in retention of the behavior observed. If the behavior is rehearsed and demonstrated multiple times, the child should remember the behavior and be able to reproduce and perform what is learned. This performance is also based on the motivation the child has toward the behavior that is displayed. The use of praise and excitement (i.e., what a good job you are doing, your hair is beautiful, you are such a big girl) at the attempts to use the brush will foster a sense of accomplishment and pride in the success of the activity (Woolfolk, 2007).

Bandura's work demonstrated a sufficient theoretical perspective for explaining human behavior. As a result of modeling, learners were shown to change their behaviors in the absence of stimulus/response/reinforcement. Bandura confirmed this concept through the "Bobo" doll study. This study, initially conducted by Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961), involved 24 preschool

children placed in three different behavioral settings, two in which there were adult models for the children to observe. The first setting allowed children to observe the adult model playing with the Bobo doll in a hostile manner. In the second setting the children witnessed an adult model's more playful and friendly interaction with the doll. The third group of children had no model to observe; they were exposed to the Bobo doll in a play area identical to the other two settings. The children who observed an adult model whose behavior was hostile while playing with the doll imitated the behavior of the model. The group that observed the model with a friendly approach to playing with the doll displayed some of these same friendly interactions when they were given the chance to play. The third group's behavior during play showed little to no major behavioral concerns. It was also noted that male children who witnessed a male model's aggressive behavior imitated and demonstrated a more aggressive behavior than female children in the group (Bandura et.al., 1961).

Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) took the experiment a step further to see how a model such as film or television-viewing could affect behaviors. Referred to as "Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models," preschoolers watched either a film which provided scenes of aggressive behavior, or a film which had no aggressive behaviors. Once again the children imitated the behaviors they had witnessed when given the opportunity to interact with the toys and objects provided (Bandura et.al., 1963). The results from both studies confirmed Bandura's observational learning principle (Woolfolk, 2007) and pointed out the importance of adults modeling and monitoring their behaviors, especially in the presence of young children. The power of modeling and imitation has been found to be vital to behavior development in children (English, 2006).

Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky addressed factors that enhance learning and thinking from the perspective of culture and social interaction (Snowman, McCown, & Biehler, 2009).

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning focuses on the importance of culture in the process of education; further, he suggested that social and cultural goals should be integrated into a social pedagogy. Vygotsky views social pedagogy in several ways. Social pedagogy includes the introduction of children to their cultures and expected behaviors through social interactions with parents, who constitute their first teachers. Social pedagogy also occurs later in more formal interactions with classroom teachers (Snowman et.al, 2009). Vygotsky contended that "through [interaction with] others we become ourselves" (Tudge & Scimsher, 2003, p. 218).

Vygotsky conceptualized a distinction between the types of information a child learns in an informal learning setting such as the home, and what is learned in a more formal setting such as the school. The informal setting provides knowledge of concepts and rules for speaking one's native language, along with recognition of objects within the environment. Children acquire this knowledge through taking part in play and communicating with parents, siblings, peers and friends. Vygotsky termed knowledge that is gained (in most instances) without any acknowledgement and directed by everyday life experiences as "spontaneous concepts" (Snowman et al., 2009). The formal school setting, in contrast, offers knowledge as "scientific concepts" that allow individuals to construct their environment more intentionally and methodically to ultimately generate and guide cognitive development (Snowman et al., 2009).

John Dewey. John Dewey's philosophical approach to learning can be linked to Vygotsky's conceptualizations of learning spontaneous concepts in the context of everyday life experiences. Dewey (1916) and Vygotsky (1933) share similar theoretical perspectives on the relationships between activities and social learning in the development of children, especially the

roles of social interactions. Dewey argued that learning in any context comes from life experiences. Dewey (1916) stated that “when we experience something, we act upon it, we do something with it: then we suffer or undergo the consequences” (p. 139).

Dewey (1916) concluded that it is an individual’s ability to question what is most important for the human community through the experiences that they participate. In order for there to be a successful educative experience, there must be a balance of the didactic with the practical; declaring that “everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had” (Dewey, 1938, p. 27).

Social learning theory. Social learning theory emphasizes individual differences and how factors such as observation, modeling, personality, life experiences and culture affect an individual’s cognitive development (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963; Dewey, 1916; Taylor, 2003). Within the last twenty years, social learning theory has been reaffirmed for its value in conceptualizing the cognitive development of minority children, including African American males. Social learning has the power to guide interventions to enhance academic performance (Taylor, 2003).

Taylor (2003) argues that the rejection experienced in schools and other social organizations by African American males has fostered their inability to display appropriate behaviors to warrant success in the different settings. Taylor (2003), contends that both home and school must come together to provide African American youth with the “pro-social” skills they need for navigating social and cultural boundaries more successfully (Boykin & Ellison, 1994; Taylor, 2003). Gaining these pro-social skills could help young African American males more successfully interact by fostering positive behaviors and minimizing negative behaviors; thus the likelihood would increase for them to develop relationships and empower themselves to

promote their own personal and academic achievements. Taylor (2003) emphasizes that “social skills are developed through interactions with family (home), school and community, and are shaped by reinforcement received as a result of such interactions” (p. 15).

Interactions in the home, school and community are the vessels of social learning that shape and enhance the development of young African American males. A variety of social learning theory lens have implications for understanding learning in diverse situations, locations and interactions: (a) critical race, (b) funds of knowledge, (c) triple quandary and (d) communities of practice.

Learning as Situated within Communities or Cultures of Practice

Funds of Knowledge

Theoretical perspectives on funds of knowledge center on the “funds” or resources of knowledge that individuals obtain outside of formal school environments, through their memberships in social or cultural communities. Kinship within the African American community constitutes one such network that provides learning resources within a given culture, which Moll et al. (1989) characterize as funds of knowledge. These particular funds are learned outside of the school setting, within the home and community in which one lives (Gonzalez, 1995). It is just as important for an individual to know how and where these funds are gained as to acquire the actual knowledge. Learning can take place in informal environments such as home and community venues: wisdom can be gained from cultural or community interactions in locations that exist beyond the walls of the classroom (Moje, 2008; Moll, Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1989). Funds of knowledge acquired through participation in the community are means of learning and socializing that can be used to promote success within a culture. Then, acquired social capital can be deployed within particular social arenas (Moje, 2008).

Moje (2008) explains that "... educators [need] not only to learn about the various funds of knowledge from which youth draw, but also to make opportunities for those funds to intersect with school funds" (p. 342). The act of learning what to say and how to say it, the process of reading, writing and foremost, one's beliefs, are learned within the social context of the home and community. Theories of the acquisition of funds of knowledge can be used to explain the development of personal funds of knowledge among African American males. Regardless of the socioeconomic status of their communities (rich, middle class, poor), children possess similar feelings and progression in how they respond and incorporate everyday learning and funds of knowledge (Goodman & Martens, 2007).

Learning experiences may often be conducted in a setting that is not familiar to all students, especially students who bring funds of knowledge outside of the dominant culture (Moje, 2008). Schools can be viewed as the venues for division between those who are able to rise to the challenge of "achievement" and those who succumb to "under-achievement" in a school culture. Such divisions are never clear-cut; varying degrees of both are present in most students. Under-achievement tends to be more widely accepted for members of racial groups with relatively larger obstacles to overcome (Hughes & Demo, 1989). Pincus and Ehrlich (1999) describe the division between those that achieve and those who fall short of the success, as the result in educational inequality. Their solution to the division is to prepare minority students to perform more effectively in current educational system by providing access to academic skills and study habits, and stability within their homes. These conditions afforded students the opportunity to focus on academic and social achievements within their school environments.

Triple Quandary Theory

The “funds” of knowledge that students possess are cultivated within their family culture to nurture and develop the needed skills and dispositions to participate in different social realms known as the triple quandary. Boykin and Toms’ (1985) “triple quandary of Black child socialization” highlights the triple adjustment that such children undergo in their attempts to navigate outside of their own cultural group. Socialization takes place as children are groomed to take on the adult responsibilities needed to become productive citizens within society. The process of socialization is fulfilled through modeling and acquisition of knowledge based on traditional behaviors, morals, and ideals (Boykin & Toms, 1985). African American children negotiate no less than three different psychosocial realms of experience on a daily basis. Boykin and Toms’ (1985) triple quandary of socialization theory addresses how life experiences learned are viewed in each identified social realm. Their research offers a framework for understanding the multiple social intellects that African Americans must employ as behavioral filters to achieve social competence within their own culture and within mainstream American society.

The triple quandary theory of Afro-American experience incorporates three social realms that African Americans must navigate for effective socialization: the mainstream realm, the social minority realm, and the Black cultural realm. The socialization process that young African American males encounter does not always mirror the social interactions of mainstream society (Boykin & Ellison, 1994). It is within this process that African American males must understand the terms of social identity and how this identity influences their dispositions (in today’s society) within each social realm. Boykin and Toms (1985) emphasized that successful negotiation in one realm does not necessarily ensure comparable success in the others; therefore the socialization process may become confusing and inconsistent.

The mainstream American experience is defined as the dominant social realm in American society, and involves the cultural themes based upon the European way of life (Boykin, 1983). Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, and Dillihunt (2005), describe the European way of life for the mainstream experience as focused on individualism and competition. Individualism refers to the tendencies a person has to embrace independence from accomplishments done alone. The need for individualism can also be seen in competition. Competition is the need a person has to be better than everyone else, surpassing everyone to be seen as the best. Toms and Hobbs (1997) state that the mainstream experience/realm includes individuals and organizations that continuously plan and strategize to improve the quality of life for themselves and their community. It is within this realm that there is a “silent language” (the unspoken words and unnoticed gestures, conveyed through body language and cultural understanding) that is spoken only by the “players” of the community; those whose daily functions influence the decisions and outcomes of the community (Toms & Hobbs, 1997). Ultimately, the mainstream experience is extensive and people affiliated with today’s U.S. society have daily experiences resulting in contacts within the realm; which include participation in work, educational, judicial systems and the mass media (Boykin, 1983; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Toms, Woods & Ngui, 2005).

The minority experience refers to reactions to the ways in which Black people are perceived or perceive they are treated by the dominant racial group in this society (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Ellison, 1994; Boykin & Toms, 1985). The minority realm represents the political and social bias connected to being a member of a racial minority group (Boykin, 1986). Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, and Dillihunt (2005) describe the minority experience realm as involving racism, oppression and discriminatory tactics that many African Americans encounter. The mainstream experience consists of messages and exposure to social, economic and political

issues that prepare and make children aware of an environment that is often unfair in nature to African Americans (Boykin, 1983; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Toms, Woods & Ngui, 2005).

The Afro-American/Black cultural experience is linked explicitly to the traditional African ethos (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Ellison, 1994; Boykin & Toms, 1985). Experiences within this realm include cultural themes and values which are described as including flexible family roles, high value placed on religion, education and work ethics, strong kinship bonds also known as fictive kinships, respect for the elderly and past traditions (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Toms & Hobbs, 1997; Tyler, et al., 2005). Tyler, et al., (2005) noted that within the Afro-American/Black cultural realm, the group (as opposed to the individual) was highly valued, specifically, communalism, a sense of helping each other (as opposed to individual satisfaction), particularly towards one's minority or ethnic group. It is within the Afro-American/Black Cultural experience and realm that students acquire the mindset and the preferences to function better both academically and socially in settings where communalism is apparent rather than individualism and competition (Tyler, et al., 2005). The conflicts African American males encounter as they move across these three realms of experience are the triple quandary (Boykin, 1986).

Negotiation within the three social realms can be very difficult for some African Americans. Boykin (1986) states that these young men may not completely understand the socialized behavior required to be successful in terms of mainstream ideals; they are familiar with and socialized within a culture that can be at odds with European-American culture. He also refers to the mismatch phenomenon as "Biculturality." Biculturality is the process of merging two distinctive sets of cultural practices and identities in order to function within more than one social realm (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Toms, 1985). African Americans ultimately

experience this mismatch with their home and school experiences and the expectations that come along with each experience.

Boykin (1986) contends that when this conflict of cultures takes place, African Americans develop coping skills to gain approval or acceptance. One of the coping skills is that of “out-white” White people, in which African Americans try to attain the things that they perceive the White people have. Some African Americans try to work along with the system and are sometimes perceived by other African Americans as being subservient or “Uncle Tomming,” an instance of identifying with the oppressor and resulting in an attitude of acceptance of the “rightness of whiteness” (p. 73). While these stances constitute survival/coping skills, they are not prevalent in all Black communities, nor have they been dissolved. Bonilla-Silva (2006) states that most White people claim that people of color, specifically Blacks, are responsible for the race problems in the country today. Blacks are thought to always play the race card to gain access and opportunities that would readily be available if they would put the past behind them, work hard, and complain less, all people across racial lines could “all get along” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). It is the negotiations that take place in each social realm (mainstream, minority experience and Afro-American/Black cultural) in which African American males rely on learned coping skills in an attempt to feel valued and define their position within their social organizations and communities of practice (Boykin & Ellison, 1994).

Communities of Practice Theory

The experiences and social realms within the Triple Quandary focus on how students, specifically Black/African American students are culturally prepared within their communities (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Ellison, 1994; Boykin & Toms, 1985). Learning takes place in

situated communities (or cultures of practice) that provide the resources needed for an apprentice to continually gain skills. Communities of practice are constituted within the routines, rituals, traditions and beliefs that are established for successful maneuvering within a given society (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) explains that the theory based on communities of practice requires acceptance of the following assumption:

...engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and so become who we are. The primary unit of analysis is neither the individual nor social institutions but rather the informal ‘communities of practice’ that people form....the theory explores in a systematic way the interaction of issues of community, social practice, meaning, and identity ... [to provide] a broad conceptual framework for thinking about learning as a process of social participation. (p. i)

The primary focus of the communities of practice theory is the process of encouraging active participation in the practices of social communities (Wenger, 1998). It is within the social community that the idea of learning is more than something that occurs for the individual, but encompasses the cooperative spirit of the community as a whole.

Wenger’s (1998) premise of the learning process as social participation encouraged participants to actively identify their practices, revealing that “communities of practices (COP) are everywhere” (p. 6). Wenger (1998) contends that everyone belongs to various communities of practice within home, work, and school environments, as well as in the context of extracurricular activities and interests. People belong to several COPs at any given time. Unique communities of practice exist within all families. Families survive together, and survival is life’s most essential enterprise. The work environment, no matter the job description, creates its own community of practice regarding what needs to be completed and how people

must interact to get the job done. School is also an environment in which, no matter who or what is involved, a community of practice extends throughout the building, within the classroom, the lunchroom, and the playground. Extracurricular activities differ depending upon individual interests, yet each forms its own community of practice: those who fish together, those who do scrapbooking, and those who put on plays. While communities of practice exist within each of these environments, there are great differences in individuals' engagement in and contributions to the practice of a given community. The community of practice then refines each member's consecutive enactments to ensure new generations of members, and sustains all members' interconnectedness (Wenger, 1998). The interconnectedness members experience within their communities of practice may be based upon their racial identity, resulting in the examination of how race plays such a significant or critical role in today's society.

Each theory discussed within the chapter provides a different lens for examining appropriate behaviors in different social settings and environments. How each theory examines these behaviors rest in the premise of the components addressed in Critical Race Theory. Funds of knowledge theory highlights, how the social practices of home and community provide learning resources to employ achievement of one's goals within each specific setting. CRT's component of storytelling/counter storytelling allows individuals to share the social practices of their culture, addressing misconceptions of racial stereotypes. Triple quandary theory focuses on how those funds (knowledge) are appropriately implemented within the social realms of the mainstream, minority, and cultural experiences that are navigated. Within each realm individuals will become a member within multiple communities of practice, displaying their competence of the practices of each. CRTs focus relates to the triple quandary theory, addressing how racism is experienced on a daily basis and how each realm address the enculturated normality racism

has been given. The involvement within these communities of practice can assist in a person's sense of relatedness and feelings of belonging particularly people of color. CRTs interest convergence prepares people of color to recognize the intent of those in the dominate positions within their communities of practice, how the dominate members view them and how they define themselves as members. Based upon this grounding in social learning theory and critical race theory as learning takes place within certain communities or cultures of practice, the chapter moves next to examine research findings on factors in school and community life that help or hinder a child's success of obtaining and using their capital and how teachers and their teaching practices influence this success.

Capital

The term capital has many meanings as well as many forms to address the expectations and experiences of societal constructs (Lin, 1999). Lin (1999) describes capital as, "...a surplus value...a product of a process; whereas capital is also an investment process in which the surplus value is produced and captured...it is an investment with expected returns" (p. 29). Lin (1999) explains the description in terms of the investment being education, and the expected returns as earnings. For example, a teacher attends graduate school as an investment, gaining knowledge and skills to obtain additional areas of expertise on their teaching license. This investment will allow the teacher to discuss with school personnel qualifications for multiple positions; leading to the desired returns of higher pay compensation and/or respect. Bourdieu's description of capital is similar to that of Lin. Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo (1995) referenced Bourdieu's concept of capital as "...a generalized resource that can assume monetary and nonmonetary as well as tangible and intangible forms" (p. 862). Bourdieu's (1986) concept is based on three general forms of capital.

Bourdieu (1986) discusses three forms of capital which include economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. The presence of each form of capital depends on the field in which it is utilized. Bourdieu uses the term field to identify the "...various institutional arrangements in the social world" (Lareau, 2003, p. 274). For example these institutional arrangements may include, a parent-teacher association belongs to the educational field, a research center may belong to a scientific field, and a bank may belong to an economic field. Within these fields, different type of resources or capital such as economic, cultural or social are obtained.

Economic Capital. Economic capital which includes money and property remains the primary means of reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986). Individuals who possess economic capital earn a higher monthly income and are most often associated with society's dominant group (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995). Economic capital is known as the dominate form of capital. Individuals that obtain economic capital are more than likely to acquire cultural and social capital with greater ease (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) contends that there is inequality based upon the capital a person or group possess, specifically those who have economic capital and those that do not. Economic capital is easily converted or transformed as a means of gaining social and cultural capital, however having social or cultural capital alone or is not as easily transformed into economic capital (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995).

Cultural Capital. Cultural capital includes embedded dispositions and customs acquired in the socialization process and the collection of valued cultural objects such as knowledge, skills and formal education experiences (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995; Ihlen, 2005). Individuals are identified as possessing cultural capital when their experiences and expertise are that of society's elite (Throsby, 1999). Bourdieu (1986) suggest that three forms of cultural capital exist which include, embodied state, objectified state and institutionalized state. Among the three

forms embodied form is the most significant (Bourdieu, 1986; Throsby, 1999). Bourdieu (1986) notes, “most of the properties of cultural capital can be deducted from the fact that...it is linked to the body of presupposes embodiment” (p. 243-244).

The embodied state is the dispositions of the mind and body (Throsby, 1999). The embodied state, with external wealth can be transformed into an integral part of an individual’s background experiences; however it cannot be transmitted quickly (Bourdieu, 1986). Tierney (1999) uses the example of a museum as a site in which an individual acquires embodied cultural capital. As well as an individual’s aspiration to attend college, but experiences provide the necessary cultural capital which is recognized as the embodied state, therefore the dispositions of the mind and body are changed.

Cultural capital in the objectified state is when the capital has been transformed into cultural goods such as sculptures, paintings, journals, poetry and music (Bourdieu, 1986; Throsby, 1999). Bourdieu (1986) contends that cultural goods can be earmarked as materially (economic capital) and symbolically (cultural capital), therefore cultural goods such as sculptures and paintings are transmitted as cultural capital as well as economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In the objectified state, simply owning the cultural goods is simply economic capital; it is the essence in which the individual is able to enjoy and cherish what is owned (Tierney, 1999)

The third and final state of cultural capital discussed is the institutionalized state and is “... cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246). The institutionalized state of cultural capital is “...when the embodied cultural capital is recognized in the form of...an academic credential” (Throsby, 1999, p. 4). Tierney (1999) explains the institutional state as the awarding of academic credentials to an individual by the institution or

governing body that sanctions societal goals or status. For example a college degree award to an individual is based upon the capital they have acquired (Tierney, 1999).

Social Capital. Social Capital has been defined by multiple scholars with various meanings. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as

...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of the durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (p. 247).

An example, based upon Bourdieu’s definition of capital, individuals are able to obtain or acquire things simply based upon the family name, the school they attend or the social organization they become members (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common; all have some aspect of social structure and they have the ability to facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Lin (1999) contends that the concept of social capital “...is rather simple and straightforward: investments in social relations with expected returns” (p. 30).

Lin (1999) contributes the development of the definition of social capital based upon the discussions and explanations of other scholars to lend a streamline view of how social capital works. Lin (1999) discusses three general explanations as to how individuals interact and network in an attempt to gain the expected returns. The three explanations include: (a) facilitating the flow of information; (b) social ties may influence the representatives; and (c) social relations reinforce ones identity and recognition (Lin, 1999).

Facilitating the flow of information can provide an individual with useful information about opportunities and choices otherwise not available (Lin, 1999). For example, a co-worker associates closely with the company's budget administrator. Everyone has been made aware that resources will be reduced and there will not be a great chance for any salary increase for the fiscal year. By chance the budget administrator is privy to unexpected budget increases which will allow significant changes in the plan for the company. As a close associate of the budget administrator the co-worker is then given the information that other will not receive in hopes of preparing a justification for additional funds before the news is shared with everyone. This flow of information allowed this co-worker additional time to prepare needed information to obtain the expected return (i.e. salary increase, departmental funds, etc).

While having access to important information is essential to successfully implement strategies for desired results, it helps to know the right person or organization that can advocate for those particular outcomes. The second explanation Lin (1999) discusses is the social ties that carry a certain weight in the decision-making process (i.e. putting in a good word). In this instance, the same budget administrator that provided the vital information of the financial opportunities of the company may become the person in the social network that will truly advocate for the budget justification submitted on behalf of the department. It is the social relationship that is shared amongst specific co-workers that gives this upper edge producing greater capital.

The final explanation Lin (1999) shares is how social relationships reinforce a person's identity. Continuing with the example of the budget administrator and the departmental co-worker, because of their social relationship each may be seen as significant resources to extend the company's capital. It is the social relations that support individuals in earning public

acknowledgment of the resources they possess that increases their worthiness as a member of the social group (Lin, 1999). The three general explanations are reinforcements in the conceptualization of social capital. Lin (1999) states, “ [the reinforcements] may explain why social capital works in instrumental and expressive actions not accounted for by forms of ...capital such as economic capital or [cultural capital]” (p. 31).

Summary

Social capital is generally discussed in the arena(s) of sociology, political science, and public health and housing (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). Scholars such as Bourdieu and Coleman have conducted research on social capital as it pertains to the field of education; however, many of their studies are based on quantitative data and focus on the parental-child aspect of social capital as it relates to the school environment (Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003). These quantitative measures have focused on the correlation between the acquisition of social capital and “... test scores, study habits, high school dropout and college attendance” (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003, p. 322).

There have been minimal research studies which focus on the teacher- student relationships in terms of social capital and the perceptions of learning experiences and teaching practices. Educators and policymakers seek to increase parental involvement in schooling in an effort to link the critical process of establishing stronger family and school relationships (Lareau, 1987). While the family is the core of the educational process, the children within the school settings must take and be given an active role in establishing their own relationship within their school environment. If students are to again capital within their school environment we must understand how they perceive the capital they enter school with and how they expand this capital

within their learning and school experiences. Lareau (1987) states, “we know relatively little about the stages of this social process” (p. 83), specifically as it relates to a child’s point of view.

African American Male Children as Learners

Learning is much more than the performance a child demonstrates within the context of the classroom, it is their point of views, perceptions and interpretations that happen in multiple environments. Learning that occurs within one’s community is essential and necessary in order to begin the process of becoming educated (Moje, 2008). The challenge continues to be how to guide African American youth to use what they learn in the community and the classroom to attain needed skills for today’s society. Schools must prepare these students to reach their goals, and to ensure opportunities to excel and meet expectations (Boykin & Ellison, 1994).

The learning process begins prior to entering school (Goodman & Martens, 2007). The African-American community has long recognized the central importance of education. Historically, African Americans have fought hard for educational opportunities. Laws and policies such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* eventually led to the end of segregated schools. Despite the passage of 56 years since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, there are still many people of color who attend predominantly minority schools, where there is lower quality of instruction, materials, resources and teachers with lower expectations. As compared to schools in white communities, predominately minority schools are underfunded and use deficient curricula (Pincus & Ehlich, 1999).

There is still much work to be done to ensure that African American children get the best education from public schools. Schools serving African American children often lack the financial resources needed to employ qualified teachers, and have difficulty providing textbooks and other instructional materials needed to address and serve students (Kozol, 1992). Even when

African American students attend “better” schools, they often lack access to the best teachers, fail to be assigned to the most challenging courses, and thus are not educated to their fullest potential (Asamen, Ellis, & Berry, 2008).

Positioning in Local Interactions. The African American male learner has a difficult task of negotiating their cultural and academic identities (Boykin & Ellison, 1994). It is due to their positioning within these identities that emerging tension may arise and cause conflict within their local (social and academic) interactions. Nasir and Saxe (2003) define local interactions as “...the face-to-face encounters among individuals during routine cultural practices in which tensions between ethnic and school affiliations may emerge” (p. 15). Nasir and Saxe (2003) used “positioning in local interactions” in their study to focus on the experiences of an African American student who liked to play games with friends. The youth’s past-time activity was questioned when an administrator commented that the student needed to use his time to study instead of playing games. Due to the situation the student was faced with a difficult dilemma, while his friends interpreted the administrator’s comments as looking down on their cultural practice (playing dominoes); the student recognized the administrator’s attempt to bring focus back to his studies. The student was cognizant of having to make a choice between the activities; however, his desire to successfully belong in both arenas (a good student at school, and a person who enjoyed hanging out with his friends) was going to be difficult. The student feared that neither his friends nor the administrator viewed this duality as acceptable.

Nasir and Saxe (2003) found the same dilemma for a young student who wanted to be portrayed as “cool and studious.” The student reported that it was a continuous balancing act between his school and community life. Because those within the community believed that being “cool” could not co-exist with being “a good student,” he was continuously faced with

tensions among members of his community. Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani (2003) explain that when students experience these tensions, they are given mixed messages from their peers, the school and community. Muddling through these different messages requires quite a sophisticated balancing act.

Ladson-Billings (1998) describes how the different messages students receive from the curriculum, instructional strategies and assessments can produce a mismatch between the student and the school. For example, an elementary-aged student was repeatedly told by her teacher that she was not good in Math; however the teacher was unaware of the adult role the student had assumed due to her mother's inability to provide for the family. The student took on responsibilities for budgeting and paying all the household bills, as well as maintaining the household to keep the family together. The teacher's evaluation of the student was that she lacked the necessary knowledge and ability to do fourth grade Math, but her responsibilities and life experiences demonstrated a different story. The mismatch between the teacher's assessment and the child's ability lacks continuity beyond the immediate classroom experience and what the family and community knew of her abilities and knowledge.

Research findings about school learning among African American males reveal a mismatch phenomenon. Schooling is an additional piece in an already complicated puzzle. One of the most difficult relationships to unravel is the intergenerational effect of difficult childhoods, poverty, and the absence of an involved parent in the lives of increasing numbers of African American males (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Adjustment to school life is related to how children adjust to different expectations of home, community and school.

Communicative Competence. Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) conducted research on code switching, which refers to the ability to move smoothly between cultural perspectives

such as one's culture of origin (home) and the school culture. For instance, terms used and body language, a code switching moment for the African American male between their home behaviors and school behaviors would be the type of language they would use to joke with their friends in the neighborhood and how they would adjust their language to joke with their friends at school. McDermott (1987a) explored this idea in his observations of Black children entering a school in which they were asked to conform to rules and behaviors or alter their codes. In this case, teacher-student battles resulted because when a child moves or speaks in a different manner from that which the teacher dictates, the child can be considered out of control, hyperactive or labeled as having learning difficulties. Such complicated and value-laden experiences can leave young African American males unprepared to enter and achieve success in the elementary school.

An African American researcher reflecting on his early elementary school years voiced the hatred he felt at having to attend night school to learn how to behave. The researcher had always been at home with his grandmother, who allowed him to do whatever he wanted during the day. Outside play in the backyard took place whenever he wanted. There was not a designated snack or lunch time, eating and having free access to the refrigerator was a continuous option throughout the day. As the only child at home during the day, he used any and all materials at any given time, he did not have to wait or share with anyone. Basically, he had difficulty adjusting to a structured schedule and did not conform willingly to the classroom schedule. His actions, viewed through his eyes, were not unusual; they were the behaviors he had always displayed at home and without a formal pre-kindergarten learning experience; no one had shared the "rules" of classroom life with this young man (Graham & Anderson, 2008). He

had adapted to his day being on his time, when and how he wanted to do things was his only point of view and/or way of life at that time.

Gay (2000) determined that within their everyday discourse many African American youngsters engage in highly spontaneous and interactive communication styles that do not require taking turns or permission from others to speak. Yet this style of communicative competence runs totally counter to what is expected and accepted in traditional educational settings. The mainstream public school expectations for communication style create a conflict in the understandings and behaviors of African American males. The mismatch phenomenon becomes a reality for the receivers who must interpret the meaning of the school's message regarding the way they talk. African American males that experience this mismatch face the inability to connect, convey and comprehend appropriate school practices (Taylor, 2003)

The mismatch between the communication used at home and the communication demanded at school is a serious stumbling block (Delpit, 1986; Gay, 2000). Individuals in mismatch environments, often have trouble transferring their behaviors from one environment to another; which may result in misbehaviors, reduced interest in learning, and lack of confidence potentially leading to school dropout (Howard, 2008; Taylor, 2003). Historically, schools have not recognized the learning experiences and resource children bring outside of the mainstream realm (Boykin, 1986; Boykin, 1983; Boykin & Toms, 1985); however, schools must match and integrate relevant activities that foster social realities for the students they serve if school experiences are to be meaningful (Dewey, 1916; Graham & Anderson, 2008; Vygotsky 1978).

African American Males as Learners in School

Communicative competences that African American males possess as learners within their community do not always translate to the level of proficiency within their school settings.

McLaren's (1986) analyses of his observations and interviews within a school setting led to his interpretation that "the primary cultural narrative that defines school life is the resistance by students to the school's attempt to marginalize their street culture and street knowledge" (p. 275). For young African American males, survival has many possible contexts related to parental expectations, peer expectations, street expectations, and in some cases, church expectations. While constantly managing the various cultures within their worlds, there exist the added pressures of meeting school expectations (Gay, 2000).

Honora (2003) noted that school learning and achievement is highly dependent upon a sense of belonging in the school environment. For African American males, inclusion and belonging are rarely achieved in school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Honora, 2003). Although social acceptance is a major factor for most educational institutions, the fact remains that discrepancies exist between the commonality of students feeling socially accepted within their schools and how schools implement, as well as foster an environment that nurtures social acceptance (Bauer & McAdams, 2000; Mendez, Frantuzzo, & Cicchetti, 2002).

Researchers have agreed that a sense of belonging/relatedness correlates with self motivation (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). This sense of belonging/relatedness focuses on interpersonal relationships between individuals, their family members, and peers. Different individuals in children's lives play central social roles in fostering their motivation (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Furrer and Skinner (2003) examine the possibility of a higher success rate that can foster further motivational success for African American males. In this study, an effort was made to strengthen the sense of belonging/relatedness to the community and/or home environment with that of the school. Belonging/relatedness has been repeatedly addressed in the literature with regard to student

motivation. Furrer and Skinner (2003) explain that the core notion of belonging/relatedness is that a history of interactions with specific social partners, "...leads children to construct generalized expectations about the nature of the self in relationships... [to the extent that] a sense of relatedness may function as a motivational resource when children are faced with challenges or difficulties" (p. 148).

Belongingness/relatedness is a means for a student to develop motivation for certain activities based on a clear understanding of the value of their actions, and their regard for other individuals around them. Specific people in a student's life may be crucial in the development of a sense of motivation. Belongingness/relatedness gives individuals a sense of value and motivation by providing them with support in their undertakings and buffers that increase determination to achieve success and overcome obstacles (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). By making students feel that they belong to something important in the classroom and in other social settings, their motivation to succeed may increase. Academic achievement is positively affected by a sense of belongingness (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Matching learning preferences/styles with instruction. Jones-Wilson and Caston (2004) contend that in order for African American males to be academically successful, their learning styles must be at school. Pincus and Ehrlich (1999) expand upon the reported mismatch between the home and school culture of students, referencing the United States educational system as one that claims to value all students and their experiences, but continues to focus primarily on the beliefs and views of the mainstream realm (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999). The dominant powerful culture stresses individualism rather than collectivism (Tyler, Boykin, & Dillihunt, 2005). Teachers must understand the significance that culture plays in the development and recognition of African American males' learning preferences, as well as

how to adapt instructional presentations and assignments to address these (Berry, 2003). African American children's overall school performance and cooperative interests are enhanced when their learning preferences such as working in a group setting (rather than in an individual competitive situation) is utilized (Jones-Wilson & Caston, 2004).

Jones-Wilson and Caston (2004) define cooperative learning as a collaborative strategy used to teach children to be responsible and how to work with others. Cooperative learning, places children who function at varied levels in small working groups to complete activities. The cooperative learning teaching strategy promotes a better understanding of the content under study, and encourages group members to form connections with their classmates as they work together to attain success (Jones-Wilson & Caston, 2004). These scholars explained that each group member should be given a responsibility to ensure that all members are learning and contributing to the final work product. Cooperative learning promotes the development of a community of learners within the classroom (Jones-Wilson & Caston, 2004).

Through cooperative learning, students are able to accomplish given tasks in a non-threatening environment because each member encourages their group. When African American males experience success in these settings, they are confident in their work and in their ability to complete future tasks (Jones-Wilson & Caston, 2004).

In their research, Jones-Wilson and Caston (2004) conducted thirty minute interviews with sixteen elementary-aged African American males to gather their descriptions of their feelings in reference to their school, teachers, family and themselves. Interview questions focused specifically on how they like to work with their friends, how they studied, whether they liked projects or individual work, and whether they worked well with others. The consistent theme throughout the children's responses was that cooperative learning was their preferred

method in completing learning assignments. Providing opportunities for African American males to work in cooperative learning groups strengthens their social behavior (Ellison, Boykin, Tyler and Dillihunt, 2005; Jones-Wilson & Caston, 2004). Such participation allows them to negotiate at least two of their social realms: the Black cultural experience realm, and the mainstream experience realm, as noted by Boykin and Toms (1985). The Black cultural experience is described as being people oriented, whereas the mainstream experience is characterized as representative of the norms of Euro-American traditions. It is within the Black cultural experiences that people collaborate and acknowledge that everyone's thoughts, views, opinions and feelings are valued (Boykin & Toms, 1985). Cooperative learning allows all group members' suggestions and ideas to be shared and heard (Jones-Wilson & Caston, 2004).

Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, and Dillihunt (2005) also discuss the learning preferences of elementary school students in research conducted with 138 fifth- and sixth-grade students. The study compared the learning preferences of African American children and their White counterparts from one public elementary school in which 95% of the student population received free or reduced lunch. Participants were selected across a total of four classrooms, including two fifth-grade classes and two sixth grade classes. The sixty-six African American students and the seventy-two White students were administered the Social Interdependence Scales to assess learning preferences (Ellison, Boykin, Tyler & Dillihunt, 2005; Johnson & Norem-Hebeisen, 1979). The purpose of this research was to investigate educators' awareness that learning preferences must be acknowledged and addressed to provide optimal learning experiences. Previous research had indicated that elementary student learning preferences included cooperative, competitive and individualistic settings (Ellison et al., 2005). Results in studies of Jones-Wilson and Caston's (2004) and Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, and Dillihunt (2005) indicated

cooperative learning was the overall learning preference for elementary school students. Learning and motivation across academic subjects increased when cooperative learning was encouraged and implemented in the classroom setting, and specifically higher levels of achievement for African American students (Ellison et al., 2005).

Cooperative learning models address learning preferences/styles that are associated with the cultural values and the collaborative nature used to socialize children within the African American community (the social realm of the Black cultural experience) (Boykin & Toms, 1985). The learning preferences of competition and individualism that holds way in the mainstream realm (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Toms, 1985) were rated low by the African American students, but much higher by their White counterparts. Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, and Dillihunt (2005) contribute the school/academic success of African American students to the implementation of cooperative learning instruction which addresses their learning styles/preferences, allowing students to mimic their out of school experiences (funds of knowledge) based on their cultural traditions and socialization.

Behaviors in School

The behaviors African American males display at school has a significant impact on how they are perceived by their school community. Discussed in a prior section, Graham (2008) shared his reflection of how his behavior required him to make adjustments to socially relate and belong to the school community. To gain a comprehensive grasp on student responses to teaching practices, one must take into consideration the practices that the student is accustomed to at home and within the community (Moje, 2008). Ryan and Patrick (2001) conducted research on motivation in the classroom setting; however the outcomes of the study are not conclusive in providing a comprehensive picture of student motivation and engagement. Furrer

and Skinner (2003) researched relatedness (a sense of belonging, inclusion, and acceptance) as a factor for motivation, focusing on four goals. The first goal was to demonstrate the relationship between relatedness and classroom engagement and performance. The second goal was to investigate the contributions of relatedness/belonging specific to social partners (parents, teachers or peers). Third, the researchers sought to discover the interaction between relatedness and the variables of age and gender. The fourth goal was to provide profiles of relatedness for specific social partners. Results revealed that relatedness/belonging has a positive impact on motivation and engagement, and these effects have been shown to be long-term.

Students with a higher sense of relatedness perform better academically and have highly developed levels of motivation compared to those with a lower sense of relatedness. The motivation and performance of the participants in the study also saw improvement as the school year progressed (Furrer & Skinner, 2003), which suggests not only a positive effect but possibly a cumulative effect on performance and motivation. The Furrer and Skinner (2003) research effectively connected different social environments and partners with student motivation, as relationships of relatedness/belonging between students and their families, as well as peers made significant impact.

African American students often report a sense of misidentification with their academic institutions. This misidentification is sometimes attributed to negative teacher-student relationships, which can be impacted by teacher stereotyping. Stereotyping contributes to feelings of misidentification and can influence African American students to detach or disengage from their academic communities. This detachment can result in reduced levels of self worth and academic achievement (Honora, 2003).

Honora (2003) interviewed 16 low-income African American students about identification with their school through discussions of student perceptions of teacher feedback, teacher support, accessibility, and school roles and purposes. Students were asked to discuss: (a) a typical school day; (b) their involvement in any extracurricular activities; (c) afterschool routines; (d) how they viewed themselves as students; (e) their perceptions of a good student; and (f) how their teachers would describe them. Findings indicated that favorable student perceptions of their teachers positively influenced a sense of school identification. In addition, the perception of schools as venues for preparation for future success and opportunities also improved identification with schools. The Honora (2003) study emphasizes the importance of considering ethnicity when studying effects of social relationships and factors on academic performance and motivation. Recommendations for future research included examining teacher behavior and teacher-student interactions using ethnographies for the purpose of developing further understandings of how these factors influence identification.

Behaviors guide how African American males are perceived and then treated by teachers in the teacher-student exchange and/or relationship. Differences in the home and school cultures tend to result in an adjustment of the behaviors of Black males in the latter environment. African American males may not identify with the expectations and customs of the mainstream culture (which is present in the school environment) which places an additional demand on their social interactions where they must adjust or assimilate to the dominant culture.

Suspension, Drop Out, “Left Behind”

The Condition of Education 2009 in the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) reports that 15% of Black students are suspended from school as opposed to 5% of White students. Out-of-school suspensions remove African American males from their normal

routines and allow them opportunities to make decisions that may or may not be in their best interest. Among other things, these decisions could lead to drug abuse and other crimes, possibly leading to early juvenile detention and/or incarceration (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). As African American male suspension rates rise, the nation must begin to move beyond passively asking questions as to why this phenomenon is occurring and become actively engaged in creating viable solutions that can be implemented within the schools (Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999). In many ways, the U.S. educational system excludes African American males from opportunities to voice their needs and provide suggestions that may ultimately assist in lowering the suspension and dropout rates, using various subtle forms of discriminatory practices. Some of these discriminatory practices include teachers' lower expectations and the use of assessments (i.e., standardized tests) as a means to segregate students into homogenous tracks. These discriminatory practices may lead to a lower sense of relatedness/belonging and may result in behaviors of verbal and physical confrontations with school authorities. These practices, when experienced by African American males place them in situations where they may feel race is the common factor (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and suspension is their only option.

Pincus and Ehrlich (1999) note that the structure of the educational system works as a disadvantage to many students of color. The statistics indicate that White students do much better in school than Black students. The drastic gap in achievement between the ethnic groups is explained by Pincus and Ehrlich (1999) as the result of the "difference in culture and academic skills, racial discrimination, and structural inequalities of education" (p. 272). Educational inequities are still quite substantial, especially in terms of suspension rates and reading abilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Student reading performance differs by race

with, 45% of Black students scoring at the basic level as compared to 75% of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

It is imperative that African American males are given opportunities to be successful within the school environment because of the apparent link between suspensions, engagement in unproductive lifestyles, and their eventual success. Solutions must be developed that address the specific needs of that population while allowing them to appropriately integrate into the school culture.

Engagement

As students become engaged (fully involved, attentive, commitment, giving all effort) within their academic and social activities, there is a sense of ownership. Ryan and Patrick (2001) investigated the characteristics of classroom environments that affected a student's engagement in a particular school activity. Participants in the study were 233 fifth graders with diverse ethnic backgrounds, with 55% of the participants classified as African American. The Adaptive Learning Survey and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire were used to focus on the effects of teacher practices on the students' perceptions of the given task. Specific attention was given to the relationship between the teacher and the student, and how this relationship influenced the students' level of engagement. Findings suggest that belonging/relatedness has a significant impact on a student's level of motivation to become engaged in learning. The outcomes investigated in the study included not only academic results but also social outcomes. These outcomes were specific and operationally identified as the following: students' academic and social efficacy, self-regulated learning, and disruptive behavior. Operational definitions of the above variables include student judgments of their

academic and social skills during active engagement with the activity, and also student disruptions or negative conduct within class activities (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Ryan and Patrick's (2001) research revealed that teacher practices affect student levels of motivation and engagement. Increases in student motivation and engagement were linked to student perceptions of teacher support as well as to the teacher's practices of promoting interaction and mutual respect. Ryan and Patrick (2001) were able to elaborate on the classroom dynamics that influence student engagement. However, they failed to take into account the effect other types of social relationships have on the student's engagement. They did not, for example, investigate the effect of the student's social environment at home and in the community on motivation and engagement. Further, they did not consider the interactions between the school or classroom environment and the community or home environment.

A number of factors had a significant impact on the boys' engagement in school activities, including interest in the subject content, understanding the value of learning and succeeding in the activity, and student understanding that engaging in the activity would lead to something better. A sense of already being good at a particular type of activity could lead to a decrease in student engagement in the activity, effect related to effective teacher use of the feedback and praise (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). The researchers concluded that the feeling of success an individual has in an activity may serve as an effective motivator for engaging in other related activities. The quality of the relationship between the educator and the learner is also a strong factor for engagement, as is the educator's focus on the individuality of the learner. The parent-child relationships as well as parent expectations contribute to the motivation of students. This research revealed that social factors play a critical role in establishing a sense of

motivation in students by changing certain dynamics in the school and home environment (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005).

Engagement must be addressed from a socio-cultural perspective where the entire social context and environment is involved. That is, the inclusion of engagement in the home, school, and community environments. It is crucial that such a perspective be taken because student engagement is linked to motivation and eventual success. Also, all influencing factors on student engagement must be considered because the student learns in varied contexts.

Home/Community Life and Learning

In African American culture, the home plays a role in socialization and the community takes on the function of a large extended family. The community represents various individuals with vested interests in helping the neighborhood children develop the social skills necessary to be successful. Clinton (1996) states:

...each of us plays a part in every child's life: It takes a village to raise a child...children will thrive only if their families thrive and if the whole of society cares enough to provide for them. (p. 12)

The community "family" is the major stakeholder in modeling social practices required for learning processes (MacLeod, 1987). Research findings related to the development of funds of knowledge center around learning that takes place in the home and the community and the implementation of these funds within the classroom. Nettles (1991) definition of community as "an environment... [that has specific] structure, climate or culture and an involvement process" (p. 133). The community provides the values, beliefs, rules and goals to maintain order and encourage social interaction among its members. In addition, community involvement influences the development of the child in and out of the school environment (Nettles, 1991).

The community culture for African American males can be poorly matched with the culture encountered in public schools. It is necessary for African American males to develop strategies for survival within their communities and simultaneously transform their behaviors to match what is considered acceptable in the school environment (Nettles, 1991). McDermott (1987b) shared his academic dilemma in trying to remain on a “middle line” along with those who did well in school and still maintain friendships with those who did not. This middle line allowed him to maintain his academic position at school, as well as his community identity with his friends.

Who knows a child better than family, friends and other people within their community? Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) argue that the networks within home and community are flexible and have a learning focus motivated by the child’s interests and questions. In these settings, knowledge gained is based upon the child’s needs and interests rather than imposed by a teacher or another adult in the classroom. Learning within home and community is considered “thick and multi-stranded, meaning that one may have multiple relationships with the same person or with various persons” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133) within their community. When children acquire funds of knowledge from the ‘teacher’ within the home, their learning is a reflection of a connection to the entire development of the child, not just as a student with academic goals to achieve. On the other hand, in classroom relationships between teacher and student, as Moll et al. (1992) describes it, “the typical teacher-student relationship seems thin and single stranded as the teacher knows the students only from their performance within rather limited classroom contexts” (p. 134).

Home/community learning must be aligned with school learning. The African American male learns within the larger context of his community which functions also as a family. Within

that family context influences and lessons are gained such as appropriate social skills and responses, academic expectations, etc. The alignment of all contexts allows for the teaching of the whole child which is essential for learning in a relevant and connected context.

Friends and Peers. The friends and peers an individual has, sets the parameters for initiative, goal attainment and commitment for a young man's view and value. Graham and Anderson (2008) state young adolescent males, just as the adults who provide guidance in their lives, have barriers that they must face. They conducted a micro-ethnography involving three African American males. Data was obtained through three open-ended interviews and one formal interview conducted in narrative form. In the interviews, participants were asked to describe their educational experiences, a format which allowed participants to have ownership and be authors revealing their feelings regarding academics within the school setting, their experiences within their communities, how they viewed themselves, and how they thought they were seen within both school and community environments. Findings revealed that peer pressure was a major hurdle for the young males. The participants described their peers as not understanding and referred to them as "acting White," but according to the researchers, these youths "continued to focus on their Blackness as a source of strength and inspiration" (Graham & Anderson, 2008, p. 21). Based on the strong support of their significant others (i.e., parents, faith-based members, community leaders), these young males were able to choose educational success over "being cool", and they found ways to rise above peer ridicule.

Implications of research conducted by Kunjufu (1986) on mothers of Black boys suggest that if there is no "significant other" to guide young males' feelings regarding the constraining forces present in their environment, academic success and/or employment is at risk. Without this guidance, young African American males may find solutions that negatively impact their future.

Choosing any means of making easy money, and living the so called “life of luxury” is observed in the community by some males who take this route to manipulate or escape an otherwise hostile environment. Further, it becomes difficult to keep a young adolescent male interested in school when he has been given the responsibility of being the “man of the house” by his family.

Peer pressure, the task of staying “in good” with fellow peers, and staying true to the community has been reported as constituting a constant battle (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). A concern of many young African American males is the desire to prove that they are loyal, committed and part of the African American group. As they seek to prove this connection, they may develop a “fictive kinship” relationship. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) define fictive kinship as a “kinshiplike relationship between persons not related by blood...but [who] have some reciprocal social or economic relationship” (p. 183). Fictive kinships can be formed as a means of affirming brotherhood and sisterhood, a group membership. This membership is important to the bonds created within Black peer groups; there exists the unspoken expectation that no matter what the sibling or friend has done, they will always be supported and accepted (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The need for this bond can result in young African American male involvement in social groups such as gangs. Social groups (gangs) have been known to provide a sense of belonging, a family unit that places them in a position of importance or being cared for unconditionally. Although gang membership has negative connotations, it serves a purpose for an African American male seeking fictive kinship acceptance (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

There has been speculation that gang membership is a result of deficient familial relationships. Ethnographic and observational studies of gang members have commonly portrayed the families of gang-involved youth as lacking appropriate family management practices, and having distant and conflicting relationships (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Results of

these studies suggested that groups may provide emotional support that is not available from the family, thus serving as a substitute family for gang members. Klein and Maxson (2006) used their experiences with gang programs and the evaluation of these programs as part of the foundation for their research. They conducted interviews and surveys with more than 260 police gang experts from different areas of the country, for the purpose of taking a comprehensive look at gangs and programs implemented to combat gang membership. Results confirmed that gang members are more likely to come from single-parent families and families that provide lower levels of parental supervision. Research demonstrates that youth with delinquent friends are more likely to join gangs than those with friends who are not delinquent (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

African American male adolescents have the highest rates of detention, suspensions, expulsions, and special education placements among all adolescents (Morgan & Bhola, 2006). These experiences weigh heavily on the academic success or failure of these youth, continuously leading them to seek alternative venues to acquire a sense of belonging and acceptance. Consequently, these adolescents tend to identify with each other and form peer group friendships which are not matched with the need and motivation for academic and personal achievements.

Church. The African American church has historically played a major life role by insuring that members have access to various social and cultural resources. The African American church has not only been important spiritually, but also served as a culturally and socially unifying force, as it continues to exist at the heart of most African American communities (Braxton, 1998). The church has fought against the social injustices that African Americans have faced in America. It has also been a sanctuary of comfort, where everyone could express themselves freely and unite culturally in common beliefs and life practices

(Kellemen & Edwards, 2007). The church has provided a place to observe, participate, and experience the reality of owning and directing an institution free from the control of Whites. The church has been and is still a favored institution where interests, thoughts, and beliefs can be shared. It is influential from a physical, emotional and spiritual perspective, and has the ability to connect congregations within strong bonds of faith and determination. A focal point of African American life, the church provides spiritual guidance as well as a sense of equality among family and friends within the community (Kellemen & Edwards, 2007).

Barbershops. While different settings produce support within the community (i.e., churches, community centers, outreach programs), there is yet another place that can to be a site for safety, advice, laughter, and insight. The barbershops located in many Black communities consistently provide young African American males with a sense of security. Miles (2003) states, “the barbershop in the black community is more than a place to get your hair cut...it serves as a magnet for social interaction, and functions as an important social institution” (p.1). Alexander (2003) suggests that we focus on the barbershop as an environment where male children are introduced to the traditions of their community and culture, and shared experiences in a positive cultural space at an early age. Alexander (2003) describes the barbershops of his childhood: “...there were always old men sitting in the corner playing checkers, reading magazines, talking trash, talking community, and talking culture” (p. 105). The shops described by Alexander have similar features today; they may have evolved with the current technologies of society, but conversations there revolve around similar topics. Alexander (2003) describes barbershops as places where, even though many may not know each other, most visitors feel comfortable enough to discuss issues and share their views with strangers. There exists a sense of belonging that bonds those within the space.

Barbershops serve as sites within which African American males can learn to negotiate the endorsement and forms of participation that enhance their social and academic achievement potential. In this context, young males can gain information about their place and purpose beyond their immediate family, and enhance their perception of acceptance in their culture. Barbershops provide an environment in which children are introduced and experience a positive space at an early age (Alexander, 2003). Just as the church is introduced to provide spiritual guidance and training, the barbershop may provide similar affirming social and cultural experiences (Braxton, 1998).

Interactions in such community spaces contribute to the social and academic development of the young African American male. The barbershop is a home away from home, an informal educational institution, and an extended family setting within the African American community (Alexander, 2003). The barbershop encourages active involvement of young males in their communities, giving them roles as citizens. The conversations that take place there provide multiple opportunities for young African American males to participate in debates and reflect on different views. The barbershop is a culturally relevant context that provides a practice space (Alexander, 2003). Harris-Lacewell (2004) contends that:

. . .to fully appreciate the political thoughts and actions of African Americans, it is imperative to understand that these interactions [in barbershops] are more than social. They are spaces where African American jointly develop understandings of their collective interests and create strategies to navigate the complex...world. (p. 1)

Barbershops can be early education sites for young African American males. They are places that reinforce attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, as well as traditions within African American culture. Early instruction and learning within community spaces such as barbershops allows

young African American males to begin to make sense about their various identities (Davis, 2007).

Teachers and Teacher Practices

Reeve's (2006) study of relatedness or sense of belonging revealed that when teachers provided a caring, warm, nurturing and non-threatening environment, there were higher levels of classroom engagement promoting student participation and willingness to try. Mooney and Thornton's (1999) study of how African American students view their academic ability compared to their White counterparts was consistent with Reeve's findings. When African American students were asked to explain their success and achievement, they attributed their success to the relationship they had with their teacher, whereas their White counterparts attributed their success to their own ability. Even when students possessed the same ability levels, the African American students' perceptions continued to emphasize relationships with their teachers as the major factor.

The importance African American students place in the type of relationships they have with their teachers is a result of their cultural experiences which influences their learning preferences (Berry, 2003; Boykin, 1986). As stated earlier, Boykin (1986) contends that the African American cultural experience is not truly understood by mainstream society; therefore, the learning preferences that are influenced by these cultural experiences may be misunderstood as well. In terms of learning preferences, African American cultural experiences embrace interconnectedness (the condition of being connected, together 'as one'), for a communal approach, whereas mainstream cultural experiences focus is separateness (to exist independently or unconnected) for an individual approach (Berry, 2003; Boykin, 1986). Interconnectedness within African American students' cultural experiences reinforces the need to belong or relate to

their teacher by working together (cooperative) for a common goal (Boykin, 1986; Jones-Wilson & Caston, 2004; Reeves, 2006). Scholars assert that cooperatively working together ‘as one’ provides African American students with the needed relationship and learning environment to be successful (Ellison, Boykin, Tyler & Dillihunt, 2005; Wilson-Jones & Caston, 2004).

The learning environments of most academic institutions prepare students to be future workers by socializing them to conform to the rules and behaviors based on the authority of mainstream society (Bowles & Gintis, 2002), which is opposite of the cooperative learning environments noted in the research findings of Wilson-Jones, Caston in 2004 and Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, Dillihunt in 2005. As teachers prepare African American youth to enter society as adults, there is a need for the intersection of communalism and individualism between how African Americans learn and mainstream society (Berry, 2003). Berry’s (2003) analysis of the learning preferences includes a rational style for African Americans and an analytical style for mainstream society that of the dominant/White group. “Rational [style of] learning is characterized as...divergent thinking, inductive reasoning, and focus on people. Analytical [style of] learning is characterized as [having]... a logical diagnostic fashion [and] ...a tendency toward impersonal preferences in social encounters” (Berry, 2003, p. 246). Ellison, Boykin, Tyler and Dillihunt (2005) would pair Berry’s rational learning to that of communalism, as well as analytical learning to individualism or competition. Berry (2003) contends that of the two learning styles, schools cater to the analytical (individualism, competition) learner who is most often the advantaged student from the dominant group.

The difference approaches used by the rational learner (African American) and most schools’ common instructional practice addresses the needs of the analytical learner (White) there is a disconnect between the learning preferences of African Americans and schools’

mainstream structure (Berry, 2003). Due to this disconnect, African American students may be misevaluated through an inaccurate assessment of their intellectual and learning abilities, which can reinforce lowered expectations of African American students, and in turn affect future educational attainment (Berry, 2003; Pincus & Ehrlich, 1999).

It has been argued, that school-based instruction does not reflect the cultural values or behaviors brought to school by many students of color, because teacher practices are guided by mainstream cultural values (Berry, 2003; Boykin, 1986; Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006; Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, & Dillihunt, 2005; Wilson-Jones & Caston, 2004) Teacher preparation programs enriched with an understanding of the cultural challenges faced by African American males, and emphasizing ways in which teachers can provide support to these students regarding making successful transitions to school culture, could go a long way toward improving current circumstances for these learners (Berry, 2003).

Delpit (1986) shares her experience as a beginning teacher and how her views and instruction changed based on what worked best for her students. While the instruction she received and used during her teacher preparation program was appropriate for some students and addressed the mainstream cultural values, it lacked relevance and meaning for the majority of her Black students. Delpit 's instruction mirrored her White colleagues utilizing an open classroom unlike the Black teachers who were viewed as repressing their students with the strict rules and instructional procedures.

Through her observations of student achievement, Delpit noticed that her students were not able to construct their knowledge of reading and writing in the open classroom format. Therefore, Delpit (1986) changed her instructional strategies from an open model to a more traditional classroom environment which seemed to improve the reading and writing skills of her

Black students. This represents a cultural mismatch which occurs not only with students, but also with the teachers.

To address the cultural mismatch between teachers and students, and how the mismatch affects academic achievement for African American students, Thompson (2004) provides strategies that reinforce relationships, specifically teacher relationships with the African American students they teach. Thompson's (2004) six strategies are not new to the well-seasoned teacher, but provide guidance to beginners in the profession. The strategies include: (a) showing students they care and have their best interests at heart; (b) acknowledging that no one is perfect, that everyone makes mistakes; it is part of being human; (c) stressing the importance of what students are learning and setting high expectations; (d) sparking interest by providing personal stories to introduce new topics; (e) finding and displaying everyone's talents in the class; and (f) emphasizing that all students are smart in their own specific ways; and continually asserting that learning can be displayed with multiple outcomes. Thompson (2004) states that in order for their strategies to work, teachers must have continuous support as they implement new ways of thinking, working, and reflecting on their ideals, beliefs and values to foster a more cohesive relationship with their students of color.

Another study by Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, and Kizzie (2006) conducted a study to address the culture-based classroom practices of teachers; due to concerns of the mismatch reportedly taking place in classrooms between the learning preferences of students and the instructional practices of their teachers. The investigation focused on how teachers matched their own instructional practices to student learning specific to communal, individualistic, or competitive cultural influences (Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006).

Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, and Kizzie (2006) investigation involved two elementary schools, both which had a student population of 95% African American as well as 95% free or reduced lunch. There were a total of eighty-one teachers; fifty-six were African American (Black) and twenty-five were European American (White) that agreed to participate in the study. Teachers were given a questionnaire to report their cultural-based classroom practices and activities which were determined by four cultural themes. Two cultural themes addressed mainstream culture including individualism and competition, and the remaining two themes communalism and verve specifically addressed African American culture (Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006).

The questionnaire provided teachers with an activity or behavior to reference as they rated each statement. Teachers responded to a series of questions which assessed how they encouraged students to prepare for test, rating each statement by the frequency of use during their classroom practice. Each question was phrased to indirectly reference the different cultural themes (communal, verve, individualism and competition). For example, the questions began with the same statement, “How often do you encourage students to prepare for tests...” (p. 165). Teachers then rated this statement responding to the different conclusions for the questions which included: (a) “...together so they can share what they know; (b) ...alone; (c)...by competing against each other; and (d) in different ways or at different times on different school days” (p. 165). Results of the questionnaire indicated that overall, teachers implemented most often the cultural-based practice for individualism, followed by competitive, communal, and vervistic (Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006).

Further analyses of the data revealed African American teachers rated the use of competitive practices in their classrooms significantly higher than European American teachers.

The researchers of the study found this report to be somewhat surprising based on previous literature documenting learning experiences and behaviors of African Americans' cultural practice preference to be communal (Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, & Dillihunt, 2005). Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, and Kizzie (2006) gave explanation for this outcome suggesting African American teachers used the competitive practice to prepare African American students to achieve in the culture of mainstream society. They expressed the notion that African American students had to be twice as prepared as the average European American student; therefore exposing students to the competitive practice assisted in the preparation process (Berry, 2003; Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006).

Berry's (2003) research provides information that can help teachers of Mathematics as well as of other curricular areas to assist African American students in the transition to school success. When teachers have the knowledge needed to retain rather than resist the learning preferences of African American students, they are able to better interpret the cues for the students' thoughts, feelings and actions (Berry, 2003). More importantly, when teachers are aware of their preferences of cultural-based practices used in their classrooms, they can make adjustments to provide multiple experiences that address the different cultural and learning needs of their students (Boykin, Tyler, Watkins-Lewis, & Kizzie, 2006; Ellison, Boykin, Tyler & Dillihunt, 2005). This developing awareness offers more accurate interpretations by teachers of their students, which could provide a much-needed "acknowledgement of the cultural expressions in an academic setting... [and result in] helping African American students feel empowered to become academically successful" (Berry, 2003, p. 247).

What We Know about Elementary Teachers and Their Work with African American Males

Teacher-student relationships and the attitudes they have toward each other are important to the social and academic success (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Investment in this relationship by

both teacher and student is the cornerstone for learning and teaching (Muller, 2001). Coleman (1988) refers to the teacher/student relationships as social capital and proposes that this capital is vital in the school socialization process. African American males often have difficulty developing strong relationships with their teachers, resulting in their lack of social capital within the context of school. The social relationships that become social capital require that both teacher and student participate and maintain their specific roles and demonstrate commitment (Muller, 2001). The role of the teacher is to prepare and provide access to learning opportunities and materials, and the student's role is to be prepared and participate in the designated learning arena (Muller, 2001). Muller (2001) argues that the performance of these roles indicates the level of engagement by each individual. The level of engagement provides behavioral cues to negotiation terms and responsibilities attached to the relationship and the expectations of both individuals. The expectation of the teacher is for the student to be committed to achieve the goals and objectives. The expectations of students are for the teacher to care and to help them meet and achieve the goals and objectives (Muller, 2001).

Muller (2001) identified the relationships and perceptions of both the teacher and the student related to their experiences, both positive and negative. Muller's findings reveal that positive teacher-student relationships were experienced when the teacher felt the student was committed and made honest attempts to learn and be successful. Teachers were asked to evaluate their students' willingness and effort towards learning (i.e., class participation, attempts to and completion of assignments and homework). When the teacher's evaluation suggested that the student was trying, the teacher provided additional support and the students reported a positive connection with their teacher. Muller (2001) found that all of the students whom the teachers perceived to lack the drive and willingness to work hard were African American boys.

Teachers perceived that the African American boys within their classrooms could be “at-risk” for dropping out of school.

Displaying more effort, and thus being positioned within the classroom to develop a more positive relationship with teachers, is based upon the ability and awareness to demonstrate the appropriate social behaviors acquired in the process of socialization (Boykin, 1986). Coleman (1988) argues that socialization within formed relationships constitutes a form of social capital. He stated that social capital does not exist within an individual, but within the acquired relationships of that individual. In essence, if the African American male has difficulty with social interactions within a specific setting, the ability to obtain social capital may be non-existent.

Coleman’s (1988) social capital theory alludes to principles of social learning that desired behaviors must be incorporated and modeled in multiple settings in order to allow young African American males to display the four conditions of Bandura’s (1986) observational learning. These conditions include focusing on the behavior (attention), remembering (retention) the behavior observed, displaying (performance) the behavior in the appropriate setting, and possessing the desire to use the learned behavior (motivation). Only when all conditions are satisfied will these young men acquire the socialization skills to develop the kinds of relationships with their teachers that will help them obtain social capital.

Social interactions are directly related to the ability of the African American male student to attain social capital which is essential in the mainstream school structure. Social capital is achieved through the relationships between the teacher and student which ultimately affect the acquisition of the student’s knowledge. In order for social capital to be gained there must first be an understood investment by both the teacher and the student.

Successful Schools, “Miracle Programs,” Afterschool Enrichment

When the culture within the African American home and community connects with school culture, there is a greater opportunity to foster the relationships that males need in order to build and maintain success in both social and academic arenas. Funding by the Children’s Aid Society (2006) provides programs for positive growth of individuals, their families and communities. The mission of the Children’s Aid Society is “to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of children and families and to provide each child with the support and opportunities needed to become a happy, healthy and productive adult” (Children’s Aid Society, 2006, p. 2).

The Children’s Aid Society’s commitment to creating a culture of success for all, specifically African American males implemented the Steps to Success program. The Steps to Success program is designed to work with young African American male students in second and third grade. Its purpose is to give young males access to opportunities and experiences that would not normally be available without the program. Each participant is given a Life Coach, the opportunity to attend Saturday Academy, Academic Support and Positive Black Male Volunteers. The life coach serves as a mentor to the young males, essentially cheering them on to reach and obtain their dreams and goals. Through any successes and/or setbacks, the life coach provides encouragement for continuous climbing of the mountains ahead. The young male’s dreams and goals are also reinforced by others through the Saturday Academy, which addresses ethnic and cultural development. Activities that include the traditions and heritage of African American culture form the focus of each session. The Saturday Academy sustains the environment for academic support as well as culture development; it integrates and connects learning from school to everyday life experiences. The program is provided twice a week after

school, and these activities support textbook learning to come alive in a real world setting (Morgan & Bhola, 2006).

Components in the Steps to Success program would be difficult to implement without volunteers committed to the young males who participate in the program. Program materials state that positive Black male volunteers are needed for mentorship, scholarship and advisement. These volunteers are referred to as “Everyday Heroes.” The Everyday Hero is the Black male who is concerned about the direction in which the young males may be headed. These are the life coaches, academic supporters, and Saturday Academy presenters who not only help young males, but provide families with the necessary tools to face and meet the challenges of having an African American male child. Since the implementation of the Steps to Success program in October, 2005, many young males have had the opportunity to gain a wealth of knowledge and develop their talents to influence their attitudes and dispositions (Morgan & Bhola, 2006).

The Steps to Success program was developed within a theoretical framework similar to Thorne’s (1993) view that gender is socially created. The program “recognizes the crucial role that non-cognitive skills play in the social and emotional maturation of the boys” (Morgan, Tomasko, & Jethwani-Keyser, 2008, p. 6). Ongoing evaluation from a designated “study group” of experts constantly reevaluates its practices and strategies. The program provides positive and safe environments to prepare young males to work and co-exist with the opposite sex, and forms the foundation for mutual respect. The Steps to Success journey gives young males the tools needed to face the challenges that await them as they mature into young adults. It is the mission of the program to lower school dropout rates, prevent drug abuse, stop violent crimes, and limit the incarceration of young African American males. Though students cannot be protected from all harm, the support that young African American males and their families

receive begins to build the self confidence needed to withstand the possible hard knocks of life in their culture and society (Morgan & Bhola, 2006).

The evaluation of the program has been a joint effort between the Children's Aid Society and the Teachers College Columbia University. The recent release of the Steps to Success, African American Male Initiative (AAMI): Summary Report (2009) for the program provided primary outcomes that included: (a) child and family functioning, (b) academic performance, (c) cognitive development, (d) social-emotional health, (e) peer relationships and (f) future orientation. The information obtained to report these outcomes was gathered through multiple methods and sources (interviews, focus groups, surveys and report cards). The collection of data was acquired from groups such as, the cohort (actual participants, African American males), life coaches, academic support (teachers) and parents.

The cohort (participants in the program) responded to questions regarding relationship building and life goals. The overall perception from the participants in the area of relationship building focused on needing more one-on-one time with their life coaches. They felt there was a deeper understanding and commitment to each other. The participants also noted that they had better relationships with their friends; however it was not clear from the responses if the improvement of relationships with their friends included friends at school or new friends within the program. Additionally, participants reported relationships at school, specifically with their teachers; from the responses the boys felt a major disconnect with their teachers and feelings that their teachers did not like them (AAMI, 2009).

Life Coaches responded to the relationship builder in a positive manner. Great gains were made in the area of trust as well as commitment; therefore the life coaches played multiple roles when there was a difficult or absent relationship with the teacher, counselor or father.

Because of the extra demands placed on the life coaches many reported they had a difficult time working and addressing the needs of their mentee (AAMI, 2009).

The report on Academic support was vague. The evaluators reported incomplete surveys from the teachers in regards to the academic progress of the student as well as their expectations for student progress. Report cards issued by schools systems varied in content assessment; therefore, a comparison would be difficult and not readily available (AMMI, 2009).

The major progress of the program was the social and emotional growth the young men experienced and the acknowledgement of their parents that they believed in their sons. Parents reported, while they hoped their sons would do well in the program, however, many feared that because the behaviors, peers and poor choices; their sons would not take advantage of opportunities provided by the program (AAMI, 2009).

The evaluators continuously monitor the information and data collected as the framework to support changes and adjustments to the mission and objectives of the program. While the program will change to meet the needs of the African American males served, the premise of the program remains to meet the needs of the whole child as well as the child's family and community (AAMI, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on the literature of critical race theory, on social learning theory, communities of practice theory, and research on the socio-cultural situation of African American male children as they attempt to position themselves within the familiarity of their homes and communities, and then deploy these positions in school contexts. Some school contexts appear to nurture these young males better than others. Some home and community cultural practices travel better than others into mainstream school contexts. Review of the literature aims to zero

in on how African American male children construct knowledge in familiar out-of-school contexts and use that knowledge at school, and further, to capture the school-based practices that embrace the talents these young males bring to bear upon their own educations.

Based upon the research studies reviewed, there is a significant disconnect between how African American males learn and the instructional design teachers use to engage them in learning experiences. Because of this discontinuity, African American males are often in conflict with their teachers as a result of cultural misunderstandings related to the language, behavior and learning styles. Through the work and research findings of Boykin and other researchers, a common theme resonated indicating the major role in which different social realms may influence potential success of these young males.

Because of these various realms (mainstream, minority, Afro-culture/Black experience) and the approaches taken in most schools, African American males have a difficult time adjusting to the social ills required of them. The review of literature provides an extensive perspective of the cultural learning and behaviors for this group, that discloses their need or desire to belong, relate and work within groups that provide support. Based on the literature, these needs are met within various community settings for multiple learning experiences and social success for these young men. However the success they experience within their communities often does not translate as valued or important in the school setting. The research provides findings to explain why these occurrences may be experienced by this group, however, the research lacks identifying measures indicating how teachers understand, interpret as well as utilize the knowledge obtained from the homes and communities of African American males as the foundation to support student engagement, motivation and scholarship to ignite the process of successful lifelong learning.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

How did the needs of African American male students influence the instructional practices of teachers? How did teachers interpret these needs and what did they do to address the needs of these young men? This study was designed to explore the African American males' perceptions of classroom activities and learning opportunities that took place in the classroom and how those experiences influenced their academic success. This chapter began with an explanation of the qualitative research, specifically the phenomenological methodology was chosen for this study. The next section included a description of the context of the study and its participants, followed by a description of the data collection and analysis procedures. The role of the researcher was also addressed. Finally, ethical considerations were explored.

Many African American males continue to experience achievement difficulties in the public schools of America. Theorists, researchers, school administrators, teachers and parents have voiced their concerns; however, little has been reported about the preferences and learning experiences of the elementary school African American male. An elevation of academic and behavioral problems observed as early as the first grade for the African American male. However, few studies have been conducted on understanding the needs of and listening to the voices of the African American male at the elementary school level about their perceptions.

Research Questions

This study focused on three guiding questions to shape the data collected:

1. What are the perceptions/interpretations of African American male students and their teachers about their school experiences?

2. How do the teachers interpret their own teaching practices, particularly with regard to these children?
3. How do the needs of African American male students influence the teaching practices of their teachers?
4. How do their perceptions/interpretations mirror each other and differ?

Research Design of the Study

A qualitative research approach was most appropriate for addressing the research question. Qualitative research is designed to answer “what, how, and why” questions through study of the practices of an individual or a specific group (Creswell, 2007, p. 107). Qualitative data collection consisted of interviews for both students and teachers, observations of the students and teachers in instructional contexts and a research log on the researcher’s observations when gathering information for the study. A variety of data collection tools incorporated multiple sources of evidence used to substantiate the findings of the study. The purpose of this study was twofold: to provide descriptions and perceptions of 1st-3rd grade African American male participants in a public school setting and their teachers’ perceptions of their own instructional practices, particularly with regard to these children.

The methodology chosen for the proposed study was phenomenology. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006) asserted that “qualitative research is rooted in phenomenology, which sees social reality as unique” (p. 25). Phenomenology focuses on individuals and their worlds as they are interconnected. Therefore, research conducted from a phenomenological perspective aims to understand human behavior and perceptions through the meanings of events in which the participants are involved (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

Creswell (2009) defined phenomenological research as “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies [and interprets] the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants” (p. 13). Also, Creswell (2007) described two approaches to phenomenology, hermeneutical and transcendental; both approaches explore lived experiences. The hermeneutical approach interprets the essence of life through lived experiences, focusing specifically on the interpretation of the lived experience. The transcendental approach concentrates on the description of the experiences. Researchers agreed that there are many ways to interpret the same experience and that each participant may develop a different meaning, which is common in most qualitative studies (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). In this study, the phenomenon explored was the descriptions and the meanings of lived experiences for African American male students and their teachers through the interpretations and perceptions the participants had concerning the instruction in elementary classrooms.

A combination of hermeneutical and transcendental approaches was used for data collection for this study. Creswell (2007) contends it was the goal of the researcher to set aside prior notions about the setting and participants, and take a novel point of view towards the phenomenon was considered in the study. The researcher began the study by describing these experiences and bracketing personal beliefs and opinions prior to data collection (Creswell, 2007).

The procedures for conducting a phenomenological study as noted by Creswell (2007) involved four main steps. The first step identified a phenomenon to study. The researcher identified a research problem that was important for understanding the similar or common experiences of several individuals. The second step involved the researcher taking action to bracket out (set aside) her own experiences in order to understand and describe those of the

participants. The next step required the collection of data from several people who had experienced the phenomenon. The data was collected in multiple forms which included interviews, observations, journals, and artifacts (i.e. art, poetry, music). The multiple forms of data collection ultimately provided methods of understanding the common experiences of the participants; affording the participants multiple opportunities to share their thoughts. Analyzing the data was the final step in completing the procedure. Analyzing the data included reducing the information collected to specific and significant statements or quotes that relayed how the participants experienced the phenomenon. After multiple reviews of the data, the researcher identified meanings that were grouped to determine themes. The themes were used as the foundation for writing descriptions and interpreting the experiences.

The methods used in this study were guided by the theoretical lens or perspective of critical race theory (Creswell, 2007). Critical race theory (CRT) focused attention on race and how racism was deeply embedded within the framework of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The design of the study made it possible for participants to share information that was analyzed through the lens of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009; Howard, 2008; Sleeter & Bernal, 2003). Howard (2008), in his use of CRT, contended

given the troubling state of affairs experienced by an increasing number of African American males in PreK-12 schools, paradigms must be created which will allow their voices to shed light on the day-to-day realities in schools and challenge mainstream accounts of their experiences (p. 7).

This study provided an opportunity for African American males in a public elementary school to share their interpretations and perceptions of the instructional strategies implemented and the

learning context provided by their teachers. Through sharing personal experiences within their classrooms, these participants provided information that was used to review the instructional practices of teachers and how these practices matched and supported the perceptions of this group of students or possible instances in which the instructional practices indicated a disconnect or mismatch to the student's academic and/or social needs. The teacher participants in the study shared how and why they selected and implemented instructional practices within their classrooms and their perceptions of the influences of these practices on the academic and social successes of African American male students.

Participants and Context of the Study

Participants

Creswell (2005) described purposeful sampling as “intentionally selecting individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 204). When the researcher identified the participants and considered the site, “information rich” purposeful sampling was used (Creswell, 2005, p. 204). Through the purposeful sampling, one elementary school, three classroom teachers and nine African American male students were asked to participate in providing the rich information explored in this specific phenomenon. The participants all attended, taught, and/or lived in the school district of Hopeful Elementary (pseudonym) in North Carolina.

Identification of teacher participants by principal. The principal served as a guide for the selection of teachers. The researcher contacted the principal requesting a conference to discuss the study. The researcher used similar characteristics as those of the teacher participants in Ladson-Billings' (1997) study who were recognized as being “effective with their children,” (p. 147). These characteristics included the teacher's willingness to work with the parent as an

active partner, maintaining high expectations for academic excellence of their children, correcting behavior without demeaning the child in the process, strong classroom management skills and the most important characteristic, the child's willingness to go to school.

During the initial meeting the principal was asked to reflect on potential teacher participants based on the following criteria: (a) questions and/or statements provided by the researcher (see Appendix A), and (b) teacher of grades first, second or third. In this initial meeting, three teachers were selected. The researchers requested that the principal discuss why specific teachers were chosen and provided examples of what led them to identify these particular teachers. The researcher recorded notes in the researcher's journal on information shared by the principal.

The researcher contacted the participants by their school email (see Appendix B) and the school system's personnel directory (information which was obtained through public access). The researcher informed the potential participants that they were not required to participate in the study, but they were recommended for the study. The decision to participate was the participants' choice and in no way affected any evaluations conducted by the principal. If a teacher declined to participate, the researcher asked the principal to select another teacher, who met the criteria, maintaining the number of teacher participants needed for the study.

Initial contact with identified teacher participants. The research scheduled a meeting with the identified teacher participants. During the initial informational meeting, the researchers and the selected participants discussed the purpose of the study, expectations and responsibilities of the teacher as a participant. The teachers were also asked to provide and sign a consent form to participate in the study (see Teacher Participant Consent Form in Appendix C). Moreover, the researcher detailed information concerning the number of interviews conducted with the

teacher and the number of classroom observations. Teachers were informed of the tentative schedule which included the opening/initial teacher interview, followed by three classroom observations with informal follow-up interviews to clarify any questions the researcher had after the observations of general classroom activities and one formal closing interview.

The participating teachers were also asked to select three African American males in their classroom. This was a joint effort by the researcher and the teacher participant. Because the study began close to the beginning of the academic year, the teachers had the chance to gain in-depth knowledge of their students' academic and personal interests. Therefore, the researcher conducted two initial observations in each classroom to identify male students who were considered: (a) cooperative; (b) energetic; (c) engaged; (d) verbal and expressive of their thoughts and feelings; and (e) having academic concerns. Additionally the selected males students were (a) first time in the specific grade level (not retained); (b) attended the school at least one to two years prior to the current year; (c) previous school attendance should be at least 90%; and (d) informal discussion with teacher after the initial (two) observations.

Initial contact with parents/guardians of identified African American male participants. Upon selection of the students, the teachers provided the names of the students to the principal. A joint letter from the principal, teacher and researcher was mailed to the student participants' parents to provide introductory information about the researcher and the study. This letter indicated the principal and teacher's support, and requested for a parent (family), teacher, student and researcher conference, as well as the date and time for the conference held in the child's classroom. In an effort to schedule a conference with each parent, the letter requested the following information: (a) the parent's ability to attend the conference; (b) if they could not attend, but were potentially interested, did they want to discuss the study; or (c) they were not

interested in having their child participate in the study. When the requested documents were returned to the school, the researcher surveyed the responses and made the following determinations: (a) scheduled amenable date and time for the conference meeting, (b) contacted the parent/guardian to discuss an alternate meeting time for the researcher to visit the home to explain the study, (c) provided answers to questions and obtain consent/assent; (d) requested that the teacher revisit the class list to select another student, maintaining the required number needed for the study; or (e) send an letter to introduce the researcher (see Researcher Introductory Letter in Appendix I).

Initial contact with identified African American male participants. The initial contact made with the identified African American male participants took place during the parent/teacher/researcher conference in the child's classroom. It was very important that the selected male participants attended the conference with their parents/guardian. During the conference, the researcher explained to the male participants and their parents/guardians the purpose of the study and the expectations. The conference afforded the parents/guardians opportunities to address any concerns they had regarding their male child participating in the study. The conference also allowed the young men to acknowledge the support of their parents/guardians, which alleviated any misgivings about participating.

The male participants' agreement to participate in the study was finalized upon the signed consent of their parents/guardians (see Parental Consent Form in Appendix D) and the signed assent (see Student Participant Assent Form in Appendix E) that was read by the researcher to the participant with opportunities provided for addressing any questions about the form or the study. After obtaining consent/assent from all participants, each was given the opportunity to select a pseudonym or a pretend/make believe name used for the study. The researcher reiterated

that if at any time the student participant felt uncomfortable or decided he no longer wished to participate, he could withdraw from the study.

Context

Hopeful Elementary School is located in a county with both urban and rural characteristics; however, Hopeful Elementary is considered an urban school. Approximately, 700 students (80% African American) ranging from grades Pre-K through fifth attended Hopeful Elementary. In 2009-2010, Hopeful Elementary was a Title I school and 85% of the students qualified for free and reduced breakfast and lunch. Hopeful Elementary was also considered a Priority School, where 50 to 60% of students scored at grade level or less than 50% of students scored at grade level, as defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and federal government designations (NC School Report Card www.ncpublicschools.org, 2010). Hopeful Elementary did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (APY); meeting 14 out of 17 AYP targets reported for the 2009-2010 academic school year. The overall performance of students in grades three, four and five based on scores from the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests (EOG) was 53.0% for Reading and 72.4% for Mathematics.

Hopeful Elementary is located on a street off of Main Street, one of the major thoroughfares within the urban area. The neighborhood for Hopeful Elementary has a variety of independently owned homes (houses, townhome), rental homes, and low-income apartment housing. Located within a short distance of the school are several gas stations, clothing and beauty supply stores, privately owned (non-franchised) restaurants, and popular named restaurants and small community churches. These businesses are frequented by the students. Additionally, most students attended afterschool activities and assistance programs such as Communities in Schools and Big Brother/Big Sister.

Data Collection

Data for the study was obtained from: (a) interviews; (b) classroom observations; and (c) field notes, headnotes and *post facto* notes. A time table was established to provide organization for data collection. Hence, the researcher recognized changes to the timetable (see Appendix F) and additional interviews and observations were conducted. The additional interviews and observations provided clarity of the actions and activities of the participants.

The teacher participants had two formal interviews; an opening interview to get to know the teacher before school started (see Opening Interview Questions for Teacher Participants in Appendix G), and the second interview was conducted after the third observation (see Closing Interview Questions for Teacher Participants in Appendix G). A total of three observations were conducted in each classroom. Upon completion of each observation, the researcher conducted an informal interview (see Follow up Observation Teacher Interview Questions in Appendix G), which allowed the teacher to provide insights about the observed activities. This conversation provided the researcher with specific information about the learning practices and activities observed. Also, student participants were informally interviewed using a focus group format after each observation (see Follow up Observation Student Interview Questions in Appendix H). This conversation centered on the perceptions and thoughts the students had about the lesson/activity observed.

The student participants had a total of two individual formal interviews, three observations, and three informal focus group interviews that took place after each observation session. The researcher visited only one classroom per day for three days to conduct the student observations. The consistent time for each observation supplied the researcher with an opportunity to observe a clearer picture of the teacher and student activities for the same subject

area(literacy and/or math). Also, allotting an entire day to one classroom permitted the researcher ample time to observe and interview the teacher and students on the same day. The researcher followed the timetable as closely as possible. Necessary changes were taken into consideration and the timeline was adjusted to accommodate unforeseen schedule changes of school assemblies or specialist programs such as: art, music or physical education classes.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews, a cross between the formal/structured interview and the casual conversations, that naturally occur or “conversations with a purpose” (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004, p. 201) were a source of the data collection conducted. The researcher used leading questions as a starting point for continued conversations on the general thoughts about the participants’ experiences within the setting.

A major advantage to interviewing was that the researcher developed a relationship with the subject and received a full range and in-depth information. Also, the researcher was flexible. However, there were disadvantages related to the researcher’s presence in the interview. The participants had some apprehension, and they tried please the interviewer, which may have biased the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2007). Hence, the researcher ensured the participants that the interview was a form of two-way communication and sharing, and the researcher functioned as a good listener and did not stray from the questions created to guide the interview.

The interviews took place in a private, non-threatening environment that was designated by the principal and teacher participants. The interview protocol consisted of a set of primary questions and a set of probing questions associated with the primary questions in an effort to clarify responses given by the participant and provided rich description and explanation. Audio taped interviews provided verbatim occurrences of the interviewee’s dialogue. The researcher

transcribed and reviewed the recording for accuracy in information, and shared these with the participants. Because the writing distracted the participant and slowed the conversation, recorded interviews were less distracting than note-taking.

The opening interview began with questions to help the researcher to get to know the participants, and what was important to them. Three informal interviews took place with each participant after each classroom observation. The informal interviews served as a means to inform the researcher of the participants' thoughts or perceptions of the specific events that took place during the lesson/observation. The closing interview allowed the participants opportunities to summarize their experiences. All student participant interview questions have been provided for review in Appendix H.

Interview questions for teachers began with questions that allowed the participants to share information focusing on why they had become a teacher, including their interest, beliefs and prior experiences. All teacher participant interview questions have been provided for review in Appendix E. The interview questions provided data to indicate the interpretations and perceptions of both the students and teachers. Classroom observations provided data to indicate the relationships and day to day interactions in the classroom for both the student and the teacher. The observations connected the interpretations and perceptions of the participants to their actual interactions and behaviors within the classroom.

Observations. There are four main ways of recording observations: observation schedule; headnotes; *post facto* notes; and fieldnotes (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Fieldnotes, headnotes and *post facto* notes were used to collect data for this particular study. Fieldnotes are written accounts of what was observed and should be written in a very precise and detailed form (Creswell, 2005). The structured observation incorporates an observation schedule and a

checklist of action the researcher expects to observe (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Since the research design of this study was phenomenology, specifically transcendental phenomenology (the research sets aside their personal experiences to look at the phenomenon in a new light/view), observations data were collected via headnotes, *post facto* notes and fieldnotes.

Headnotes are mental notes that the researcher made while watching the observed event, but writing notes at the specific time of the event was not possible (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Headnotes were used most often when the researcher wanted to be inconspicuous and lessen the disruption of activities taking place (i.e. while walking around the classroom, when observations are not conducted in a stationary location by the researcher). Headnotes were written down as soon as possible to ensure the researcher was able to capture crucial details of the observed event. The headnotes once written down became *post facto* notes. *Post facto* notes are similar to headnotes; however, they are most often a combination of headnotes and notes that are taken in incomplete form (i.e. outline, bullets, and key words). The *post facto* notes were completed as close to the time of the observation as possible to lend greater detail of the events (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) declared fieldnotes as the most accurate form of recording events that are observed. Fieldnotes were written at the exact time in which an event took place. They were very detailed accounts that had that “you are there quality” (p. 229), allowing readers to picture the same event at a later date as if occurred at that very moment. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) suggested that fieldnotes not only be taken during observations, but also they should be used to record those events even when audio and video are used in case of equipment failure.

To watch the nature and frequency in which particular forms of behavior or interaction occurred, the researcher observed the entire class. In particular, direct observations were used for this study. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) defined direct observations as written records (fieldnotes) made in the “heat of the moment as things are happening” (p. 219). Direct observations were planned and deliberate in nature; involving the examination of what took place, who was involved and where (setting) (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Observations were used to provide first hand documentation of events as witnessed by the researcher. Observation notes brought the researcher back to the actual event, to recall specific details that were otherwise left out or forgotten when revisiting the data collected.

Researcher’s Journal. The researcher’s journal was used to record the researcher’s thoughts, reactions and questions about the study. The journal also helped track the researcher’s doubts, biases, questions and ah-ha moments. The entries in the researcher’s journal were memos. Memo writing was a very useful tool in the process of maintaining the ongoing dialogue or conversation that the researcher had within her mind (Creswell, 2005). Through the use of memos the researcher created a process that enhanced the ideas and thoughts concerning the data and the development of categories and/or themes. It was within the researcher’s journal notes or memos that led the researcher to new data sources (Creswell, 2005).

Data Analysis

The data analysis conducted used the methods of Creswell (2007) described as phenomenological. This phenomenological-based research method produced large quantities of interview notes, tape recordings and observation notes. This was a messy and overwhelming task because the data did not neatly coincide in similar categories, and there were multiple ways to make associations between the different data collected (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). The

researcher examined the participants' transcripts multiple times. In this study, the researcher followed the methods prescribed by Moustakas (1994) and discussed by Creswell (2007). In the initial step, the researcher described personal experiences within the research area, which allowed the researcher to set aside personal experiences so that the focus was on the participants' perceptions. Specifically, the researcher's stance provided personal experiences that may have affected the data analysis. The analysis process also involved multiple readings of participant interview transcriptions and field notes taken during classroom observations to note significant statements and phrases pertaining to the perceptions of learning practices experienced by young African American males in the classroom setting. Also, the researcher read transcripts and noted the interpretations the teacher participants had concerning their teaching practices, as it relates to the learning preferences of these students.

The field notes from each observation conducted in the classroom was analyzed initially in a broad-spectrum based upon the literature and definitions discussed in chapter two; noting the evidence of social learning that took place and if the social learning was due to any forms of capital processed by the participants. The next level of analysis for the observations looked at the components of CRT, specifically noting behaviors, statements and conversations. Using snapshots or vignettes of the observations, allowed the researcher to determine if social learning took place due to the participants use of capital or the lack of capital, particularly in terms of the student participants. The major focus was CRT and how the components such as racism is normal, interest convergence, social construction and storytelling were used within the daily learning experiences of the classroom.

While the statements and behaviors were noted from the classroom observations, data collected during the interviews were analyzed in a similar fashion. Transcriptions of the

interviews were read; significant statements and phrases were coded and categorized using the lens of CRT. The researcher looked very close at the thoughts and perceptions shared by the participants to sort through the multiple layers to interpret the existence of CRT. The researcher used a T-chart formation which had the transcribed interviews grouped by question and field notes from classroom observations on the left side of the T-chart and the researcher's interpretations on the right side. With the CRT lens, the researcher established themes from the data collected. Once themes were established commonalities within the participants' experiences were evident (Creswell, 2007).

Based upon the developing themes, the results from the data collected were used to write a description of 'what' the participants experienced, which is known as a textural description and includes verbatim statements of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This written description was followed by what is known as a structural description which includes 'how' the experience happened (setting or context) for the participants. Combining both the textual and structural descriptions in a composite narrative provided an integrated and in-depth understanding that highlighted the "essence" of the phenomenon, which allows the reader to come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Creswell, 2007, p. 62).

While the interviews and observations were specifically discussed in the data analysis process, secondary data sources such as the researcher's journal and artifacts were collected during the study and enhanced essential details to the initial data for analysis (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). The researcher's journal allowed the researcher to reflect on field notes from the observations conducted, as well as revisit questions that arose from participant observations and general experiences. The journal helped data collected through interviews and observations.

Artifacts were also used to supplement data sources. Specifically, in this study, the artifacts were “...physical props people use...within the contexts of their daily lives” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 235). Within the realm of research conducted in the classroom, artifacts included such items as: student work samples, school/classroom newsletters sent to parents, and homework journals/logs. In essence, the data analysis for this study followed the general guidelines described by Moustakas (1994); identifying significant statements and phrases, sorting the significant statements and phrases to develop commonalities and meanings and grouping them into themes. The final product was ultimately written and presented as an extensive description of the participants’ experiences of the researched phenomenon.

Researcher’s Stance

As the researcher, I situate myself as an African American woman, former teacher and principal. I recall my schooling experiences as a child and young adult were very positive. I had confidence and motivation to seek and complete challenges. There was nothing or anyone that could stand in my way of getting what I wanted and needed. While many may view my thinking as arrogant, I saw it as a means to a positive end. To me, education was and is a right that everyone has in this country; however, the type of education a person acquires is not entirely up to them. I was able to acquire an education that afforded me the ability to attend college, where I obtained a bachelor’s and master’s degree and pursue a terminal degree. None of this would have been in my grasp without the capital (cultural, economic and social) I inherited via my middle class, education focused family experiences.

Family conversations discussed the importance of education, and this made it not an option, but a requirement, since, both my parents were educators. Public school education is a way of life for me. For most of my school experience, I had one or both parents within the same

school setting as the principal of the school or as a teacher within the school building. I often wondered, because my parents were there in the same building on a daily basis and held the role of supervisor or co-worker to my classroom teachers, how did this influence the experiences and treatment I received? While I am sure that the presence of my mother and father had a significant impact on the success of my school performance, I wondered how different my experiences would have been if the social capital my parents afforded me had not been present.

The social capital that I obtained from my parents allowed me to have access to resources such as additional assistance with lesson and project assignments. I was able to select classes and teacher preferences each year. Most resources at the school were readily available to me, and I did not have to ride the bus. Therefore, I was able to stay later than my classmates to work on assignments with the resources in the library and assistance from my teachers. Even if I needed resources on the weekend, I had access to the building. Basically, I was able to approach anyone in the building for help and received favorable responses. My social capital was very high. I am not implying that my primary and secondary education teachers were not committed to their chosen profession; I do, however, think that there was an unspoken rule, “make sure the principal’s daughter is happy”.

Reflecting on my own educational experience, I recognize that I was somewhat naïve when I began my own teaching career. I was naïve even during my student teaching experience. I was assigned to two different locations. My first assignment was at an elementary school close to the university where I completed my teacher education program. I had been assigned a third grade class and was excited about the experience I had ahead of me. My cooperating teacher was not the most positive person I had encountered, but I thought that the relationship would improve as time passed. I recall my second day at the school; one of my students brought a rather

large piece of broken plastic which had a very sharp point at the end. Following the rules that had been provided to me, I reported this to the teacher, she directed me to take the student to the principal's office. It was close to the end of the school day and dismissal would be in less than fifteen minutes. I approached the principal to express my concern for the student to have this in his book bag and carrying it on the bus. The principal looked at me and told me it was so close to the end of the day, just put it back in the book bag and send the student home. She told the student not to take it out of his book bag when he got home and not to bring it back to school.

I was amazed that the principal did not take the object and was unconcerned about the potential safety issue this could cause. While I did not question the principal's decision, I left the school that afternoon declaring not to come back. The same evening, I called my parents to share my experiences and how I was concerned that this might not be the school for me. My father at this time was a faculty member at one of the state universities and had worked with some of the principals within the district. Concerned about me and the experience, my father made a call to a colleague sharing my experience and gaining some direction as to what could be done. The next day, my university supervisor contacted me to inform me that there had been a request by a principal within the school district for me to complete my student teaching at their school. The request was granted, and I had an excellent experience that year, being named the Outstanding Student Teacher for the university. Again, the social capital afforded me via my parents allowed me to learn in an ideal environment.

Upon the completion of my student teaching experience, I was offered an early contract with the school system. While I hoped there would be a teaching position for me at the school where I completed my student teaching, I felt good about the prospect of being employed as soon as I graduated. My first teaching assignment was in a small inner city school, much different

from my student teaching school within the rural/county part of the district. I expected there would be no differences in my students and the parents at my new school. My naivete quickly dissolved and reality set in; I had students who did not have any preschool experience and parents who worked several jobs and were not available to volunteer during the school day or help the children in the evening. I began to fully understand that my personal schooling experience was far from the norm for minority students. I was faced with and willingly accepted the challenge to help my students experience some of the successes I received as a child. Accepting the challenge and having a plan to implement were two totally different responsibilities that as a new teacher left me with many questions.

The success I experienced while working with the twenty-five students in my classroom inspired me to seek a way to work with more students on a larger scale to have the same impact and success. Upon the completion of my fourth year of teaching, I began my journey into the field of school administration. I became a principal in hopes of being an educator who could influence and work with children within the entire school building. I became very focused on the African American males within my school. Many of the young men had family problems, issues in the classroom and did not seem motivated to become successful learners. It was very troubling that these young men had the mindset that school did not matter. It was more important to show physical strength in the neighborhood than to acquire book knowledge. To my dismay, this was even the sentiment of some of the parents at the school. I could not understand how being considered strong in the neighborhood was more important than doing well in school. Clearly this was not the way of thinking for all families within the school community; however, there were several families that stood firm to this belief.

Capital is afforded to many; however the types of capital (cultural, economic or social) one possesses is a powerful factor. As an example, the young men at the school, where I served as a principal, had capital within their neighborhoods as being strong and fearless. They were able to go anywhere in the neighborhood without fear of being out of place. However, this social capital did not transfer to their school community, leaving them in somewhat of a lost state when they could not or would not follow the rules. My concern for these young men was and is still, that while they had the desired capital in their neighborhoods, this same capital would ultimately keep them in the neighborhood, locking them into one way of life. The multiple opportunities that could await these young men may never be experienced if they are not able to obtain capital (cultural, economic or social) in various settings. Thus, my research focused on what and how these young men interpreted their learning experiences so that their school capital was equally important.

Going into the research site, to gain as much knowledge and understanding as possible, the researcher was up front with the principal and the teachers within the setting of the study. As a former teacher and former principal, the researcher's only goal was to learn from the participants' experiences and knowledge. The goal of the researcher was to assume the role of a learner. The observations were not used as an evaluation mechanism; they were used to gather information from the interactions and conversations observed in the classroom. The researcher gained the trust of the teacher participants in order for them to be honest and forthcoming with their experiences and expertise. The researcher acknowledged that there would more than likely be initial hesitance when her professional background was revealed to the participants. Gaining the trust of the participants was of the utmost importance. The researcher informed the teacher

participants that they would have the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews to ensure that their interviews were accurate and their intent was clear.

The same stance was shared with both the principal of the building and the parents of the young men. The researcher did not want the principal to feel her leadership style was questioned, nor that the researcher would make observations to warrant what should or needed to be done, given her previous experience as a principal. The learner stance also took place with the parents. While the researcher was very interested in the African American men and their educational experience, she was upfront with their parents to let them know that advice would not be given pertaining to their child's education or specific incidents which occurred during the study. If questions occurred, the researcher encouraged the parent to speak with their child's teacher, counselor or principal for a resolution. The researcher's previous experience as a principal was not used for solicitation or advice of what should be done in the research setting.

Ethical Consideration

The research followed and adhered to the policies and procedures of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Policies and procedures were reviewed at www.irb.vt.edu. Information was included in the IRB application of the study name; purpose of the study, study personnel (who was conducting the research), research protocol (how consent and/or assent obtained, data collected and analyzed), and supporting documents (consent forms, assent forms, data collection instruments, recruitment letter). Upon approval of IRB the researcher shared IRB with the Testing and Accountability office of the district administration for Hopeful Elementary School.

An application was submitted to the Testing and Accountability office, to request approval to conduct research within the chosen elementary school. This application/request

required the researcher to provide documentation in the form of a letter from the principal specifically indicating their willingness to participate in the study and allowed the researcher to conduct the study within the school building. Additional documents included samples of all forms used to obtain consent from all participants, letters to parents and a timeframe in which the study was conducted. Upon verification of all information the district provided a letter giving the researcher approval and access into the school property to conduct the research for the study.

Chapter 4

The Participants

Introduction

The teacher and student participants are introduced in this chapter. Teacher participants' descriptions were composed based on shared personal accounts from their home and family life, early educational experiences, teaching careers, and classroom experiences. Student participants are introduced based on personal information shared about their family, personal interest, favorite subject and learning needs, and school and classroom experiences. Personal descriptions are followed by classroom vignettes that depict daily interactions of teachers to students and students to students. Within each vignette are scenarios of classroom occurrences that provide a context for understanding the capital each teacher and student brings to school and how this capital influences the learning experiences within the classroom.

Second-Grade Participants

Ms. Lucy, Second-Grade Teacher Participant. Ms. Lucy was a Caucasian female with short brown hair, dark brown eyes, full distinctive eyebrows and medium framed body. She was the younger of two children in her family. She had an older brother who was seven years her senior. In the late 1970s, Ms. Lucy was born in the central piedmont of North Carolina in an urban yet rural county setting. She experienced different educational settings beginning as early as elementary school. As a young child, her family moved to a small rural town in southern Georgia; her elementary school experiences were all within this very small town that she described as lacking cultural and racial diversity. Ms. Lucy's family moved back to North Carolina to an all rural area where she completed her secondary education. She obtained her bachelor's degree in social work and worked in this field for several years.

Ms. Lucy enjoyed her work; however, she desired a change. She wanted to continue working with children; therefore, she chose to make a career change, becoming a teacher. Ms. Lucy's decision to become a teacher led her to a teacher education program at a small private predominantly White institution (PWI) within the area where she now lives. Ms. Lucy gave credit to her family values and upbringing which guided her beliefs and supported her teaching philosophy: to help and be there for others as well as to recognize and embrace the differences in people. Ms. Lucy had been at Hopeful Elementary School for eight years as a teacher of first and second graders. She liked both grade levels and had no preference for one over the other; she credited the age of the students for her enjoyment of both grades. While Ms. Lucy enjoyed working with this age group and the fact that learning with these students was still open, new and fresh, she had witnessed the excitement of continuous learning. She described herself as a continuous learner. Ms. Lucy took classes towards a Masters degree; however, she postponed pursuing the degree since having her first child.

Although Ms. Lucy postponed pursuing her graduate degree, she referenced "research-based strategies" as the source of instructional methods for the classroom. Ms. Lucy alluded to "research-based strategies" from a book study on *The Minds of Boys* (Gurian & Stevens, 2007) completed with the faculty at Hopeful Elementary. Based upon the research reported in the text, she prepared a constructive classroom environment that incorporated bright lights, more space, and stretch or movement breaks between subjects. Additionally, she structured an environment that gave the boys some choice or freedom throughout the instructional day. Ms. Lucy's learning center approach in her classroom focused on student autonomy and learning style, giving each student an opportunity to explore his learning environment in a hands-on, developmentally appropriate classroom. As the facilitator, she provided materials and guidance

as well as planned discussions, activities, demonstrations, and reviews. Through the incorporation of learning centers along with teacher directed instruction, students were encouraged to make choices as they learned to work independently as well as cooperatively in the centers.

Ms. Lucy described herself as “caring and positive, but strict.” She shared that “a good mixture” of those characteristics would help her students achieve. She aimed to provide instruction for her students to embrace their independence and compassion to help other students within the classroom. In essence, this approach was her teaching philosophy and where she placed her focus when working with children. One of Ms. Lucy’s major foci in helping the young boys and others in her classroom become successful learners was to give them more control over what they did and how they met their goals for success.

Contextual Analysis

Although Ms. Lucy’s second-grade classroom was housed in a mobile unit external to the main building, there was a sense of community. Student desks were positioned in the middle of the classroom in four groups that were also placed in sets of four. Looking to the left of the front door of the classroom there was a yellow emergency folder with several posters that included long and short vowels and beginning and ending digraphs. Below these posters was a bookcase with a yellow curtain that covered the contents. The top of the bookshelf held several baskets and boxes where students placed their homework notebooks, weekly folders, and their graded assignments. Beyond the bookshelf was a bulletin board with a green background that displayed the classroom word wall with words like *after*, *any*, *also*, *before*, *good*, and *going*. In front of the bulletin board that displayed the word wall, there was a U-shaped table that held a basket of books and small dry erase boards. On the other side of the bulletin board was a small window.

Beside the small window, student work was displayed that represented the essential question for an assignment, “How can I represent a # [number] with hundreds, tens, and ones [place value]?”

Below the small window was a row of hooks that held the coats and bookbags of each student.

Next to the coat area was the bathroom.

The wall beside the bathroom door held large commercial cut out pictures of children that held signs to remind students to stop and learn, share ideas, listen, think and explore. Below these pictures was a large light brown cabinet with six long drawers. On top of the cabinet were an inflatable plastic story cube (One interesting thing I learned is...) and wooden number cubes as well as several pictures of Ms. Lucy’s baby girl. Located in the furthest area from the front door was a

- built in bookshelf,
- water fountain,
- teacher’s desk
- computer (3) station,
- bulletin board with student work,
- large TV mounted in the corner,
- back door of the classroom.

The front of the room displayed a lot of text and information. The whiteboard was the focal point in the front of the room; information was written providing directions and instructions for the class such as

- the daily schedule,
- essential questions for each subject (i.e. EQ-Social Studies: What do I know about citizens?),
- homework,
- word of the day (Responsibility – doing what is expected of you),
- weekly spelling words (i.e. everywhere, years, place many gnat and crumb),
- behavior chart/poster (good day, okay day, rough day and difficult day).

Displayed around the whiteboard were

- the letters of the alphabet,
- graphic organizer posters (circle map, bubble map, tree map and flow map),

- classroom and School rules (Student Creed, Voice Levels).

Below the whiteboard were blue crates that held a variety of books as a small classroom library.

The area for the classroom library blended in and became the corner where materials for calendar work were included

- a large, yellow, sun with Ms. Lucy's Class written in the middle,
- days of week chart which includes individual notes with the number and matching cubes (how many days of school),
- the monthly calendar with the current day marked and the previous days for the month,
- laminated poster (Every Day COUNTS Calendar Math),
- flip chart for counting and calculating coins,
- large class size number chart.

The remaining wall in the classroom provided areas for behavior reminders, instructional reminders, and materials

- classroom Norms (additional class rules written on green, yellow, red, blue and purple sentence strips),
- give Me Five chart (eyes on speaker, lips closed, ears listening, sit up straight, hands and feet quiet),
- shelves with games and manipulatives (Read and Write Word Game, Rhyming Word, Blends & Digraphs and Vowel Sound games),
- math word wall (calendar, tens rods, ones cubes, coins, dimes, nickels, counting, addition, clock, patterns, subtraction).

Materials and manipulatives for center activities were placed and organized so that students were able to retrieve them as needed. Students were chosen as center helpers each day to place the essential questions and materials for each center in the designated location.

Student Participants

Lance, Second-Grade Student Participant. Lance was a seven-year old African American male who was born in the central piedmont of North Carolina. He lived with his mother and was the younger of two male children in the family. Tall and lean in stature, Lance wore his hair closely cut. He had dark brown eyes, thick eyebrows, and a large smile that he rarely showed until he became more comfortable with a person. His smile was especially bright

when he shared things he liked. He enjoyed playing tag outside with his friends and going to the “court” (basketball court). Because of the age difference, he rarely played with his thirteen-year old brother who currently attended the “feeder” middle school (the middle school designated for the attendance zone) for Hopeful Elementary. Lance talked about “a bunch of friends” that he played with afterschool and on the weekends. His favorite game to play was hide-and-go-seek in the backyard, counting to twenty while everyone ran to hide. He enjoyed playing hide-and-seek because he got to use some of his math skills by counting to twenty and higher. He enjoyed reading because he liked to read the *Arthur* book series with his mother. Lance shared that his mother was proud of how well he could read and enjoyed the *Arthur* books as well.

In addition to enjoying math and reading, Lance explained that he also really liked gym. During gym, he could play basketball and jump rope. He shared, “It is good exercise...and that would help to make you healthy.” Lance shared that the only thing he did not like about school was art. He did not like art because it was hard and he did not know how to draw. Lance took pride in his work and did not want to do anything that he could not do well. Even with a seemingly perfectionist attitude, Lance was very quiet and timid when talking to new people in the classroom, especially adults. He felt that he was a good helper in the class, especially when Ms. Lucy asked him to help fellow classmates.

Blade, Second-Grade Student Participant. Blade was a seven-year old African American male born in a local urban town in the central piedmont area of North Carolina. He lived with his mother and father and was one of four children. Blade had an older sister, an older brother (11 years old), and a younger brother (3 years old). Blade was small in stature both in height and weight. He enjoyed playing school, teaching his toys, and his little brother.

He stated, “I like to go to school.” While playing inside, he found board games interesting, and he enjoyed working on the computer, watching TV, and playing with his action figures.

While Blade enjoyed indoor activities, he liked to exercise outside, especially when he could run with his dogs, Winnie and Diva. He shared that one dog is a poodle and the other dog is a “half.” He is not sure what the halves were, but it did not matter. He simply enjoyed being outside. Blade also liked to play outside with his cousin and his best friend even though there were not many children in his neighborhood. He enjoyed the visits from his cousin and friend so they could play cops and robbers. Blade enjoyed his time at home and on the weekend; however, he continued to talk about school and how it was fun, and he wanted to learn.

While he enjoyed playing school and teaching his toys, the thing that made him want to learn was meeting new friends and helping them and his teacher. Blade also liked activities that allowed him to bring items from home that helped him learn and complete his assignments successfully (i.e. science lesson that required him to bring an apple from home). Blade enjoyed every aspect of school. When he was asked if he would change anything, he stated, “No, because I like the classroom the way it is.” The one thing that made him dislike school was if he or other people got in trouble. He shared that he did not like it when people got in trouble “cause... they’re wasting their time for learning.” Blade admitted that he got in trouble sometimes but not a lot because he liked to learn.

Robot, Second-Grade Student Participant. Robot was a seven-year old African American male who was born in a rural community in the southern region of North Carolina. He lived with his mother and father and was the youngest of three children; he had an older sister and an older brother. Robot enjoyed playing his Nintendo DS and Wii game systems as well as playing football, tag, and hide-and-go-seek outside. Particularly on the weekend, he liked to lie

in bed and watch the cartoon network on television. On the weekend, Robot would lie in bed until he got hungry, and he would leave his bed to go downstairs to get something to eat, but then he would go back to bed after his meal. When he was awake, he would open his window so that if he heard someone outside he would get up and put his clothes on to go out and play. Robot also enjoyed the weekends because he had friends to play with in his neighborhood. During the week, he had to play by himself, because all of his friends had to go to daycare after school.

While Robot enjoyed playing games with his neighbors and friends, he seemed to be very focused on why learning was important and how his behavior affected learning. Robot associated learning with how much money a person makes, how to be good, and how to make wise choices. He referenced doing math, “writing good,” and “typing fast” as signs of a person’s success at learning. Robot’s idea of the best thing(s) at school was when his class went to “specials.” “Specials” included learning outside of their main classroom, going to art, library, technology (computer lab), music and physical education. When Robot was asked if there was anything he did not like about school, he stated, “Nothing.”

Robot focused on learning, doing good, and making wise choices, all of which he believed would help him when he becomes older so that he could drive. Driving seemed to be very important to Robot because he wanted to travel. He shared that he liked to drive to Amethyst Stone Mountain where his mother used to live, and they could visit his cousin and his mother’s aunt. Robot was aware of other places he wanted to visit so that he could continue to learn about different places. He named several places such as Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Georgia. Robot wanted to learn all he could, and he talked about how traveling was one way to help him learn. He seemed to be satisfied with the things he was learning in school, recalling the fact that he did not dislike anything about school. When asked if

there was anything he would change about school, Robot shared, “I would change it from helping you do stuff and telling you the answers ... [to] letting you figure it out by yourself, even if the answer is incorrect.” Robot really wanted the opportunity to try things on his own when learning; he wanted to be challenged.

Classroom Vignette

The second grade classroom daily schedule was rarely changed. Math centers were implemented each afternoon prior to teacher directed reading. Student helpers were assigned to place the materials for each center in the designated area each day. On several occasions, Lance, Blade, and Robot were chosen as helpers within the classroom setting. All of the young boys had turns with the job of center helpers. Lance also had the responsibility of the helper who walked with students when they were called out of the classroom to another location in the building. Ms. Lucy considered each young boy a good helper.

While the materials for the centers were put in place, Ms. Lucy assigned a group of students to each center. The groups were pre-assigned; therefore, the students knew of which group they were a member and followed the instructions given for their particular group. Each center was equipped with the essential question (the objective, what was to be learned in the center) and enough materials for each student to work in the center. Students kept records of their work from each center in their math notebook that documented what was completed in the center. For example, in the math center for addition, students used dice to roll numbers that indicated the addition sentence they would write and solve. If the dice displayed a two and a five, the student would then write in their notebook $2+5=7$. The process continued until time was called, and the groups rotated to the next center. Each group spent approximately fifteen

minutes in each center. The teacher indicated when time had expired for the center, which signaled students to clean up for the next group that would use the center.

Center groups had no more than five students assigned which allowed everyone to participate. The students worked cooperatively, shared materials, and assisted each other. As the teacher walked and monitored the centers, the students would respond to questions posed by the teacher when directed. The voice level during center time was at a moderate level. Students discussed and shared their thoughts and findings. Blade's group had five members; his group began the center rotation at the place value center. The essential question for the center (How can I use hundreds blocks, tens rods and one cubes to represent a # [number]?) was written clearly on a laminated sheet of paper. Blade selected the first number card, which had the number 103. Blade selected a hundred block and three cubes to represent the number. He then recorded the information in his math notebook, and he drew a picture of the blocks and cubes he had selected. Blade worked quietly on the floor while Robot worked in the same center where he was trying to tell another student what to do and what to write in the notebook. Blade was not distracted by the discussion between Robot and the other student; he moved his material slightly away from them and continued to work.

Robot continued to instruct the student and pointed out what he believed was wrong with the students work. When Ms. Lucy heard the disagreement between Robot and the other student, she went over to Robot and reminded him to do his work and to take care of himself. Robot explained he was only trying to help. Ms. Lucy told him that sometimes people may not want help and that she was proud of him for trying. Ms. Lucy patted Robot slightly on the back as she moved away to signal the class to complete their work as center time was almost over. As the students completed their final assignments, Ms. Lucy provided directions to clean up the center

area and to stand up when the center was cleaned. Ms. Lucy took out the reading text in each student's desk while they cleaned up the centers, which seemed to help with the transition to the next activity. Ms. Lucy scanned the room for the sign that students were ready to listen and move back to their seats. Students returned to their desk to find their reading text open to the story for the day.

Ms. Lucy introduced the new story by asking the students to take a picture walk with her. As the class turned the pages of the story, she asked the question, "Looking at the pictures, what do you think this story is about?" The students raised their hands to be called upon by Ms. Lucy to answer the question. Ms. Lucy called on Lance, and he responded, "Pumpkins." The teacher praised Lance and continued with the next question. She then requested that the students give a descriptive word about pumpkins. Blade raised his hand and responded, "Matter, solid, small mass." Ms. Lucy replied, "Very good, you are using some of our science words... this is a realistic text." Ms. Lucy read the text as students followed along in their books. When she completed the story, Ms. Lucy assigned students to reading partners to go back through the story slowly to look at each picture carefully. Lance and his partner took turns reading each page of the story. Lance assisted his partner with difficult words; however, he did not give his partner a chance to sound out the words that were difficult. He was quick to assist so they could finish first.

While Lance and his partner worked to finish the assigned task quickly, Blade worked at a slow and steady pace. Ms. Lucy assigned Blade two partners for the assignment. As Blade worked with his partners, he seemed proud and confident. As his partners read the story, Blade took much care to make sure they were assisted with unfamiliar words, and he helped them

sound out words in question. Blade took time and did not rush his partners. He waited for his turn to read, and he reminded them to listen and wait their turn.

Lance, Blade, and Robot's dispositions were very distinctive. While they all seemed to feel important when asked to work with others in the class, they all took on the responsibility in a different manner. The young boys seemed to work with their fellow students in the way they preferred to learn. Ms. Lucy shared that she tried to make sure shoulder partners and student helpers were changed as frequently as possible, but she had to match student personalities which sometimes would prompt adjustments without much notice.

Analysis

The math centers and reading activities that took place during the observations provided a clear picture that within this second grade classroom environment, social learning is obviously apparent. The teacher modeled and provided the students with optimal opportunities to interact with each other in small groups or with partners. The students were peer helpers who worked together that resulted in a cooperative learning environment.

Third-Grade Participants

Ms. Chanel, Third-Grade Teacher Participant. Ms. Chanel is an African American female born in the late 1970s in eastern North Carolina. She referred to her small rural hometown as "the country." She was the youngest of three children and had a brother and a sister. Ms. Chanel described herself as "the baby of the family." Her father left the family when she was young; therefore, she credited her upbringing and morale values to the hard work of her mother. Ms. Chanel was petite in stature, had a small body frame, and wore a short haircut with the top of her hair formed in spikes. While she was petite in size and not much taller than some of her third grade students, she spoke with a stern tone and passionate voice. She left her

hometown area in the mid 1990s to continue her post-secondary education at a state university in an urban setting within the central piedmont area of the state, pursuing a degree in Elementary Education (K-6). After graduating from college, Ms. Chanel remained in the area; her career in education began as a teacher assistant in a local middle school. She began her teaching career a year later at Hopeful Elementary where she taught for the past ten years. She spent nine of those years teaching fourth graders. During this academic year, Ms. Chanel excitedly began a new journey of teaching third grade for the first time; she claimed she would never go back to the fourth grade. She was a lifelong learner, pursuing a master's degree in Elementary Education at her undergraduate alma mater.

Inspired by mentoring she received from a family neighbor as a child, Ms. Chanel planned to become a teacher. After her father left the family, she recalled her neighbor becoming a very influential part of her life. Ms. Chanel described her mentor as a teacher who worked within the area but not a teacher who ever formally taught her in a classroom. Because of the time the neighbor took to help her family through such a hard time, she felt the love that needed to be shared with all children. Growing up and experiencing this kindness instilled in Ms. Chanel the desire to model her life after this mentor. She set a goal to give children the same attention she received from her neighbor, "the teacher." Consequently, Ms. Chanel strived to give students within her classroom the type of support she received from her mentor. She modeled instruction and worked from the premise of her learning preferences. She was a tactile learner, and she believed teaching with a tactile approach was the best way to help her students.

Ms. Chanel was very confident in her teaching style to keep the classroom environment very structured. While she made sure the classroom environment was structured and a consistent routine was put into place, Ms. Chanel created multiple opportunities to move about the

classroom to release excessive energy in a constructive manner. Ms. Chanel described her methods of keeping students active and engaged through the use of group work, peer discussions and observation, and manipulatives. Ms. Chanel's teaching philosophy revolved around the notion that all children can learn. If children are provided instruction that meets their learning needs, they are more likely to be successful. As a hands-on learner, Ms. Chanel was steadfast in her belief that children learn better through hands on activities, particularly African American males.

Ms. Chanel shared that her teaching philosophy had evolved over the years. She stated, "I've grown a lot of strong qualities" which she concluded had resulted in her development as a better mother and sibling. She shared, "I've been a teacher, so I realize that teachers play so many different roles." She felt her teaching philosophy had been accomplished whenever her students returned to visit her to share what a change and impact she made in their lives. Ms. Chanel described herself as "dedicated." She felt that her teaching philosophy and dedication to the teaching profession provided opportunities for her students to learn. Her greatest satisfaction was witnessing her students get excited about learning, which inspired her to continue as a classroom teacher.

Contextual Analysis

Upon entering Ms. Chanel's classroom, one could hear the determination in her stern and passionate voice, and one could see focused looks on her students' faces. She kept her classroom door open, and it displayed a welcome sign, "Welcome to our Hopping Third Grade Class." Each child's name had been written on a green hopping frog. The classroom was full of color and rich with text throughout the room. In the left front corner of the classroom was

- student work that appeared to be an art activity in which they had built banana splits using the order of operation (what comes first),

- the first of two bulletin boards that displayed the monthly calendar that denoted the current date and the markers for previous days of the month,
- the whiteboard that displayed a hand-written daily schedule and any special events or activities for the day (i.e. assembly, picture day etc.),
- a blue flip chart that displayed a sentence strip entitled “reading vocabulary” with words such as excitement, shocked, sadness and alarmed;
- laminated posters of graphic organizers such as a circle map, bubble map, tree map and flow map above the whiteboard;
- a second bulletin board that had the class rules and a behavior chart,
- a list of actions that ensured a good day (the list of actions included, treat everyone with respect, involvement in all activities, go the distance, encourage classmates, responsible actions and show a positive attitude);
- the behavior chart that included six different faces to indicate the type of day the student had, from a superstar, great, good, okay, rough and finally difficult (Each student had a marker with his or her name; the markers began on the good day face to begin each day. As the student displayed appropriate or inappropriate behavior based upon the class rules and expectation they were instructed to move their marker up or down throughout the day),
- a tall corner cabinet that attached to the wall, which held the classroom television (The television remained on playing soft music, barely noticeable unless you were in close proximity of the television. The television was also used to provide information such as, the math problem for the day (K-2 and 3-5), school rules, PTA meetings, book fairs and birthdays),
- a large U-shaped table that was used for small group instruction (on the table, there was a basket with small books and several small dry erase boards and markers, as well as a stack of assessment cards that the teacher used).

The wall adjacent to the front door displayed

- a reading word wall on the connecting wall (the reading word wall included words such as business, carpenter, spell, broom college marketplace, quarters and dimes),
- a three pane window that allowed natural light to shine on the classroom library,
- the classroom library contained a bookshelf, plastic tubs that house the overflow of books that did not fit on the bookshelf,
- an easel that doubled as a dry erase board on one side that was placed in the middle of the rug area which defined the classroom library area in front of the red, green and yellow tubs with the overflow books,
- a wooden carousel natural wood in color with plastic tubs similar to those in the classroom library area that was used to keep classroom manipulatives, such as pattern blocks, number cubes and charts, calculators, and color chips; and
- three computer stations.

The connecting wall revealed

- posters and information for mathematical operation (posters included greater than/less than, geometric shapes [rhombus, trapezoid, etc.], a number line which also identified ones, tens, hundreds, thousands hundred thousand);
- a math word wall that provided students a point of reference for mathematical cues such as ordering, compare, rounding estimate, degrees, foot, inches, standard form, extended form, vertex, angle and side;
- above the math word wall were posters made to display words that may be seen in mathematical word problems for addition, subtraction and division;
- a bulletin board on the back wall that had a border with “kids at work” (bulletin board has a pocket for each student and work is displayed in each pocket),
- the teacher’s desk,
- class pictures of Ms. Chanel’s previous classes from the nine years of teaching,
- in front of the desk on the floor was a blue chest which resembles a treasure chest and beside the desk were two tall beige filing cabinets,
- built in cabinets and student cubby area,
- the built in units were blue, the cabinet sections were above the vertical sections that the students used to place their book bags, coats and lunch boxes,
- alphabet letters were on each door of the cabinets, some had words beneath them, for example, growing for the letter G, I’m for the letter I, and muscles for the letter M; and
- a sink which also had a water fountain, and hand sanitizer on the counter.

Next to the classroom door there was a plastic holder on the wall that held a red emergency folder and the fire evacuation plan for the classroom.

The student desks were located in the middle of the classroom. The student desks were placed in groups of four and five. There were two groups of five desk and two groups of four desks. The overhead projector was in the middle of the room in front of the student desks, and two long rectangular tables were in the middle of the room behind the student desks.

Student Participants

Max, Third-Grade Student Participant. Max was an eight year old African American male who was born in Texas. His family moved to the area when he was five years old. He was the third to the youngest of eight children who lived with his mother. Max was stout, had bright brown eyes, and wore his hair closely cut. He enjoyed going to his friends’ house to play and watch television. His favorite television channels were 22-BET (Black Entertainment Television), 73-Disney Channel, 32- Nick Junior and channel 48- the Cartoon Network. He also

enjoyed playing with his Xbox 360. While he was very familiar with television, Max really enjoyed outdoor activities. He enjoyed playing outside with Red, his dog, and he liked to go fishing with his father who lived in Tennessee. Max recalled how hard it was catching a catfish during his last fishing trip, and he was very proud of his accomplishment. He also shared that he liked to spend time with his mother as he would often help her with groceries when she returned from the store.

Max was a very active young man when it came to his class interactions and work. He sat in the first set of student desks closest to the classroom door. His desk was part of a group of five located at the end of the designated group. Max shared several things that he liked about school, which included eating lunch, going outside, and getting to work. During lunch, Max liked to eat macaroni and cheese, popcorn chicken, and broccoli. There was one lunch item Max did not like which was cantaloupes. He stated, "I don't like cantaloupes since I was a baby." While outside, Max liked to play on the other side of the playground where there was a stage and a rope to climb. He shared that he had a small blackboard at home that helped him with things he liked to do at school. He shared, "[I] like counting and spelling stuff." When Max was asked if he could have a special day at school, he shared that he would be a teacher since he wanted to be a teacher when he grew up, and he also shared he would be nice.

James, Third-Grade Student Participant. James was a seven year old African American male who was born in Brooklyn, New York. His father and mother moved the family to the area when he was one or two years old. He had an older brother who was 12 years old, and a younger sister who was four. James was tall and thin in stature. He had a big smile that revealed his white teeth. Because James had a close haircut, his ears were very noticeable. During his free time, James enjoyed playing football and basketball, drawing, watching

television, and talking with his cousin. James had a daily routine for his afterschool time. He attended the afterschool program which was located in the gym at Hopeful Elementary where he completed his homework and was permitted to go outside and play after the homework was checked.

He was a quiet young man who had a confidence about him when he got to know a person. His mild manner and big smile appealed to his classmates and anyone who visited his classroom. When entering the room, James would quickly look up and ask, “Do you want to talk to me today?” James also loved to read. He shared that reading made him want to learn in school. He especially liked the book series *The Diary of the Wimpy Kid*. He also believed math was fun because he liked the lessons and activities on finding the unknowns. He shared that he uses the math he learned at school to help him measure ingredients for pancakes and how many to cook, especially when his family had breakfast for dinner. For him, a special day would include making macaroni and cheese and pancakes with his sister and mother because he could use math to help him cook. Because he enjoyed mathematics, he concluded that he would have the class do math before reading if he were the adult in the classroom since math was his “best thing...best subject.”

Classroom Vignette

The third grade class interactions and environment for Max and James seemed to be very different. They were briefly assigned desks in the same group; however, Max’s desk was moved to a different location on the opposite side of the classroom. The interaction between Max and James was rare during classroom activities and lessons. While they both shared they enjoyed school, their experiences did not resemble one another. During a math lesson that focused on subtraction problems with borrowing methods, the teacher demonstrated procedures several

times on the overhead using different color pens to identify the numbers. The teacher instructed students to get out their green crayon to circle the tens column and blue crayon to circle to replace and rename or regroup. Throughout the lesson, Max had a piece of Kleenex that he tore, folded, and crumbled in a ball. Ms. Chanel instructed him to get to work and throw the Kleenex away, and he complied; however, he got another Kleenex to replace the one he threw away and touched it to the tip of his nose, unfolded it, folded it again, and touched it again to his nose although his nose was not runny. He repeated this behavior until he decided to throw the tissue away in the trash canister beside the door then he moved to the counter with the hand sanitizer. He pumped the container until there was what he considered enough liquid in his hand, and he rubbed his hands together and shook them dry. Once he finished, he got another piece of Kleenex and began the process again.

Max continued to play with the Kleenex until Ms. Chanel came to his group, sat in his seat with him, and walked him through the steps for regrouping. Ms. Chanel asked Max to tell her what he was doing as he completed the problem. She questioned which place value he regrouped and what color crayon he needed to use to demonstrate his thinking. Max was able to answer her questions and wrote the information while the teacher was sitting with him. When Ms. Chanel left him to check other students' work in the group, Max pulled out the Kleenex again. During the lesson, students within the group talked to each other but not with Max. They only interacted with him when he threw a piece of the Kleenex at them or when he checked with them to see if his work was correct.

This behavior seemed to be a habit with Max. On another occasion, the teacher called Max out into the hallway for a brief moment. Max re-entered the classroom while the remaining students completed work from the previous lesson. During this time the teacher praised one

group and stated, "This table is on fire today, I am very proud of you. Go up and move up one." The students proceeded to the front of the room to the behavior chart and moved their markers to the next level. The teacher reviewed prior knowledge for circle and tally graphs, students worked on the assigned activity; however, Max played with a small piece of paper instead of the Kleenex. As the other students worked, he folded the Kleenex in his book and rolled it up with his pencil. Max was continually distracted during the lesson; he requested to go to the bathroom seemingly doing anything to avoid completing the task assigned.

While Max seemed to be off task, the opposite behavior was taking place for James. His desk was part of a group of four located near the window and the classroom library. He sat across and beside females in his class and diagonal to another young African American male. The interaction at this table of students was polite and productive. In one instance, a classmate at James' table accidentally kicked his foot, and she quickly apologized to him. James accepted her apology by replying, "That's okay." He and the students within his assigned desk group worked well together; they helped each other without disturbing the rest of the class. As the students worked, Ms. Chanel was seated at the U-shaped table. She called students up to complete quarterly assessments, which focused on comprehension skills. The students seated at their desk were instructed to continue to work on the assignment and not to disturb her while she was working with their classmates at the table. Ms. Chanel instructed them to get a game to play after they finished their work, and she checked it.

Excited by the opportunity to play a game, James continued to work on his assignment until it was finished. When he completed it, he anxiously raised his hand to get Ms. Chanel's attention so she could check his work. As he waited for Ms. Chanel to finish with the student at the table, James tapped his pencil on his desk. Ms Chanel completed the assessment with the

student and recognized James' raised hand. When James informed Ms. Chanel he was done, she reminded him to check his work and to place his paper face down on the desk. James was then allowed to get the selected word search game. Ms. Chanel praised James, stating, "Thank you for working so quietly." James took the game and found a place on the floor behind his desk to work.

As James worked with the word search game, Max returned from the bathroom to play with a piece of paper while he looked around the room to see what others were doing. Ms. Chanel went over to the table where Max was seated to work with another student. When Ms. Chanel arrived at the table, Max began to count his fingers as if he was working on the assignment. He then shifted his attention to a pencil and began to play with it. Ms. Chanel asked Max if he had finished his work, and he responded, "No." When Ms. Chanel instructed Max to move his marker on the behavior chart, he responded, "I can't move it." Max's marker was on the red face, which denoted a difficult day. To Max's response, Ms. Chanel told him just to sit down. He returned to his seat and began to talk to another student at the table. Ms. Chanel informed him that he would have to bring his lunch back to the room during lunchtime and that it would not be fun. He acknowledged her comment but continued to talk to the other students. Ms. Chanel then gave Max a nonverbal warning, looking very stern at him and shaking her head back and forth which indicated no. Max disregarded the look and began a shouting match with a student at his table. He yelled, "You fat, you big fat foot, big fat farmer." This behavior earned Max and the other student lunchtime in the classroom away from their peers.

Although Max was easily distracted by a piece of paper or any object that captured his attention, he quickly became engaged in lessons that were hands on or tactile in nature. With an assignment on body parts that required students to read about the skeleton and label its parts,

Max was attentive to the work for the lesson. He cut out the names of each part of the skeleton and glued the pieces in the appropriate place. When Ms. Chanel asked Max if he was working, he proudly responded, “Yes, I am on the skeleton.” Max was focused on his work and completed the assignment prior to the end of the time allotted for the activity.

Analysis

James was able to conform to the classroom rules and expectations for each lesson without problem. Socially, James was able to work independently and with his classmates when directed. However, Max had a difficult time working independently and with his table mates. Students at his table ignored him and the objects with which played during their assignments. Max only communicated with the group to get the attention of the student at the opposite end of the table, which usually ended in an argument. While Max did not work well with students, the teacher never separated his desk from the other students’ desks; however, he was frequently moved to a different group.

Fourth-Grade Participants

Ms. Fourth Grade, Fourth-Grade Teacher Participant. Ms. Fourth Grade was an African American female with brown hair that fell just below the bottom of her jaw. She wore brown rectangular rim shaped glasses and had a medium frame build. Ms. Fourth Grade was born in the mid-1980s in the central east coast area of the United States. She was the youngest of three children and was the only girl. She admitted she always got her way growing up and sometimes even now as an adult. Her hometown was small in size, but she considered it the city compared to some of the neighboring towns based on the available stores and mall. She shared that many people were impressed when the town received its first Wal-Mart in the area.

When Ms. Fourth Grade reminisced on her own elementary school experiences, she shared that learning was important, but it was not measured simply by a test score. She believed a major concern with schools today was the behavior parents displayed. She expressed concern about how some parents believed that teachers or principals were out to get their child. Ms. Fourth Grade recalled how her parents never questioned notes that the teacher would send home. She could still hear her parents' respond, "Your teacher would not send this note home if you had not done something wrong." As a child, she did not have a side to tell, so what the teacher reported about her learning or behavior was law in her house, and her parents would follow through with consequences. She concluded this behavior was not the case in today's public school classroom as parents questioned teachers and principals frequently.

When Ms. Fourth Grade compared Hopeful Elementary to her own elementary school, she shared that the two schools were very different, especially the student body. She explained how her elementary school classes were diverse, and there was not a particular group that overshadowed another in terms of numbers. Her secondary school experiences was the opposite because she took advanced placement and college preparatory classes, so there were not many students who looked like her in the classroom. There were a select few African American students in the advanced placement classes. She never had to question who would be in her class because she always knew the core group of students. It was never expected that anyone but the same small group of African American students would be able to handle the advanced placement class work.

Ms. Fourth Grade came from a family of educators. Her father was a teacher and principal, and her brother, aunt, and uncle were teachers. She explained, "It runs in the family," so Ms. Fourth Grade felt destined to become a teacher. She continued her post-secondary

education by attending a small local teaching college near her hometown where she received her degree in elementary education (K-6). Ms. Fourth Grade moved from her hometown to North Carolina, obtaining her teaching license for the state two years ago. She taught for a total of four years at Hopeful Elementary and traveled from her hometown for the first two years of her teaching career. Ms. Fourth Grade taught the first two years in first grade and the last two years in fourth grade, which was the grade she preferred because she believed fourth graders were more independent and because she liked the fourth-grade curriculum. She referred to it as “the tough love age.”

Ms. Fourth Grade shared that her desire to join the teaching profession was driven by her love of children, her desire to help children, and her love for teaching itself. She stated, “I like to see the little light bulb come on when they have a concept ...and wanting them to be prepared for the real world.” Ms. Fourth Grade shared that preparing students for the real world required her to have many different roles, ranging from a mother of twenty-five students to a doctor and to a nurse. She was amazed at the numerous roles she played on a daily basis. She explained, “It’s like you literally have split personalities.”

Ms. Fourth Grade’s goal to prepare her students for the real world was fostered by key instructional activities she described as centers, games, and cooperative groups. She believed this approach aligned with her teaching philosophy, which was “going by the book, but doing what works.” Ms. Fourth Grade admitted that she took everything she learned in her teacher education program as well as the professional development into consideration when providing instruction for her students. In essence, she tried to do what books offered; however, she knew what worked for her students. She gauged her student success based upon their class work, assessment and benchmark results from the school data coach, and her trained eye of knowing

when a student has learned a concept. She stated, “It’s like a little light bulb goes off in their head and...this bright look on their face.” Ms. Fourth Grade tried to incorporate activities that would engage the students, while appropriate behaviors were maintained.

The computer-related activities seemed to work the best for her African American males because they were focused on the computer and did not have to interact with other students in the class. Ms. Fourth Grade was concerned that inappropriate behavior would occur during the lessons; thus, cooperative groups were only used for very short periods of time and less frequently than she would like. While this was a concern she had for the entire class, she had a major concern for the learning environment for the two student participants, Usher and Shawn.

Contextual Analysis

When entering Ms. Fourth Grade’s classroom, the placement of student desks indicated which students she identified as having a hard time working with others. In the center of the classroom, there were six sets of student desks in groups of four. There were two desks that sat away from the desk groups; the first single desk was close to the entrance of the door, and the second single desk was positioned near the far side of the classroom close to the windows. To the left, there was a short counter with a sink and a small refrigerator; cabinets were built above and beside this area. Continuing the view from the left there were

- blue cabinets above and beside the counter, that were used to display the general word wall with words such as absolute, inconvenience, monkeys;
- beside the cabinets were vertical rectangular cubbies used to keep students’ coats, book bags and lunch boxes;
- a file cabinet has placed at the end of the cubbies on the connecting wall.

The connecting wall had

- a small table that held a CD player, above the table;
- a picture of North Carolina, surrounded by the state seal, a “tarheel”;

- beside the symbols of North Carolina there was a bulletin board that displayed student work entitled “4th Grade Stars at Work” (student’s graphing plot activity was showcased),
- above the bulletin board were laminated posters that displayed strategies for finding information, which included: Right There - In the book (you can put your finger on the answer), Author and Me – Between the lines (The answer is not directly in the text. You have to think about what you already know and what the author tells you), and On My Own – Beyond the book (The answer is NOT in the text. You have to think about what you know);
- in front of the bulletin board was a U-shaped table which held student work, specifically large posters made by the students of North Carolina that identified the mountains, the piedmont, and the coastal regions of the state;
- beside the U-shaped table was a wood carousel, that held different colored baskets (red, green, yellow and blue),
- the classroom library/reading corner was beyond the carousel which included a bookcase with three shelves of books and posters on the wall for good reading habits entitled “Fix-up Strategies”,
- a bookcase used to store manipulatives was beside the reading corner with connected to the next wall (three shelves held five yellow containers with blue student calculators enclosed, clear containers with place value blocks, rods and cubes, as well as practice math booklets),
- above the manipulative case the title “Math Word Wall” was displayed, this area included identified words and the definition for each, such as Commutative Property, Associative Property, greater than, less than, equal, Property of One, Zero Property, Multiplication Properties;
- posters entitled “Classroom Rules” and “Consequences” were placed on the wall between the Math Word Wall and three large windows revealing the view of a concrete courtyard which included a basketball court,
- directly in front of the windows were three classroom computer and one printer.

This area brought the view back to the front of the classroom near the teacher’s area, which included

- the teacher desk,
- a tall file cabinet,
- a slender book case,
- a blue corner cabinet which held the classroom TV,
- the TV played soft music as well as information for the day, which included, what clubs met for that specific day, birthdays, math problems of the day one for grades K-2 and one for grades 3-5;
- classroom clock with memos and reminders stapled to the wall beneath.

There were two bulletin boards one on each side of the whiteboard in the front of the classroom. Above the first bulletin board and continuing over the white board, there was

- a poster entitled “Order of Operations” (the poster displayed, Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally [P-Paraphrase, E-Exponents, M-Multiplication, D-Division, A-Addition and S-Subtraction]),
- directly above the white board was the alphabet line that displayed cursive letters,
- above the alphabet line were small laminated posters with different types of graphic organizers (the circle map, tree map, bubble map and flow map),
- the white board had written information which included the essential questions for the day (How do I draw conclusions and make generalizations? Can you solve a division problem with a remainder?),
- there was also a designated area (extreme right side) on the white board entitled “Homework” below the heading, the assignments in each subject for the evening were written (Math: textbook page 169, problems 15-37; Reading: Read pages 364-370 “The Great Kapok Tree” and complete Reading Log),
- the second bulletin board was at the end of the white board near the “Homework” area. The bulletin board had the monthly calendar with each day marked through the current date,
- beyond the second bulletin board the wall had been divided in to two parts for the Reading and Science Word Wall (Reading Word Wall displayed white sentence strips with words written by the students that included marveled, fouled, swatted, speechless, rim, cause and effect, jersey and hoop),
- the section of the wall designated for the Science Word Wall did not have any words displayed,
- the overhead projector was positioned so that the information displayed would be in the middle area of the whiteboard in the front of the room next to a rectangular table.

The rectangle table in the front of the room had multiple stacks of paper and teacher editions for math and reading. Ms. Fourth Grade used the rectangular table to work with individual students as well as small groups to assess and re-teach lesson objectives. Seemingly, this area provided the students with Ms. Fourth Grades’ undivided attention, making it very appealing to those who desired more time with her.

Student Participants

Shawn, Fourth-Grade Student Participant. Shawn was a nine-year old African American male who was born in the Great Lake Region of the United States. He had a brother who was fifteen years old, and they both lived with their mother. Shawn enjoyed activities that allowed him to be outside, which included riding his bike. When it came to sports, he liked to play, football, basketball and baseball. Shawn gave the impression that he was a true dare devil.

His favorite pastime was riding his mini-motorcycle, making it reach extremely high speeds. He shared that the next best thing was going to the fair and “riding the big rides that are scary.” Shawn claimed to have many friends in his neighborhood and bragged that he did not have to play alone because he knew everybody and was known by everyone.

While Shawn enjoyed the activities outside, his favorite subject in school was math. He shared, “It’s easy.” He was proud to announce that he received the “highest grade” in his class on the Math End-of-Grade test at the end of the previous school year. His love and enjoyment of math began last year when his teacher allowed them to do projects, specifically the “Gallon Man” project. He shared that understanding the measurements for cups, pints, quarts and gallons was difficult for him until the teacher introduced the gallon man; he stated, “It ain’t that hard no more.” Shawn’s motivation to learn was driven by his fear of being retained in the current grade. He stated, “I don’t wanna be the one that is in fourth grade and they be at laughing at me. I want to be the one in the fifth grade.” Shawn did not want to be “left behind.” Shawn’s perception that his teacher did not do activities that he would like added to his fear that he would not learn everything he needed to know to be promoted to the next grade.

Usher, Fourth-Grade Student Participant. Usher was a nine year old African American male born in the northeast region of the United States. His family moved to the local area when he was five-years old. Usher was one of seven children in his family. He shared that one brother was deceased; one brother still lived with his father in the northeast region of the country. Usher had another brother and two sisters who lived with his mother. He was the youngest of the four children who lived in the local area. Usher’s favorite free time activities included going outside, playing basketball and football, working on the computer, watching television, and playing his Xbox. Usher’s weekend schedule included many of these activities

with the addition of attending church and basketball practice, which was affiliated with his church on Sunday.

Usher had a haircut that was thicker on top than on the side. He was tall and thin, which helped and encouraged him to play basketball. He was one of the tallest students in his classroom and seemed to be one of the quietest. Usher seemed unsure of himself in terms of school. “Usher” was not the original name he chose for his pseudonym. Initially, he selected the name “Crazy.” When questioned if he was sure that was the name he wanted to use, he was adamant “Crazy” was the name he wanted. For two weeks, he used “Crazy” but decided to change the name during an observation follow-up session. He requested to change his pseudonym to “Usher” because he was an usher at his church. During a later conversation, Usher shared that he originally chose the name “Crazy” because that was the name the others called him in class. When asked if the entire class called him that name or just a few students, he stated, “Only one” and that it was Shawn (the first student participant). Since there was a strained relationship between these two young boys, they were not be placed in the same group for a focus group nor were they placed in the same group for instruction or assigned a desk close to each other during class.

Usher was comfortable sharing his thoughts as long as he was the center of attention; he liked being the only one in the interview sessions. As interview sessions and classroom observation follow-up sessions became more frequent, Usher seemed more at ease but still somewhat vague in his responses. When asked the question about what makes you want to learn in school, he responded, “I don’t know.” When asked why he wanted to learn, he answered, “Cause I want to get an education.” Usher shared that he wanted an education so that he could get out of school and take care of himself. He believed that learning math would help him to

take care of himself. Usher also liked the fact that his class did math first in the mornings and then they could finish and get ready for guided reading groups. He liked guided reading time because he did not go to an actual group, but he went to “fast forward.” Usher explained that he went to fast forward to improve his reading. He liked the fast forward sessions with the group of students that had a hard time with reading. During this time, they played games, worked on the computer, and took their time reading the required text. There was no deadline or rush to get finished to answer questions. It seemed that Usher felt he could ask questions during the fast forward sessions without feeling out of place.

Classroom Vignette

The fourth grade class interactions and environment were somewhat similar to the third grade class. Shawn and Usher did not interact very much while in the classroom, but their lack of interaction appeared intentionally arranged by Ms. Fourth Grade who determined it best not to have the young boys positioned near each other. She noted both young males had significant behaviors that needed to be addressed, so she intentionally kept them apart. Ms. Fourth Grade shared that Usher would misbehave because he wanted attention, and it did not matter whether it was good or bad. He just wanted to be noticed. Ms. Fourth Grade described Shawn’s disposition as in your face and disrespectful while Usher’s disposition was more sneaky, undercover, and undetectable. Both required a lot of attention to get through the instructional day. For those reasons, Ms. Fourth Grade did not allow Shawn and Usher to work with one another when students worked in cooperative groups or as partners.

Consequently, their perceptions about what happened in their classroom were very different. During a math lesson, Ms. Fourth Grade reviewed the essential question “How do I balance and solve algebraic expressions?” As she stood in the front of the room at the overhead

projector demonstrating how to complete the sample problem, Shawn got up and took his book bag to his assigned cubby then returned to his seat. After Ms. Fourth Grade verbally instructed the class to complete numbers nine and ten on the overhead, she circulated through the room to check on the progress of each student. Shawn left his seat to sharpen a pencil and returned and yelled to Ms. Fourth Grade, "Can I get a calculator? This is complicated." Although Ms. Fourth Grade was working with another student, she immediately responded, "Are you finished?" to which Shawn replied, "No" and began to count on his fingers since he did not have a calculator. Ms. Fourth Grade returned to the overhead to go over the problems the class completed. She called on different students who shared their answers, and she wrote the steps on the overhead for the class to view and verbally repeated information the students provided when solving the problem. She then had students work with partners to practice the concepts she presented. Before Shawn went to work with his partner, he got his book bag. Ms. Fourth Grade saw him and reminded him that the book bag needed to be put away. Shawn put the bag back but not before getting his pencil box. When he returned to his seat, he proceeded to inspect the pencils and erasers. Ms. Fourth Grade saw Shawn and instructed him to find his partner. Shawn remained at his desk seeking the pencil and eraser he wanted to use. Ms. Fourth Grade stopped again and stared at Shaw, not saying a word. Shawn looked up at her and smiled, and Ms. Fourth Grade responded, "It's not funny. Go find your partner!" Shawn finally moved to the front of the room where his partner was seated and started the assigned work.

As Shawn and his partner worked, they needed assistance with the assigned task. They raised their hands to get Ms. Fourth Grade's attention; however, they were unsuccessful. Shawn went over to the area where Ms. Fourth Grade was working with another group, stood beside her, and inquired, "Can you help?" Ms. Fourth Grade responded, "I can as soon as you raise your

hand.” Shawn returned to his partner area and raised his hand again. Moments later, Ms. Fourth Grade announced time was up and instructed the students to return to their seats. Shawn was not happy and shouted, “Ah, man! I keep asking for help and you won’t come!”

Shawn displayed similar behaviors until it was time for guided reading groups. Ms. Fourth Grade instructed students to put their things away, move their desk to the guided reading position (turn the desk around with the opening of the desk facing inward so that no one could or would be tempted to take anything out of the desk), and take something with which to write to the next class. Shawn got his pencil box and looked for the pencils he wanted to take. Ms. Fourth Grade saw Shawn and told him that he only needed one pencil. Shawn tried to explain and stated, “What if it breaks?” Ms. Fourth Grade told him to take one and only one pencil so that he would not get in trouble to which Shawn replied, “Ok, but if it breaks and I can’t do my work, it’s on you, so when I get in trouble I will tell them you said not to take but one.” Ms. Fourth Grade told Shawn that he would be fine, and he only needed one pencil. Shawn got in line behind Usher. He tapped Usher on the back of the head and asked, “Do you only have one pencil?” Shawn tried to get Usher’s attention, but he was unsuccessful. Ms. Fourth Grade saw him and immediately told him to move to the back of the line. Usher stood in line and waited to leave the room for guided reading.

Although Usher seemed attentive during teacher directed instruction, he seemed to have difficulty with the lessons. He appeared to work on the assignments given by Ms. Fourth Grade but never raised his hand to respond to a question or to have his work checked. Usher would erase a lot of his work and look frantically between the information written on the overhead and his work in the notebook. At times, he tried to write everything that Ms. Fourth Grade put on the board. He was one of the students that Ms. Fourth Grade would call to work with her at the

rectangular table, and he appeared to like this type of one-on-one assistance so much that he would grow frustrated when Ms. Fourth Grade assisted someone else. Ms. Fourth Grade shared that Usher regularly sought attention and tried to be a pleaser when he got the attention he wanted. She explained that Usher did not get along with many people in the classroom because he did not want others to get the attention he desired. When he felt that the attention was not on him, his behavior seemingly deteriorated, and he became easily influenced by others who were misbehaving.

Analysis

Usher and Shawn displayed behaviors that Ms. Fourth Grade deemed inappropriate. Based on the information and discussion with these students, they sought attention from their teacher to obtain the assistance they needed to perform well in her class. In many instances, their behaviors were “cries for help.” Usher’s cry was silent, withdrawn, and seemed to hide the fact that he did not understand some of the activities. He only asked questions and indicated a lack of understanding only when he was able to work with Ms. Fourth Grade in a one-on-one setting. Contrariwise, Shawn displayed no hesitation to let Ms. Fourth Grade know his needs. He was explicit with his thoughts and needs and often made it known that his teacher did not recognize what he needed. Ms. Fourth Grade indicated that she dealt with Shawn’s dispositions as “the boy that cried wolf.” She seemed to believe that Shawn could do the work, but his disruptive behavior was his main barrier; therefore, his needs were overlooked when he really needed assistance. Usher’s quiet demeanor did not bring attention to his needs as immediately as Shawn because his approach was less aggressive. When he needed assistance, he seemed to go unnoticed and received minimal assistance until Ms. Fourth Grade was able to spend time with him one-on-one.

Chapter 5

Themes in the Data

Introduction

Throughout the study, student and teacher participants were very forthcoming with their thoughts and perceptions. The researcher studied participants in the school environment for all interviews, observations, and informal conversations. During the interviews, each participant reflected on experiences that brought happiness as well as those that resulted in disappointment. Four overarching themes emerged during data analysis, and the researcher “named” each based upon significant commonalities from the participants’ experiences and perceptions. The themes are as follows: (a) *teacher and student perceptions of their learning experiences*, (b) *teacher practices*, (c) *teacher needs superseded those of students*, and (d) *misaligned perceptions and interpretations*. Sub-themes were identified within each theme for both teacher and student participants.

Subthemes that support the first overarching theme, *teacher and student perceptions of their learning experience*, related to (a) “treat everyone the same” for the teacher participants and (b) the desire for relationships with their teachers from the student participants. Subthemes in the second theme, *teacher practices*, were (a) teachers have a mechanized approach and (b) a mismatch between students’ stated interests and classroom opportunities for learning. The subthemes for *teacher needs superseded those of the students* were (a) teacher needs, and (b) student needs. The subthemes for *misaligned perceptions and interpretations* focused on a combination of teacher and student participants’ experiences: (a) teacher statements versus instructional statements, (b) teacher need to control student behavior versus student need for active engagement, (c) teacher need for authority versus student need for relationship with the

teacher, (d) teacher practice of “sameness” versus student need for challenge or extra help/more time, and (e) African American males have needs related to gender and culture versus teachers “treating them all the same.”

Within this chapter, findings from participant interviews and observation field notes are used to support each theme. Each subtopic will address the perceptions and experiences of the teacher participants followed by related information shared by the student participants. At the end of each theme, a summary will be provided that articulates the significant points.

Theme One: Teacher and Student Perceptions of their Learning Experiences

Treat everyone the same. The teacher participants described how they decided what instructional practices to implement in their classrooms and how they matched their students’ learning preferences to their teaching preferences. Ms. Lucy shared:

I like to give them the opportunity to have different ways to learn. So, uhm...we do partner work. Sometimes we do group work and center work and we also do independent work, so that they can show me that they’ve actually, you know – achieved in learning that concept. So, I like to give them different ways to move around or you know – uhm – different ways of learning. We do you know ... some visual examples on the board and overhead.

All activities in Ms. Lucy’s classroom were the same for all learners. The white board in the second-grade classroom was covered with information. The left side of the board displayed weekly spelling words, homework assignments, and essential questions for each subject area. The right side of the board was used to write examples to model the steps students should take when working on their assignments. During the week of Halloween, the class studied pumpkins through various activities. One writing activity involved the elements of writing a story and the

organization of thoughts. Ms. Lucy displayed a medium-sized pumpkin on a small desk near the back door of the classroom. There was picture of a pumpkin on the right side of the whiteboard. Ms. Lucy also drew on the board an outline of a pumpkin with horizontal lines inside as an illustration of the pumpkin-shaped paper the students used to write about the pumpkins. Beside the pumpkin, a bubble map (large circle drawn in the middle with the word “pumpkin,” then around the large circle, individual lines were drawn connecting smaller circles with describing words) was drawn to display words students had discussed as characteristics of pumpkins (i.e. orange, bumpy, big/small and clean). Above the bubble map was a tree map which included information on how pumpkins looked, smelled, felt, and tasted. Students used this information to form their individual stories about pumpkins. Based on the multiple forms of information presented to the students for the pumpkin activity (i.e. visual, auditory and tactile), Ms. Lucy indicated that her strategies were meant to address the various learning needs of the students. However, in reality, all of these stimuli were the backdrop for assuring that all students would do the same assignment in about the same way.

Ms. Lucy’s classroom practices provided active learning for her students. She stated:

Yeah, I try to mesh them together and try to make it cohesive so it will work out best for them you know, just to give them all opportunities to learn or do the best that they can.

I’m just not teaching one, I am trying to you know ... reach everybody in the classroom.

It's basically on what they need and what they learn best doing and each class every year is different. You know ... some are better with just maybe partner work and independent work and you know, depending on the group or the maturity level of your group, they can handle you know ... centers or different types of activities or games and stuff.

Ms. Lucy spoke of providing her students with multiple opportunities to meet their learning needs; she stated that she did not base instruction on the majority. She said she attempted to address the needs of the students as individuals.

Ms. Chanel discussed what she used that easily motivated and engaged the students in her classroom. “I use a lot of cooperative learning pieces where they work with it in groups; also a lot of manipulatives, hands-on things that they seem to enjoy and a lot of one-on-one with the teacher.” During the time in Ms. Chanel’s classroom, the researcher witnessed only one instance when this teacher worked one-on-one with a student for an extended amount of time beyond the normal circulation in the classroom to monitor student progress. This one instance was during the quarterly benchmark assessments.

Ms. Chanel used her personal learning preference to guide her teaching style. Ms. Chanel stated:

I am very hands on, so anything that I do, I normally try to find something they can use their hands with, [and] so I love manipulatives. So anything that...can catch their attention where they can play with something or have something manipulating their hands is what I try to focus on.

Ms. Chanel seemed to feel that the hands on approach would meet the learning needs of the majority of her students. During an interview session, she revealed:

I mean, I treat them [African American male students] the same way I treat the rest of them [remaining students] in here. I do know there are a lot of times that I do like them moving more than the rest of the kids, but I think I treat them the same. Things are the same.

Ms. Chanel's approach to treating the students all the same led to a "one size fits all" model. The "one size fits all" approach meant that all of the students had to conform to a classroom that was very structured; most students remained in their seats, raised their hand, and did not move until Ms. Chanel recognized them. Ms. Chanel gave assignments once she completed examples that were in her presentation of information. Although Ms. Chanel discussed in interviews the use of peer helpers, cooperative groups and hands-on activities, students mainly worked alone, only using pencil and paper as the needed materials. While observing in the classroom, there was a student who seemed to prefer the assistance of a peer helper (the students were not sharing answers but seemed to be discussing how to do the problem). As soon as the students began to assist each other, Ms. Chanel quickly reprimanded them for talking, and they had to move their markers down on the behavior chart. If students deviated from the preset instructional plan, Ms. Chanel quickly redirected them. There were no observations of hands-on experiences with manipulatives and the participating student did not specifically mention having hands-on experiences in this classroom.

In interviews, Ms. Fourth Grade indicated that she used trial and error to identify teaching methods that met the needs of her students. Ms. Fourth Grade stated:

Um, I'm willing to try anything. ...the first couple of weeks are for me, trial and error. I learn them. I learn what works for them and what doesn't work for them. Um, so, you know, the first couple of weeks we try various ways, independent, we try me the whole time, we try groups, and then I found, "Okay, they can't really handle this. So let's try this." And it's really based on what works for the overall class. Of course, it's not going to work for everyone, but what seems to work best for the majority.

Discussing her current student group, Ms. Fourth Grade continued:

Um, because this... the class is not a class that works well independently. Um, when I break them into groups, that's when we have fights. We have the arguing. We have all kinds of issues. So I try not to do a lot of individual or group practices. Because [they] just simply are a group right now that needs me and wants to have my attention. And I have to be the 'right there' type teacher right now.

Ms. Fourth Grade's assessment of her class and their learning preference seemed to be more about keeping order and/or control of how the students' behaved.

The scheduled fourth-grade classroom observations were similar with regard to instructional presentation. The students were seated at their assigned desks, most in groups of four to five in number with either Shawn or Usher sitting alone. Ms. Fourth Grade started each lesson in the front of the classroom, standing at the overhead projector for the instructional presentation. Ms. Fourth Grade posed questions, and students raised their hands to respond. Ms. Fourth Grade recorded their responses on the overhead for everyone to take notes. Ms. Fourth Grade would assign three to four problems or questions for the students to complete. As the students worked, she would circulate through the room to check on student progress and understanding. During these observations, Ms. Fourth Grade was the mobile person throughout the room. At times, students requested permission to sharpen pencils, take a bathroom break, or retrieve an item from their cubby area; however, the teacher controlled all movement within the classroom. The researcher observed students working in cooperative groups or pairs in only one lesson. Ms. Fourth Grade allowed students to work with their assigned partners for approximately ten minutes, and then she instructed them to return to their seats to report their answers. Ms. Fourth Grade recorded their responses on the overhead, bringing the class back to the initial structure for instruction.

Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade also discussed school experiences for their students. They both shared that African American male students had a hard time changing past behavioral opinions within the school environment. The reputations of the students played a major role in how the students were treated. Student reputations or what the teacher participants called their ‘rep’ hindered the African American males from changing any perceptions others had of them within the school environment. Some African American male students were known for acting out in class or had been seen in the office a lot and had developed a bad “rep” in the school. Even if they attempted to change or to do better, their past behaviors were likely to be brought up, setting up an expectation for students to keep their behaviors consistent with their “reps.”

Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade discussed how they attempted to give their students a fresh start to leave the past in the past, allowing their students to feel respected and valued, and ultimately giving them someone to trust. Ms. Chanel shared:

Now in my class yes [they feel respected and valued]. But when I taught fourth grade I would say no. I think a lot of our African American males, because they’re like titled already when they come in [to the school], so their background follows them from grade to grade, ...when they come in my room I always start the first day by saying, when we’re in my room, we’re family. Whatever happened in the past is the past; we’re starting all over from clean slate.... I can say that a lot of kids say nobody likes a lot of the African American boys. They don’t like me or you don’t like me... So I think a lot of times whatever they [African American males] were known from in the past years has carried on and then the teachers put the bug in the other teachers’ ears too, so it’s kind of like when the child walks in the class, you already know that this child is gonna be bad.

Ms. Chanel provided detailed examples about what would typically happen. She continued:

He's gonna do this, he's gonna do that, but then it just depends on the teacher and the teacher's style. I noticed that with me, I am very structured, so kids that have problems with other teachers, they need structure, they need to know what they're doing every hour on the hour. A lot of parents like me, because of the fact it's structured, where you go in some rooms and it's open ...I mean, that's fine if that's what the teacher wants to do, but I can't take it. So a lot of the African American males that have problems with other teachers seem to do better in here, because it's more structured.

Ms. Fourth Grade also expressed that these young African American boys may not feel respected and valued at school. She conveyed:

...because of behavior...I would have to say, no. Only because... a lot of times especially here at Hopeful, there are so many African American men that stay in trouble. It's hard to say that they're really valued [or] respected...simply because they tend to cause more trouble. So instead of teachers giving African American men the chance...from year to year to start over, it's pretty much their rep is carried over every year and it's noticeable. Even the teachers that say that they don't do it, it's noticeable that they do.

The teacher participants based the academic performance of their students on their perceptions of engagement and disconnect. The teachers viewed academic performance in terms of behaviors and saw these behaviors as contributing to the level of engagement or disconnect during classroom lessons. Ms. Fourth Grade had a different take on the level of engagement for the students in her classroom. When discussing Shawn and Usher, Ms. Fourth Grade shared:

I think academically, they would both be a lot stronger. Shawn is taken away from the classroom, due to being in the office the majority of the day, for either suspension or

being moved to another room because of behavior and just not turning work in. I feel that he could be a lot further than he is, but because he's out of the room so much, his grades were affected tremendously.

Shawn's removal from the classroom environment lessened his opportunities for engagement, compelling him to disconnect from the classroom activities. Ms. Fourth Grade also discussed Usher's lack academic success. She stated:

I feel like Usher, yes and no, I feel like some of his is due to behavior and some is due to just laziness. If you don't stay on him, he kind of drags his feet on doing things. You have keep the pressure on Usher.

During the time the researcher observed the fourth-grade classroom, Shawn and Usher were both removed at times. The researcher conducted Shawn's initial interview in the principal's office. When the researcher returned from observing in a different classroom, Ms. Fourth Grade shared that Shawn had been sent to the office, and his interview could be conducted there if Shawn would cooperate. When the researcher visited the principal's office, Shawn was waiting to speak with the assistant principal while two other African American male students waited their turn to speak with the assistant principal as well. After gaining permission to speak with Shawn from the school administration, Shawn was more than willing to speak with the researcher. The researcher informed him that he would have to go back and speak with the assistant principal after the interview concluded.

The second fourth-grade classroom observation was postponed. Ms. Fourth Grade informed the researcher that neither of the boys were in the classroom, and she asked to speak in the hallway, away from the other students. Ms. Fourth Grade explained that Shawn and Usher would probably not return to the class until much later, but their return to the classroom the next

day was contingent upon what happened with them for the remainder of that day. When asked why the boys were not in class, Ms. Fourth Grade was vague in her response, simply stating, “They were just having some problems.” Both Shawn and Usher returned to the classroom and the observation took place the next day. During the follow up interviews for the observation, Shawn and Usher learned that the researcher visited the school the day before to see them, but they were not in class. When asked what happened, Usher stated, “Are you sure I wasn’t there? I don’t know.” Shawn stated, “Oh, I had a stomach ache.” Neither discussed their removal from the room.

Desired relationship with their teachers. Students’ level of engagement and commitment to learning was based upon the relationship they had with their teachers. When students feel they have developed a caring, nurturing, and non-threatening relationship with their teachers, they are more likely to have a much higher rate of social and academic success (Mooney & Thornton, 1999; Reeves, 2006). The student participants based their perceptions of how much their teachers cared, respected, valued, and trusted them on ways teachers were or were not supportive or recognized and understood their needs. If student participants’ perceived their relationship with their teachers to be positive in nature, then they had the perception that their needs were met (see Table 1).

Table 1
Common Needs of Student Participants

| Student Participant | Identified Needs |
|----------------------------|--|
| Blade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Desire teacher’s attention ● Desire teacher’s approval and praise ● Work with and help fellow classmates |
| Lance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Challenging work and activities (meaningful and accelerated) ● To be needed (peer helper, classroom guide/escort) ● Desire teacher’s approval and praise ● Work with and help fellow classmates |
| Robot | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Challenging work and activities (meaningful and accelerated) ● Learn for future success |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay in top learning groups (not lumped or booked down) • Desire teacher’s approval and praise |
| James | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior marker at the top level (best behavior noticed) • Desire teacher’s approval and praise |
| Max | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items to help him manipulate or use his hands or body to work • Desire teacher’s attention |
| Shawn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition • Desire teacher’s attention • Feel important (his academic and social needs) • Knowledge early to move to the next grade • Work with others/hands-on (projects, etc.) |
| Usher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition • Desire teacher’s attention • Feel important (teacher to know and address social and academic needs) • One-on-one time with teacher |

As illustrated in Table 1, student participants identified a number of common needs, including the need to get their teachers’ attention and their approval. These needs emphasize the importance of relationships from the perspective of the student participants.

Max and James trusted their teacher and felt respected and valued by their teacher’s commitment to help them and her reactions to their needs. To the question, “Do you think your teacher knows what things you like to do and what helps you learn?” Max simply stated, “Yes, cause I be telling her.” James shared, “I ask her everything that I want to do.” Max claimed he felt trusted, respected, and valued by his teacher. According to Max, his teacher had a major influence on him and he felt his teacher cared for him. Max stated, “When I grow up and I be a teacher, I’m be nice.” Max felt important, and he felt cared about as he concluded, “Everybody knows my name.” Even though he got in trouble sometimes with his teacher, he still felt she cared about him and was aware of what he needed. Unfortunately, Max’s experiences were in the minority.

Most student participants held the perception that their teachers were unaware and not caring. Blade lacked the feeling of being important and cared about. He stated, "...Um, not much. The only time I do is um, like if it's somebody's birthday or if it's my birthday I feel special because and I feel special for that person whose birthday it is." While Blade felt he was cared for only when it was a special day, this was not the case at all for Shawn. Shawn stated, "...she [Ms. Fourth Grade] never ask me what I like to do..." Shawn indicated that sometimes it was difficult for him to know what his teacher expected so that he could get the support he needed. Shawn described an experience that he perceived as unfair, "[If] somebody get up and do something, right? Then once they do, then I get up and do something, right? He don't ask either, but when I, I get in trouble though, but they don't." Shawn did not feel respected or valued by his teacher and lacked trust that she would do what was best for him. Shawn stated that different situations confused him. He said:

Because ... it's like ... if I'm about to get hit or something, she be like just walk over here and don't even bother with them. She try to get me out of trouble and stuff and [to just] walk around it.

Shawn was unable to comprehend why his teacher would reprimand him alone for actions he committed but would not reprimand a fellow classmate who displayed the same actions. At other times before Shawn would get in trouble, his teacher would be supportive, helping him to make the decision that would keep him out of trouble. Shawn was unclear as to what behaviors would get him in trouble with his teacher and what behaviors would garner her support. Similarly, Usher felt that the teacher did not know how he felt or what was happening to him in the classroom. Usher shared:

I do feel important, but not that much. Sometimes I'm not happy. The kids in my classroom talk about me [and] bother me. ... I just hear people talk, saying my name and like saying stuff about me.

Usher wanted a relationship with his teacher so that she would know what he needed, how he felt and how she could help him. He desired a clear indication that his teacher cared about him.

Theme One Summary

The presentation and implementation of learning activities within the classroom settings were generic. Based upon discussion with the teacher participants, they described using a variety of methods; however, these methods were not used. The student participants had to conform to the method of choice for the teacher's lesson delivery, in essence treating them all the same.

Student perceptions about caring and the development of relationships with teachers were powerful. The student participants felt valued if their opinions were heard, especially if their ideas influenced the teachers' learning plan for them. If the teachers listened to them, then they felt they cared about them and their academic success.

Theme Two: Teacher Practices

There were multiple discussions with teacher participants that revealed pedagogical techniques implemented throughout their teaching careers. Specifically, they discussed their pedagogy in regards to their African American male students. While the teacher participants reported using similar techniques or methods to engage the student participants as well as their fellow classmates, their explanations as to 'why' these techniques were used varied.

Observations indicated the actions were mechanized in instructional delivery as well as anticipated outcomes. Student participants discussed how the techniques and methods presented by their teachers impacted their learning.

Teachers had a mechanized approach. In keeping with daily classroom routines, each teacher had a routine for instructional presentations. While routines help elementary-aged student adjust to different schedules, these routines do not have to be incorporated into every learning activity. The teacher participants used repetitive instructional practices on a daily basis; it was rare, if at all that the instructional activities/methods varied.

Ms. Lucy and pedagogy. Ms. Lucy supported that her pedagogical choices were based on her teacher education training, professional development presented at Hopeful Elementary, and the faculty book club discussions. Regarding African American males Ms. Lucy shared:

...key things I remember about teaching males specifically...they work better in bright lights. We've all heard [they] need more space so I try to give them a little more space you know, or know that they move around more than girls, you know, and stretch out more than girls, so I try to give them a little more freedom with that... We learned that boys, uh, learn better if they have a few breaks in between subjects. So sometimes whether it's just a walk or two back and forth to get a quick sip of water or a stretch break...we might do twenty jumping jacks...between each subject. So, um, so [I] try to do that and sometimes it might just be a fresh air break where we walked around the sidewalk for a few minutes and back in.

She also shared general instructional details:

Okay, um, let's see, I do a lot of centers...during math and also during reading instruction and phonics. The kids seem to learn really well that way; working in small groups with other kids. Um, we do a lot of shoulder partners, also, so that they have a peer to help them out with assignments. Especially if it's a new objective in whatever subject we're working on. Um, so we don't always start out with independent practice at this age.

They have someone that they can, um, help and, you know, also ask questions. So we use, that a lot and then also once they become independent on an objective, and then I let them work...a little more alone. We do a lot of just kind of mixed practice with centers, shoulder partners, um; sometimes we do a whole group activity where they might work together as a class or a team also.

The mixture of instructional methods that Ms. Lucy incorporated were keeping with her description of pedagogical practices introduced to her during her teacher training and continued professional development. For example, Ms. Lucy shared information that she learned from *The Mind of Boys* book study conducted at Hopeful. She incorporated several suggested strategies such as providing more space for the students to move around, using brighter lights, taking breaks between subjects, and taking stretch breaks. The classroom arrangement provided open areas (without objects) for students to work in their groups during center time as well as their choice of several different locations to read with their shoulder partner. Ms. Lucy also allowed the students to take a stretch break. After students were directed to return to their seats when center time was over, they put their math notebooks in their desk. When everyone was settled, Ms. Lucy had them stand behind their desks to stretch and shake it out (students stretched their arms, legs, bent over to touch their toes and then shook the arms, hands, legs). As soon as the stretch break was over, the students followed Ms. Lucy's instructions by returning to their seats, opening their books to the selected page number, and waiting for her to begin the lesson.

Ms. Lucy's approach to meeting learning needs was coupled with how her students reacted to a given lesson or activity. She did not seem hesitant to try different instructional methods to address the learning preferences of her students. Ms. Lucy seemed flexible in her lesson presentation and made adjustments as warranted.

Ms. Lucy took a facilitator's role to observe how the planned learning activities affected the behaviors of her students. She described her method:

Well, I try to watch how the students react when we do an activity, whether it's a math game or you know – it's a center or its partner work...I try to watch how they react to each other, how they actually follow the rules or the directions to see if it is, you know – a good activity for them to learn. If they like learning with the manipulatives more, if they like working independently more, so I try to arrange the lessons based on that.

Ms. Lucy's comments supported her belief that when learning needs are met, behavioral needs are addressed. When students' learning opportunities are developed based on their needs, their behavioral needs are less noticeable and pertinent during lessons.

Ms. Chanel and pedagogy. Ms. Chanel described her pedagogical practices as being driven by hands-on learning preferences. She stated:

...definitely group, group things, um, peer, peer observations or peer talking to each other, a lot of hands-on, giving them opportunities to be up and moving around the classroom, anything to keep them active because we know that they have a lot of energy. So anything that will let them get their energy out.

Ms. Chanel gave examples of specific practices for reading and math. She explained:

For reading, I use terms which help the kids with their reading comprehension, um, outlining, how to look at the questions and find the details, and go back to the story and prove the answers. For math, I use a lot of problem solving strategies. I'm very visual and have to touch things, so I always give them hands on things as well. A lot of problem solving strategies is what I use for math.

Ms. Chanel taught one lesson in which her stated pedagogy matched her actual teaching practices, during the timeframe of this study. A lesson on the skeleton required students to read a passage that covered facts about the skeletal system. Ms. Chanel reviewed the directions that were on the worksheet, reminding students to answer the questions based upon the information they read and to look back at the story if they needed assistance to complete the short answer questions. When students completed the worksheet, their next worksheet addressed the identification of bones. Ms. Chanel provided students a sheet that had the names of the bones which the students cut out. They then matched the words to the locations of the bone on the skeletal worksheet. During this lesson, Ms. Chanel reviewed reading comprehension strategies to assist the students with the assigned work.

It was continually notable that Ms. Chanel had a very structured classroom. During most of the observations, she circulated throughout the room to monitor students' progress. Ms. Chanel reminded the students in the classroom not to leave their seats and to raise their hands if they needed assistance. Most students did not leave their seats and raised their hands. Max was unique in that he would sometimes do the opposite of the directions given and would have to move his behavior marker down (Ms. Chanel had students lower their markers as a result of what she considered to be inappropriate behaviors). One day, Max had such a hard time following the rules, when instructed to move his marker down, it could not be placed any lower. Max was then sent to the office to spend time with the assistant principal.

Ms. Fourth Grade and pedagogy. Ms. Fourth Grade said that her practices addressed her students' interests, such as their interest in playing games. Her discussion revealed:

...honestly anything computer related; they love, so if it's a game online, that [addresses a] concept or, um, a reading program, that's right up their alley... Play a lot of games,

like if it is math, I try to do a math game, like today we did, um, showdown. They love that...I put a problem on the board, they turn it over, then when I say “showdown” they holler out the answer.

Ms. Fourth Grade shared that she believed the use of technology and games provided a greater level of engagement based upon student reactions. From the field notes from classroom observations, there was only one instance in which the “showdown” game was played. When the researcher came to the room, the game was concluding; therefore, the researcher did not document details regarding the success of the game and student actions. For the majority of observations, Ms. Fourth Grade conducted lessons from the front of the room, standing at the overhead projector while the students were seated in their desks completing paper and pencil assignments.

Each of the teachers discussed approaches to instruction that they routinely practiced. The three common approaches can best be summarized in the following way: (1) *If I try them all, something has to work*; (2) *It is how I learn, so it must work for them*; (3) *They cannot handle it so I must control it*. Throughout the investigation, teachers implemented a variety of instructional approaches that they appeared to test to see what worked and what did not work. Ms. Lucy relied on math centers with various activities in each one. Based on this variety, she believed the needs of all of the students were met. Her statements supported this belief as she discussed “meshing them together... so it will work out best to give them all opportunities to learn or do the best they can” and “watching how [students] react” to the lesson. Ms. Fourth Grade also said she used a variety of strategies at the beginning of the year until she determined what worked best for the majority of the class. In many ways, teacher participants appeared to

use a trial-and-error method of teaching, experimenting with different instructional approaches until something worked with the students.

After several conversations with the teacher participants, the second approach of *It is how I learn, so it must work for them* emerged as a common practice among the educators. During several discussions, Ms. Chanel indicated that she was a tactile learner; therefore, she felt that approach would be the best way to teach her students. Ms. Lucy discussed how her family upbringing and school experiences that focused on the socialization (helping others and working together) as the foundation for her use of cooperative groups and shoulder partners. During a math lesson, students were assigned to practice writing their numbers to six hundred. There were students having difficulty, Ms. Lucy assigned student partners to monitor the work of the students having difficulty as they completed their own assignments. The students providing help were directed to stand/sit beside the students (shoulder partner) providing assistance only if their partner could not figure out the next number to write in the sequence.

The last instructional approach that emerged was *They cannot handle it so I must control it*. Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade specifically discussed having structured classrooms to help their students learn and be successful. Ms. Chanel shared her idea of “training” the students rather than teaching them, invoking images of a drill sergeant controlling an environment and all movement and actions within it to produce desired results and outcomes. Ms. Chanel frequently reminded students of the common rules during classroom activities, to remain in their seats, raise their hand for assistance and only proceed with a different rule, if they were given permission. Ms. Fourth Grade did not believe students in her class could handle the responsibility of working together; therefore, she implemented lessons and rules where she controlled the interactions of the students. There were few instances that students were allowed to work together, Ms. Fourth

Grade shared her method to strategically assign student partners/groups (assigning students that more than likely would get along and who differed based on their academic levels) or she had them to remain at their desk and work independently.

These instructional approaches and decisions worked for the participating teachers. In many ways, they did what came naturally to them and what was of comfort to them. However, these instructional approaches did not align well with the perceived needs identified by the students. On several occasions, students articulated their preferences and what they believed would help them learn more effectively, but their teachers did not necessarily respond to these needs.

Mismatch between students' stated interest and classroom opportunities for learning. When asked about their interest, the student participants shared numerous game systems and electronic media they enjoyed viewing or playing. Usher stated, "Some of my very favorite things to do are...get on the computer, watch TV and play my Xbox." Max shared, "play my DS, my Wii, my Xbox 360, then watch TV, then sometimes play with my dog." Robot shared, "After school I do my homework and then usually I play my DS. Let's see – Bakugan, Track Mania, Touch Mechanic and Tetris DS." Some student participants also discussed that they liked reading books such as "Arthur" and "Diary of a Wimpy Kid."

Additionally, the young men expressed their affinity for physical activity. Shawn shared, "I play basketball, football, ah tag, and baseball. Ah...I ride my bike and I ride a mini motorcycle." Lance stated, "We usually go outside and go to the courts, with a friend. We play hide-n-go-seek...I hide in the backyard." Usher shared, "On Sunday, I go to basketball practice...Um, it's for my church, I play for my church." James defined why sports and physical

activities were important. He stated, “It helps us get stronger, the PE teacher helps us get stronger.” Classroom activities did not touch on the interest of students outside of class.

Student perceptions of classroom activities reflected both positive and negative experiences. Based upon conversations and information shared by these student participants, they were more engaged in classroom activities when they had the opportunity to explore and make connections with hands-on lessons and projects. Student participants shared their learning experiences, and many preferred the subject of math over any other. Student participants in the second-grade classroom were particularly fond of math, especially during their math center time.

Robot described the following experience in the addition center, “like in the math class, we do addition... my teacher makes sure that I’m doing it correctly... not throwing the dice up in the air and just rolling it in front of me.” Blade spoke about his experiences during math centers and how he engaged in the activities. Blade revealed:

[Ms. Lucy] puts out things that we like to play with. Because it’s ... like phonics or math centers um, supposed to learn, because she knows that it helps us learn different math problems and other things about measuring and counting to one hundred and farther.

Lance stated, “The thing that I like [about] centers is you get a lot of minutes and you get and learn how to do things. You get to learn how to measure and do all that.” Lance’s reference to learning about measurement was based upon a new center introduced during a classroom observation. Ms. Lucy prepared the class for math centers, selecting students to place all of the materials out in the designated areas throughout the room as well as having students get their math notebooks out to use. Ms. Lucy reminded students that they had a new center where they would practice measuring different items with their rulers. The first group that was called to

work in the new center got started quickly. During each groups' time in the center, the students got started on the task quickly and worked diligently during the time provided. When the timer sounded, the students did not want to leave the center. Ms. Lucy reminded them that everyone needed a chance to work in the center and that this center would be available for them the next day.

The second-grade participants discussed common activities during their math centers and discussed how the centers kept them actively engaged. The second-grade participants had hands-on experiences in math centers each day. Mostly, they enjoyed this work and viewed it as play.

The third and fourth-grade student participants had different accounts.

Usher described:

I don't like doing work at school. It's like math; it's like a whole bunch of questions that we do in math. Like Ms. Fourth Grade would be like teaching us stuff, then like when we'd like get the problem and then she'll help us, I'd be struggling on it and then when I get [the] answer, it's wrong and then I'm going to have to do it over again.

Usher struggled when he had to do things that were hard for him or that he had to do repeatedly. He seemed to realize that avoiding lessons that were harder for him was not a good thing. He knew what had to happen to make difficult lessons easier, ultimately engaging in the activities and mastering the objectives. He stated, "Pay attention to the stuff that she be doing on the board and not playing."

Throughout most of the observations of math lessons, Usher rarely raised his hand to answer a question. He kept his head down, only looking up to see what Ms. Fourth Grade had written on the overhead. He copied everything, and he erased what he had written a lot during these activities. As the teacher went over the answers, she wrote the information on the board.

Evidently, Usher's answers rarely matched what the teacher had written, so he had to quickly correct his answer. Usher paid attention and followed along as the teacher provided instructions; however, it seemed that more of his answers were incorrect than correct. Usher went through the motions to get through the math lessons in such a way as to not bring any attention to himself.

The fourth graders compared their current experiences with those from third grade. Usher and Shawn both discussed projects and different activities they enjoyed when they were in the third grade. Shawn spoke of his teacher and a project that helped him make a visual model when trying to identify capacity and the measurement system for volume. Usher described making up sentences to help him remember information. Both young men shared the activities that helped them learn in third grade and how these lessons made an impression because they were actively involved.

Shawn was the only participant who seemed really concerned about not learning. He shared:

...they say when you get to the fifth grade the EOG is going [to] have fourth grade stuff on it and sometime the teacher don't teach you that and at the end of the year, there is not enough time that's why I don't want to wait to the end of the year. I want to learn [it] a lot earlier.

Shawn seemed determined that he needed to learn everything that he could to move to the fifth grade. He was frustrated that his teacher was not providing the support he expected. Frustrated, Shawn described several incidents:

Well, one time I raised my hand; I was holding it up for a long time and she was writing something down. I needed help; she never came to me and I [was] just waiting.
I was like, this is really hard.

Shawn also stated:

Oh, sometimes if I don't like it and the teacher moves me and she writes on the board and I don't know it and I say, 'like, can you explain this to me?' She likes tries to explain it and I still don't know. Then she go through it another way. Then I say, 'can you go through it one more time?' and she explains it another way. But, I still don't understand it. She is like, 'well just try.'

Shawn wanted the attention and help from his teacher that would allow him to work and learn all the things he feared would keep him from being successful in the next grade. Shawn was not the only participant who expressed the need for greater amounts of teacher help. For instance, Robot stated, "... I would want her to do things for me. I want her to do things [so] she can help me."

Theme Two Summary

There was no evidence that supported the teachers' cognition about the students' interests and activities outside of school, nor did they involve the students in learning activities related to their preferred interests and activities. This did not bother the students; in fact, student comments reflected their belief that school was not supposed to related to life away from school. The students expected school to be a place where they followed teacher directives to learn discrete skills and information that would be needed as they moved into the next grade. Observations in the classroom also revealed that the teachers had created routinized procedures which met their needs for controlling student behaviors and covering the curriculum content. Teacher interview statements about meeting the students' needs were not frequently evidenced in day-to-day classroom life.

Theme Three: Teacher Needs Superseded those of the Students

Most teachers enter the profession because they want to make a difference in a child's life. More than likely, they have had a life-changing experience during their educational journey as a result of a teacher's willingness to go the extra mile that made a difference in their life. Throughout all of the discussions, the teacher participants demonstrated that they felt genuinely passionate about teaching their students to be prepared for future life experiences. Teachers developed and presented lessons and activities to provide students with information and tools that would enhance their skills and build knowledge. In this study, the teachers tended to develop lessons in their personal pedagogical comfort zones.

Teacher needs. Based on the discussions with the teacher participants, there seemed to be a comfort zone for each teacher that was drawn from the multiple layers of what and how they communicated, taught and assessed their students. Ms. Lucy stated that she used her background in social work to meet her students' needs. She said she wanted her lessons to connect students to their everyday life experiences. Ms. Chanel needed absolute control and structure. Students conformed their learning to her form of teaching. There did not seem to be much of a 'grey area' for any change or compromise. Ms. Fourth Grade had the most comfort when her students were seated at their individual desks. She acknowledged that a more active learning environment seemed to address the needs of the students, but it required more movement than she thought her class could handle.

Ms. Lucy shared what took place in the second-grade classroom setting that provided African American young men with learning opportunities. She shared:

I try [to] connect it to the real world around them. I guess, especially this age with second grade they are not right at that point yet, you know? We talk about concepts of

skip counting, two's, five's, and ten's or how that might apply to counting coins or using money when you pay for something or saving up in your piggy bank. So, I do try to connect it for them, some concepts. Social studies concepts, like we're doing citizenship and rules and laws and stuff, so we connect that to home and parents and following directions at school on different things. So, some concepts do transfer over.

Ms. Lucy communicated how important it was that she recognized the learning needs of her students which also gave her students some control over their learning environment. Ms. Lucy discussed what seemed to bring respect and value to the students in her classroom. She shared:

They seem generally happy. They grasp concepts easily and they also are great peer helpers in the classroom, so ...when I have another student who is not catching on to something quickly, then I will let them go and help. Letting them be helpers in the classroom [as well as] peer tutors. I try to do that equally you know, among the room with everybody and not just those three, but that way they all feel you know... equally important. I talk to them about [how they] should do the right thing because it's expected and how they should be good friends or good helpers. I think it works really well for the whole class, from what I have seen. They all seem to respect each other [which is] so equally important.

Throughout the second grade observations, Ms. Lucy frequently used Lance, Robot, and Blade as classroom helpers and peer tutors. Lance seemed to be the person who was assigned to escort other students that needed to go in the main school building from their mobile classroom. During one of the observations, Ms. Lucy had Lance walk a fellow classmate to the building after she had received a call that the student was needed. She informed Lance that teachers were conducting testing (speech and reading) and that he needed to walk the student to the main

building. When Lance returned, Ms. Lucy informed him that when the student came back to the classroom, he would need to walk the next student to the same location. Ms. Lucy called upon Robot and Blade frequently to serve as peer helpers. When two new students became a part of the class, Ms. Lucy assigned both Robot and Blade as buddy helpers to make sure the new students were able to follow the class routine and expectations. The assignments given to Robot and Blade assisted catered to Ms. Lucy's need to maintain the established classroom environment.

In describing the learning environment in her classroom, Ms. Chanel stated:

Um, first of all you have to train them. So that's one thing that I do. Now the one thing that I'm supposed to be doing that I don't do, but they want us to do, um, [is] centers during our math time; math for ninety minutes. [We are] supposed to do forty five minutes of center activities and forty five minutes of whole group. Well, I am so opposed to centers, but um, and I get in trouble by it all the time, but I incorporate my centers during whole group lesson...I just make sure the kids understand what they can do. First of all, we start off by letting them have an opportunity to play with the manipulatives. So either I reward them with five minutes before we [begin the activity to] play or if you're doing a good job before, you know, after an activity, then you can play again. So they look forward to having times where they can just stack them or count them or color coordinate them however. So basically just getting them trained, teach them what they're supposed to do, what they're not supposed to do things, and then give them the opportunity to go in the center and see how they do. And if it doesn't work then let them be in the independent...not independent, but be in the center with the teacher. Teacher guided.

Ms. Chanel explained she allowed the students to play with math manipulatives for a few moments before or at the end of lessons. However, math manipulatives were seldom used for math instruction during the investigation. In many ways, she used manipulatives as a component of her behavior reward structure as she granted those students who she deemed as “compliant” access to them.

During Ms. Chanel’s interviews, she indicated that her opinion differed with the administrations’ expectations that teachers should use math centers for at least forty-five minutes of the ninety-minute math block. Based on Ms. Chanel’s discussion of centers, she used math centers, but not in the traditional manner. Math centers for these third graders took place when Ms. Chanel felt the students demonstrated they could use the materials correctly. If they did not use the materials correctly, then they were not allowed to work in the center but had to work with the teacher. Ms. Chanel had a well-defined plan that she incorporated into her classroom routine. She seemed confident in her decision about how to implement the required centers, even if she got “in trouble” for it.

Ms. Fourth Grade seemed to be right in her comfort zone. She discussed that her African American male students liked learning things on the computer and hands-on activities, but these were not her first choices for supporting learning within the classroom. Ms. Fourth Grade stated, “Um, hands-on...anything that they can touch and getting up and walking around, which is an issue for me because they sometimes cannot handle it.” It appeared behavioral needs trumped learning needs for this teacher participant.

The teacher participants said that the best learning took place when their students were able to use manipulatives (hands-on), working together and moving around. However, Ms. Fourth Grade shared, “...there are various issues in the classroom. So when they all get together,

we have a problem.” Even though Ms. Fourth Grade said she shared the common belief that hands-on activities and moving about the classroom helped African American males relate and grasp concepts easier, this approach to learning was not used in her classroom.

Ms. Fourth Grade discussed several experiences and expectations of inappropriate behavior, and how they influenced her teaching preference/style. She shared:

Um, as far as partners, honestly I try to keep it to a minimum. Just being honest...when we do it [work with partners], it's not for a long period of time. For example, we did it today during math and it was only five minutes. So in five minutes they have to be done. Then I'll walk around and I'll monitor. I stay really close to those that I know can't handle it. I stay extremely close to them [indicating Shawn and Usher].

Ms. Fourth Grade explained why she chose to implement her lessons in learning environments where the students were isolated on their own 'deserted islands' when working. She shared the following comment:

Also, I consider behavior when I group them. I don't want two [students] that I know are going to argue and fuss and fight. Because then they're not going to get anything accomplished in the group. Instead of learning, they're going to be fussing and ongoing. Um, so behavior does play a major role...even where I place them in the room. You know the walking around exercises or the group [work] is limited. But I do try to give them some because I want them to eventually get to the place where they can do it. And, you know, they don't need me over their shoulder in order to behave or in order to complete a project...

Ms. Fourth Grade began her planning of instruction based upon the behaviors initially displayed by her students seemingly with the objective of controlling the students' behavior in order to enhance their potential ability to master the objectives and goals of the lesson.

Essentially, each of the teacher participants had developed solid classroom management plans for maintaining ultimate control of the classroom environment. For all three teachers, behavior control was the primary need, and all plans for instruction were secondary to maintaining control.

Student needs. The students were frank in their discussions of their needs and learning experiences in the classroom. Generally, they appreciated active involvement, using manipulatives and computers, being able to understand and get good grades, and having appreciation of their teachers. Robot shared information about what his teacher taught. He stated:

...usually it's important to learn everything, to learn how to drive, type fast without looking and know how to use your phone, know how to do multiplication and mostly learn how to do good in school...like learning more about money and stuff, learning how to be good and choose wisely...

He thought that the work in his classroom would provide him the means to make connections to the experiences he would face in the future.

The student participants appeared to easily understand topics that they were able to relate to their daily lives outside of school. When given opportunities to use hands-on approaches while learning, the student participants found learning to be particularly valuable. Blade enjoyed the lessons that Ms. Lucy presented. He particularly liked the activities that allowed him to bring items from home to school and he appreciated what he learned at school that he could connect to

his daily routine at home. Blade specifically discussed the introductory lesson on thermometers and he was pleased to report that it was not hard for him to understand. Blade stated:

First, uhm, what I thought it was, was something that was in the car like what we have. We have a thermometer only it's on like a screen. When my I get in my mom's car, I look at the thermometer, it changes a lot. First it comes on like sixty-eight, and then it goes down to sixty-seven and sixty-five.

Blade was able to connect to the use of thermometers in his home environment; therefore, related activities at school were not hard and were viewed as valuable.

Max and James referred to their mathematics instruction as something they enjoyed. Max valued the math strategies Ms. Chanel taught them to use when solving problems by regrouping. He was taught to use colored pencils to identify numbers in the ones and tens places to identify his regrouping approach. Max stated, "We had to write down like six problems. It was fun, because we had to circle the numbers with blue, red then red and green." When Max was asked if there was anything else that could help him with this lesson, he continued to share, "Let us use cubes." Clearly, Max desired hands-on approaches to learning. James also discussed the same regrouping lesson; he described what he did to get the problems correct. James said, "Um, we had to circle the tens place in red and we had to circle the ones place green, it helped me keep the numbers in the correct spot." James referenced that he did his math homework the same way at home.

Blade discussed concepts related to active learning and how he had to figure out the answers to win. For instance:

I like to play board games...you get to roll the dice and if you pick a card, you have to see what it says. Some cards are pictures that are close-up and you have to see what they

are and if you guess right, then you have to put like an X in the circle. Then there's one [game] when you have to add something up and if the person that you're doing it with, finds [or] figures out what you're acting out then the person that you [are] playing with gets a point too and the person who gets the most points wins.

Max and Blade discussed examples of learning experiences that involved them playing a part in what and how they learned. The other second and third-grade student participants provided information that related to the concepts of active involvement. Lance and Robot were more than happy to help others be actively involved by encouraging their classmates to "try" when they were assigned as peer helpers.

Lance took his responsibility of being a peer helper seriously. During a partner read activity, Lance was adamant that he was going to tell his partner every word he did not recognize instead of helping him sound out the word. Ms. Lucy reminded Lance several times to make sure his partner was sounding out unfamiliar words. Lance continued to give the word to his partner without regard to what Ms. Lucy had reminded him to do. Ms. Lucy noticed that his behavior had not changed, and she instructed him to move his behavior marker (clothespin with his name on it) from the good-day face to the okay-day face. Reluctantly, he got up to move his behavior pin. As he moved his pin, Ms. Lucy explained to him that in order to be a good peer helper he needed to help instead of give answers to his partner.

Similarly, James monitored his behavior. James was a quiet individual. His active involvement included following the teacher's instructions and getting his behavior marker to the highest level possible for good behavior. James seemed to be amenable and easy going when it came to the classroom routine. He followed all the rules and tried to make sure he did exactly what was asked of him. James had been absent on the day when his class started the skeletal

lesson. When it was time to continue the lesson the next day (during an observation), he informed Ms. Chanel that he did not have the worksheet the other students had. Ms. Chanel began to look for a copy of the assignment sheet but was unable to locate the document. Ms. Chanel told James she could not find the exact same activity sheet but found a similar sheet for him to complete. She asked James if the new sheet was okay and informed him that the only difference in the work would be for him to write the names of the skeletal parts instead of cutting and gluing the names. James told Ms. Chanel that was fine and he quickly got to work.

Max's behavior was consistent during observed classroom activities and interactions. When Max was given manipulatives in math, he was able to complete his assignments and stay on task for that given period. When concepts were taught without the use of manipulatives, Max would find items in his desk that he could fold, tap, tear, and roll. He used anything that kept his hands moving and held his attention.

Max excitedly described a science lesson. He stated, "We did, you know those little wax papers, we put a leaf under it then we used crayolas to color around it but we had to color it hard so it would show up." In Max's classroom, student use of manipulatives was not documented in the observations. During the scheduled observations, the standard routine for activities involved listening to the information presented (verbal and written examples). When the presentation of information and guided practice concluded, the teacher gave directions for independent practice. While the students worked on their assignments, the only interaction was Ms. Chanel checking student progress. Seldom were the voices of students heard. The researcher always observed the children seated at their individual desks and engaged in paper and pencil activities. The student participants expressed some anxiety about their work.

Lance discussed not valuing drawing and completing art projects in the classroom. He said, “I don’t like art, because it is hard. I don’t know how to draw.” Lance did not like to draw because it was something that he did not do on a regular basis. However, he did share what he liked. He enjoyed centers because he got to practice in the specific center if he did not understand. He was able to frequently work in the same center because they rarely changed. Lance preferred opportunities for learning for which there was repeated practice. He seemed to have the mindset that “practice makes perfect.” He did not like art and was not comfortable in his ability to complete assigned projects well; however, working in centers was something he enjoyed and could perfect with continuous opportunities to practice. Shawn did not have the same mindset, particularly when he experienced continuous learning opportunities that did not meet his needs. Shawn stated:

No, cause...people be telling her, she doesn’t like [listen]. ‘...this is hard. This is boring.’ She sometimes, she won’t hear, but sometimes I think sometimes, I think she do and she will just be saying nothing. ‘Cause we got to go to read a book and then we have to read the whole story and do stuff like that...when I start to get to the end of book and I start trying to figure out – you know, figure out the answer, I’ll be struggling and my head starts to hurt.

Shawn continued to share:

I don’t know, but sometimes I be confused. But the teacher said ‘you did it right, how are you confused?’ I’m like, I don’t know, I just – I just can’t get it right in my head. It’s confusing to me. I just start writing stuff down. Like, oh, I know the answer now ... It’s not that I feel comfortable it’s just like sometimes I just can’t. Because, every time I need help, she talks to somebody else, or my hand going to be up forever.

During the observations in the fourth grade classroom, there were several instances when Shawn's hand was raised to request assistance and his teacher did not acknowledge him. When Shawn did not get a response or was not recognized by his teacher, he would leave his seat to go to her. Her response was to remind him to sit and raise his hand for help. Reluctantly, Shawn would return to his seat or working location. Frustrated by the lack of assistance, Shawn did a number of different things to get Ms. Fourth Grade's attention (i.e. rocking back and forth in his chair, not getting out the correct materials, pulling things out of his desk, or tapping his pen or pencil on his desk). When Ms. Fourth Grade addressed Shawn's behaviors, he explained he needed help.

These types of examples were numerous in Shawn's experience. During a math lesson on algebraic expressions, Shawn came into class late from breakfast. The lesson had already started and Shawn began to unpack his things, walking back and forth from his desk to his cubby area. Ms. Fourth Grade addressed Shawn's actions, reminding him to get to work. As the lesson continued and the teacher presented information on the overhead projector, students were able to provide answers to the questions. Shawn still had not settled down to focus on his work or the teacher's instructions. Shawn requested a calculator and was told, "No." He replied, "Well, I need help." Ms. Fourth Grade ignored his comment and continued the lesson. For the next segment of the lesson, Ms. Fourth Grade assigned students partners to work on the remaining questions. Shawn continued to ask for help during the partner work session. He raised his hand, got up from his work area, and went to the teacher for assistance. Ms. Fourth Grade informed him that she would come when he sat down and raised his hand. Moments later, Ms. Fourth Grade announced, "Time's up, return to your seats." Shawn immediately uttered, "I still need help...she gets on my nerves" in a tone not loud enough for Ms. Fourth Grade to hear.

Usher did not have much interaction with his classmates during the observations. In the classroom, Usher's desk was located with the other students' desks; however, he did not interact with them. He would at times look at their work, and he would collaborate if he was assigned to work with a partner, but partner work was not often used in this classroom. For the majority of the observations, Usher's desk was with the others; however, closer to the end of the observation, Ms. Fourth Grade had moved his desk, and he was not part of a group anymore.

The new placement of Usher's desk was like an 'island' by himself. He continued to work in the same manner, watching the overhead intensely to write the information Ms. Fourth Grade provided. During a health lesson on body movement, Ms. Fourth Grade placed the students in small groups; the teacher gave verbal instructions for the body movement they were to perform. Usher did not interact with the students; he smiled slightly during some of the movements but did not immerse himself in the chatter of the other students. When Ms. Fourth Grade instructed students to return to their seats to complete a word search, she asked Usher if he wanted to move his desk to work with the group in the front of the room. Usher agreed and moved his desk to the group. The students did not acknowledge his presence, and he did not attempt to work with them or ask any questions. He worked quietly alone.

The fourth graders seemed to lack trust in their teacher's ability to know what they needed and how they needed to learn. When observing Shawn's classroom, he was productive and determined to complete his assignments correctly when he seemed focused. At the time of one observation, the students were graphing ordered pairs. Ms. Fourth Grade provided the coordinates on the board, and Shawn immediately began his work. Ms. Fourth Grade went back to his desk to check on his progress. When the teacher came to his desk, Shawn took the opportunity to get clarification on the coordinates he needed to use to identify the two shapes and

to make sure he was doing the work correctly. As Ms. Fourth Grade checked his work, she reminded him that he had to “connect the dots.” Shawn was working on his assignment, taking only a moment or two to check his work against the student beside him.

Upon checking his work with his classmate, Shawn realized that he had connected the dots incorrectly. Shawn immediately raised his hand for assistance, and Ms. Fourth Grade told him to come to the front table where she was working with another student. Shawn’s reaction to his mistake demonstrated his concern about not finishing his work correctly. He continued to say to the teacher, “I messed it up, I messed up. It’s confusing; I told you it wasn’t right.” Ms. Fourth Grade took a look at Shawn’s paper and stated, “I didn’t say it was wrong. You hadn’t finished.” Shawn insisted he needed a new sheet of graph paper, but the teacher did not provide one. She informed him that it would put him behind to start over at this point. Ms. Fourth Grade used a bottle of white-out to erase the incorrect dots and told him to take his paper back, and he should be able to finish. Shawn’s actions indicated he was determined to understand how to graph the coordinates; he was persistent in his quest to receive help from his teacher. Ms. Fourth Grade seemed to recognize his determination and willingness to try, which prompted her attention to his needs. Shawn’s persistence indicated his needs were not being met and he sought the help of his teacher for greater understanding of the objective.

The student participants displayed persistence when they need more challenge in the course of learning. For example Lance and Robot, the second-grade participants, frequently implied that there was a lack of challenge in their classrooms. Both boys seemed very confident during classroom observations, interview sessions, focus groups and informal conversations. They expressed that they were “smart” and talked about the importance of being smart to be

successful in the future. There were experiences that they enjoyed within their classrooms, but they wanted more.

The need for more challenge was coupled with the need to be extremely accurate in their work. Robot shared:

...we could learn about everything even [in] higher grades than us – because I got a reading teacher, usually she wants us to be the top and write good and not write slopping. Because if we do that, she will book us down to a lower grade [‘Book us down’ - reference to being placed in a lower level book].

Completing work at a higher level than second grade was important to Robot and Lance. Lance stated, “I like to do multiplication the most, that’s what I feel like doing...only we do that in the third and fourth and fifth grade.” Lance continued, “Well, I would like to count – just count by all the numbers and I would like to do, like, more challenging stuff...like minuses or times...like 900 times 8.”

During an observation of math centers, Ms. Lucy assigned Lance to the center that required him to write and solve addition sentences. The sentences were based on the numbers revealed by rolling the dice (2). As Lance rolled the dice, he had to check back over the work he had previously done in his math notebook for the same center. Each group rotated through each center everyday for the entire week (5 days). Since there had only been one new center introduced to the rotation in the three and half month span of observations and visitations to the classroom, the researcher questioned Lance about his work in this particular center. Lance diligently looked through the addition sentences he had written in the notebook after each roll to assure that he would not repeat any of the sentences already completed. The researcher asked, “Since you already have a lot of the addition sentences that can be done for each roll, how do

you feel about going to this center?” Lance stopped for a moment and replied, “Well, I don’t mind rolling the dice, it is fun. But I wish I could do something harder.”

Ultimately, these two students wanted the chance to figure things out even if it was difficult. Robot shared there would be some changes in the classroom if he could be the adult. Describing one of the changes he would make, he stated:

I would change it from helping you do stuff and telling you the answers ... [to] letting you figure it out by yourself. Even if you get it incorrect, I won’t lump you down [‘lump you down’ – put you in a lower level (book or group), I’ll just let you keep trying. And, uh...I’ll let you, uh - let’s see – I’ll let you do multiplication any kind of, like, work when you have to write. I’ll let you draw, but no inappropriate stuff.

Robot simply stated, “[We want them] to make things harder.”

The students indicated that they needed attention from the teacher when they did not understand and that they preferred active involvement. They also wanted to work at a level that challenged them.

Theme Three Summary

The perceptions of teacher pedagogical practices in regards to their students’ needs was dependent upon primarily the comfort levels teachers possessed when implementing specific instructional strategies and less on the learning needs of their students. If the teachers did not prefer the instructional strategies that met their students’ needs, they were not used. Basically the teachers’ needs superseded the needs of the students. The experiences student participants shared as enjoyable and that helped them learn were those in which they could actively manipulate materials. Teachers discussed how, what and why certain pedagogical practices

needed to be planned in their daily instruction; however, most of these practices were not observed.

Theme Four: Misaligned Perceptions and Interpretations

Based on the data analysis, there were several instances of the misalignment between perceptions and interpretations. Five specific misaligned perceptions or interpretations emerged: (1) teacher statements versus instructional behaviors, (2) teacher need to control student behavior versus student need for active engagement, (3) teacher need for authority versus student need for a relationship with the teacher, (4) teacher practice of “sameness” versus student need for challenge or extra help/more time, and (5) African American males have needs related to gender and culture versus teachers “treating them all the same.”

Teacher statements versus instructional behaviors. Teacher statements about their instructional practice did not often match their instructional behaviors. Throughout the investigation, teacher participants clearly provided information about their beliefs in regard to appropriate and effective strategies that African American males need. For instance, two of the teachers felt that African American males needed frequent opportunities to move around. Although teacher participants identified these types of needs, very rarely did their instructional behaviors match these instructional beliefs; consequently, they did not incorporate these needs in their lesson planning nor did they respond to these needs during their instructional delivery.

Teacher need to control student behavior versus student need for active engagement. Teacher need to control student behavior versus student need for active engagement was the second misalignment. During their interviews and observation follow-up conversations the student participants said they wanted activities that involved a higher level of active involvement. They wanted opportunities to use manipulatives and materials that allowed them to

experience learning outcomes by “doing.” They felt that being actively involved in dealing with content would provide a level of deep knowledge and understanding that they desired. The students wanted more projects to be done in their classroom that would allow them opportunities to learn with each other. They had less appreciation for traditional pencil and paper activities’ however, they completed these traditional activities to remain in compliance with the rules and requirements set by their teachers. The students wanted more learning opportunities for active engagement with their fellow classmates, and their teachers affirmed in interviews that this was a student need. However, the teachers’ need for behavior control in the classroom superseded both student needs and sated teacher beliefs.

Teacher need for authority versus student need for a relationship with the teacher. The third misalignment was the teachers’ need for authority versus student need for relationships with the teacher. Continuous observations in Ms. Lucy’s classroom revealed that the need for control governed Ms. Lucy’s instruction. Ms. Lucy strategically set up her centers so that students had multiple opportunities to practice with assigned objectives, which the student participants equated to “play.” Their perceived relationship with Ms. Lucy was contingent upon frequent selection as peer and classroom helpers, but there was little evidence that their relationship extended beyond the academic and social arena at school. For instance, Ms. Lucy was not aware of personal changes that had taken place within Blade’s home and how this affected his school experiences. The researcher noticed that Blade seemed withdrawn and asked him about it. He explained that he was sad because his father was saddened by his sister’s passing away. When the researcher informed Ms. Lucy that Blade had mentioned his sadness about the death of his aunt, Ms. Lucy was surprised and stated that he had not mentioned or said

anything about it. Ms. Lucy had not noticed a change in Blade, indicating a lack of a relationship between the two.

Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade utilized a “tough love” approach. They were straightforward with their level of strict control, which hindered traditional forms of personal connections that may have been made if there had more flexibility in the classroom management. Essentially, the teacher-student relationships were labored because of the need or demand for “business as usual.” Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade strictly managed student behaviors as there were few opportunities for the development of relationships with students from start to end of the school day. Students listened to the presentation of their teachers and completed related paper and pencil activities. Talking and movement within the classroom was closely monitored, and everyone was on task and busy throughout each day. Although these student participants wanted a caring relationship with their teachers, they had to learn that “tough love” could also build the student-teacher relationships they desired.

Teacher practice of “sameness” versus student need for challenge or extra help/more time. The next misalignment involved teachers’ need for all students to be at the same academic level versus student need for challenge or for extra help. “Sameness” was observed in all classrooms. The second-grade students rotated in the same centers. If a student was having difficulty and needed assistance, Ms. Lucy assigned a peer helper or shoulder partner (usually Blade, Lance or Robot). In the third and fourth-grade classrooms, specific assignments were given; the teacher would monitor and occasionally work with students one-on-one if the teachers deemed there was a true need as they circulated throughout the room. The students were given an assignment after the teacher presentation and had a specific allotted time to finish that guaranteed structure and control. In numerous instances, teacher participants did not

differentiate between student participants as they prepared the “same” instruction for each student regardless of student differences.

African American males have needs related to gender and culture versus teachers “treating them all the same.” The final misalignment related to the notion that African American males have needs related to their gender and culture versus teachers’ need for everyone to be the same. With statements like, “treat them all the same,” “they cannot handle it,” “...for all males, not just African American males,” the teachers clearly indicated that there was little recognition that there were differences in the needs of these young men. The teachers articulated that African American males needed more light, space, and opportunities to get up and move around as well as more opportunities for hands-on and computer-related activities; however, there was little evidence throughout the investigation that they consistently provided these types of learning environments or activities for their African American male students.

The African American male student participants in this study did not discuss their race or gender specifically; therefore, they did not indicate that they had needs related to race or gender. Because of the difficulties that African American males face as they grow up and enter adulthood, it is expected that teachers understand that African American males have some specific needs that should be addressed in school, but these teachers had a philosophy of treating students all the same, and their instructional behaviors matched this belief.

Chapter Summary

Through data analysis procedures, the researcher identified four overarching themes. The first theme, *teacher and student perceptions of their learning experiences*, involved student-teacher relationships. The teacher participants’ focus on “treat everyone the same” formed the foundation of teachers’ development of relationships with students. This practice of “sameness”

did not work for all students, specifically if the teachers' action or behavior did not reflect the needs of the students. Based on student perceptions, the relationships with their teachers were directly tied to their needs being met. Second-grade students felt they had developed a good relationship with their teacher. The second-grade participants gained the trust, value, and respect of their teacher because they were assigned to help and provide assistance in major aspects of the classroom. The third-grade student felt their teacher cared about them, because they could ask her questions and tell her when they needed help. There were frustrations among the fourth-grade participants about their relationship with Ms. Fourth Grade. This frustration stemmed from a perceived lack of availability, support, and communication from the teacher. These students felt they were in dire academic and social need, and they wanted more help (sometimes loudly and sometimes silently). Shawn and Usher wanted to be noticed and identified as important enough that their needs mattered. Because of the lack of acknowledgement from their teacher, these students felt they were not valued, and their teacher was unaware of their needs. The most common stated need among student participants was their desire for teacher attention, approval, and praise, none of which were obtained because of the teachers' philosophy of "sameness."

The second theme, *teacher practices*, focused on teacher participants' routinized practices and how their instructional behaviors did not match the students' interests and needs. Most participants enjoyed any topic or activity that had a math focus. For the most part, the second- and third-grade students perceived that they got what they needed and wanted to learn to be successful. Both of these groups felt their teachers provided strategies and tools to help them accomplish their goals. The second-grade students perceived their math work as play, especially in their centers. The availability of hands-on materials in these centers made them "fun."

However, when the centers remained the same for several months and became redundant, the students felt less challenged and began to just go through the motions. The fourth-grade participants were lost in the chaos of trying to be heard or at least gain some recognition that they were struggling. There were more instances of fourth-grade African American males sharing their lack of success and need for opportunities to make connections within their learning environment.

The second and third-grade teachers' perceptions were similar to the students' accounts of their engagement in classroom activities. Ms. Lucy used instructional approaches that engaged her students and involved some movement and use of manipulatives. Ms. Chanel spoke frequently about providing opportunities for the students to be engaged; however, the researcher seldom observed her integration of hands-on materials and manipulatives in lessons. Ms. Fourth Grade did not feel that her students could handle interactive hands-on instruction. All of the teacher participants felt the instruction they provided was appropriate for the academic abilities and needs of their students.

The third theme, *teacher needs superseded those of the students*, placed the spotlight on teachers' needs to remain in their comfort zones for teaching practices and classroom management. The teacher participants' needs superseded the needs of the students. Their goal was to provide knowledge that would prepare their students for their future experiences beyond the school environment within the scheme of maintaining their level of control and structure. In interviews, the teachers gave the impression that their focus was on the needs of the students as they made their instructional plans. However, instruction seemed to be based on their personal pedagogical comfort zones. What the third and fourth-grade teachers reported as their intended plans did not translate to meeting the needs of their students. Their lessons lacked hands-on

activities and integration of supplemental materials. The second-grade teacher provided hands-on activities and materials that enhanced the students' learning process; however, she minimized their opportunities for in-depth learning experiences by keeping the activities "safe" so that student success was inevitable. There was little to no chance of mistake or failure.

The fourth theme, *misaligned perceptions and interpretations*, related to major differences pertaining to students' interests, student behaviors, teacher statements and needs, and their instructional behaviors. Based on students' interests, it seemed they preferred lessons that required active learning. Teacher participants acknowledged that students learned better when they were able to use their hands and materials to reinforce topics that would normally be completed only in written form. Ms. Lucy's second-grade students had hands-on activities in most of the lessons presented in her classroom. The third and fourth-grade teachers seldom used these types of activities. They structured their classrooms to restrict excessive movement and social interaction because they feared behaviors they deemed inappropriate would surface during the instructional time. As a result, Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade based instructional practices on their need to control and hinder behaviors that interrupted instruction and the structured routine.

The students wanted a chance to prove they could do challenging work. They wanted opportunities that built a sense of continuity in their knowledge base. The students looked to their teachers to prepare and provide them with the ability to connect their school learning with societal responsibilities they would inevitably face in the future. However, what the students needed and what their teachers actually provided created a valley. This "wide" valley resulted from major differences in the students' perceptions of the learning process and the teachers' perceptions of the learning process. The teachers provided instruction they truly believed

complemented their student learning needs. Based on student reactions, it was not enough, which resulted in teachers standing on a mountain on one side of the valley and the students on a mountain on the other side. The teachers seemed to have the “know,” but they did not display the “how.” They possessed the tools (knowledge) that would empower their students, but it seemed as if they did not know how to effectively convey the information or skills to their students in ways that captured their attention or in ways that motivated students and assured their learning. The students indicated they had the determination to acquire knowledge and education, but there was evidence that many of them were falling short of the goals set by the school and their teachers. Ultimately, building a bridge across the valley could generate successful lifelong learners and productive citizens. In this study, the needed bridge was structurally unsound.

Chapter 6

Discussion

Introduction

This study involved an examination of elementary-aged African American male students' perceptions of activities and learning opportunities in their classrooms and how these experiences influenced their academic and social success. In this study, teachers' perceptions were examined as to how they identified the learning needs of their African American male students and how these students' learning needs influenced their instructional practices. The following research questions guided this study:

- (1) What are the perceptions/interpretations of African American male students and their teachers about their school experiences?
- (2) How do the teachers interpret their own teaching practices, particularly with regard to these children?
- (3) How do the needs of African American male students influence the teaching practices of their teachers?
- (4) How do their perceptions/interpretations mirror each other and differ?

Throughout this chapter, the research findings are discussed and situated as they relate to the literature. Practical implications from this research for practicing teachers, school administrators, and teacher educators are explored. Finally, suggestions and recommendations for future research are proposed.

Question 1. What are the perceptions/interpretations of African American male students and their teachers about their school experiences? Although the seven African American male students who participated in this study held some common and unique

perceptions about their school experiences, their take on their school experiences varied considerably according to grade level. Across all grade levels, student participants shared that they liked to learn using materials and manipulatives that helped them explore and grasp concepts. They also enjoyed working in pairs or in groups with their peers, and they wanted their teachers to be regularly available to provide specific and prompt feedback. They wanted productive relationships with their teachers that would support their learning. According to the student participants, teachers did not respond to these learning needs.

In each classroom, the student participants perceived their teachers' differently (as would be expected). Second-grade student participants expressed a high level of trust in their teacher's instructional decisions and the information she provided. These participants had developed a relationship with the teacher that made them feel important, especially when they were given classroom assignments to help their classmates or the teacher. Although they trusted their teacher, these participants expressed their desire for greater challenge within the classroom. There were three academically and socially advanced participants in this second-grade class who were proud to be students who were frequently given the task of helping their classmates. Based on their experiences, they held favorable perceptions of school. About half of the students in this class (who were not study participants) were continually in the position of being assigned to get help from their more academically advanced peers. Those who were never selected as peer helpers might describe their experiences in this regard as discouraging.

Both of the third-grade participants indicated in interviews that they perceived their teacher favorably, and they appeared to admire her in some ways. For instance, they said that they felt comfortable talking with their teacher, and they strived to make sure that she was proud of them. On the other hand, these students stated that they wanted and needed instruction

provided to them in differing ways. Both third graders enjoyed using materials beyond the normal paper pencil activities. They wanted the opportunity to use calculators, counting cubes, base ten blocks and even the simplest materials such as colored markers or colored-pencils to assist them with their learning and to demonstrate the knowledge they had obtained.

Unlike the second- and third-grade participants, the fourth-grade students perceived themselves as voiceless in their classroom. They believed they did not have opportunities to express to their teacher what their instructional needs were or what would help them learn. During classroom activities, these participants did not believe the teacher recognized or acknowledged them when they needed assistance.

The fourth-grade student participants had complex relationships with their teacher. They had developed two different and separated relationships – a social relationship and an academic relationship. They had to carefully maneuver as they attempted to understand the events and their places within the classroom setting. In the social relationship, their teacher tried to make sure they made appropriate choices to minimize unwanted behaviors, and when this happened successfully, the fourth-grade participants felt that the teacher helped them. Their academic relationship with the teacher seemed to be tarnished; they felt that the teacher would not help them with their work. Therefore, it was troubling to the students that it seemed as if their teacher wanted to help and support them sometimes, but in academic circumstances, they felt as if she did not want to assist them at all. Both students discussed positive experiences they had in second and third grade, and they longed for these kinds of academic activities in fourth grade. They both recalled activities that incorporated hands-on, project-based learning opportunities. Based on the interviews, both of these students had been able to establish positive academic and social relationships with their second and third-grade teachers and they had perceived that in

these previous experiences, they received necessary support and felt their learning needs were met. Fourth grade was different and academically frustrating for these two participants.

The student participants overwhelmingly stressed two points: (a) they wanted their teachers to challenge them with more rigorous instruction, and (b) they wanted their teachers to integrate more hands-on, meaningful activities within their instructional presentations. All of the student participants wanted more opportunities to work with other students in their classroom, to discuss information and/or solutions and to hear alternative problem solving strategies that they might not have considered when completing an assignment/activity. Student participants alluded to instructional methods they thought would help their teachers engage them more in the learning within their classrooms by more fully involving them in actively learning new information and concepts.

There were differing perceptions about African American student needs among the teacher participants. Ms. Lucy's described her second-grade African American male students' school experiences as positive. She felt that her African American male students seemed generally happy in the classroom, because they eagerly took part in class discussions and activities, and they grasped concepts easily. The third and fourth-grade teacher participants, who happened to be African American, had similar perceptions of the school experiences of their African American male students. Both of these teachers focused primarily on their views about how important the students felt and how they were treated. These teacher participants' major concern was their students' reputations, and how they impacted their school experiences. These two African American teacher participants believed that these young men did not work well with anyone who they perceived disliked them, so they would not give them a chance. The African American teacher participants feared that the African American male students would encounter

situations that rendered strong, unchangeable prejudices against them as a result of their negative reputations.

The participant groups involved in this study had very different perceptions of the school experience. The student participants desperately wanted to be heard, noticed and accepted for who they were, as well as their actions (whether good or bad) that made them unique. In fact, the second-grade student participants expressed utopian views and perceived their teachers and school experiences as a story that would always have a happy ending. The fourth-grade student participants could recall those happy moments within their earlier school experiences; however, their descriptions of their current story had the potential for an unhappy ending, even possibly resulting in a nightmare that would affect their future expectations of school. The perceptions of the third-grade students fell in the middle – neither utopian with high expectations for happy endings, nor fatalistic with expectations for unhappy endings. The teachers truly thought they were providing the most appropriate learning opportunities for these students and they were largely unaware of the student participants as unique individuals who felt that they had needs that were not being addressed in the classroom.

Question 2. How do the teachers interpret their own teaching practices, particularly with regard to these students? The three teacher participants said they wanted the students to feel good about themselves and tried to make sure their students understood why they were learning about certain topics as well as help them connect their learning to real life experiences. There was no indication of perceived differences between African American male students and the other students in the classrooms in teacher discussions of the matter of addressing their needs. Educational approaches in all three classrooms were designed to reach all students in the same way.

Ms. Lucy wanted to create an environment where everyone was completely equal, never acknowledging racial differences within her classroom. However, she did acknowledge academic differences. Ms. Lucy's overall goal was to instill in her students the idea that they should all help each other out and everyone should feel valued and important as a member of the classroom. Although Ms. Lucy had the best intentions of providing a wonderful environment where everyone was happy and all students helped one another, it did not actually happen. Not everyone was able or allowed to help one another because they were not working at academic levels that would give them a chance to be a peer helper. Students who were not allowed to help (and were always being helped) may have had differing perceptions about being a valued member of the class. For those identified as classroom helpers, there were conflicts. Being a peer helper was not always a positive experience, especially if they did not provide the instructional assistance in the manner that Ms. Lucy had taught them.

Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade were hard on their students, but stated they wanted to ensure that students were successful in anything they tried to do. There was pride in the fact that their highly structured classrooms and demands of certain behaviors from students afforded them a level of respect in the school community. They stated that African American male students would face challenges in today's society, so they were intentionally tough with them. Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade believed that this stern approach was what parents wanted. They said that parents requested that their children be placed in their classrooms because misbehaviors would not be tolerated and students would not be in trouble at school. The fact that parents requested these two teachers for their children's teachers reinforced the respect they had earned with the school community. There was also belief that the role and responsibility as a teacher was to "train [students]" so they could function in society.

Students had to earn the right to use manipulatives for hands-on activities in Ms. Chanel's classroom. There were no manipulatives or hands-on activities observed in Ms. Fourth Grade's classroom. Even outside time for recess was limited for Ms. Chanel's students. Third-grade students were rarely given time to play freely or socialize with their peers. There was more time devoted to recess in Ms. Fourth-Grade's classroom for the students to interact and socialize; however, this was not the case during classroom activities. Therefore, the students did not know how to work together. The emphasis was on training students to operate in a highly structured environment.

The teachers' interpretations of their teaching practices with regard to the needs of their African American male students were that they were on target and that they had hit the bulls-eye. In essence, based on the teachers' actions and discussions, they felt there were no doubts that the instructional strategies implemented in their classrooms met the learning needs of these students. However, based upon the learning needs identified by the student participants, the teachers had missed the mark.

Question 3. How do the needs of African American male students influence the teaching practices of their teachers? The needs of the African American male students did not influence the teaching practices of their teachers. The teachers structured the classrooms and their instruction based on what they perceived as effective practice and what they believed would meet the needs of all students. Their perceptions of student needs were not a match with student interpretations of their own needs. In examining this mismatch, it is reasonable to ask about the degree to which children of 8-11 years understand what they need as learners. Perhaps the teachers knew more about what the students needed than the students themselves understood. Yet, the students were asking for reasonable accommodations that can be considered effective

instructional practices. They wanted rigor and challenge, hands-on experiences that they could relate to their own lives, learning experiences involving manipulatives and meaningful projects, and they wanted honest, trusting relationships with their teachers. They did not perceive that these needs were being met, and the teachers had no understanding of the fact that these African American male students did not view their learning needs as being met. There was no meeting of the minds between teachers and the participating students.

There was a common sense of control in all three teachers' instructional practice. Student participants were allowed to work in restricted areas for specific amounts of time. In the second-grade classroom, participants focused on the same concepts daily without any differentiation, variation, or infusion of rigor. Student participants in the third and fourth-grade classrooms were assigned seatwork. Their teachers relied on direct instruction and independent, pencil and paper practice.

Question 4. How do their perceptions/interpretations mirror each other and differ?

The perceptions of the student participants and the teacher participants were similar and mirrored each other with respect to the African American male students' expressions of what they needed and wanted (i.e. opportunities for use of manipulatives, hands-on activities that required active involvement, and to work with their fellow classmates) in order to be successful learners. The teacher participants identified and described the same methods that they believed helped African American male students succeed in the classroom and school environments. There were also parallel perceptions about the need to connect school learning to the students' everyday life experiences in hopes of preparing them for the "real world."

There was a major discrepancy in the perceptions/interpretations of the two participant groups about what was happening in the classroom, and the classroom observations supported

the perceptions of the student participants. The teachers' beliefs about instructional practices needed by the students were not carried out in actual classroom practices. There was a notable difference between what the teachers said students needed and what they actually engaged in when teaching. What the teachers said and what they demonstrated in the classroom contradicted. This amplified the fact that the students were not heard and that they did not receive the instruction or support they needed and deserved. The teachers may have "heard" the students as they attempted to tell teachers about their learning needs; however, there was a blatant disregard of student voices. The teachers taught in the scheme of what they liked and what was in their personal pedagogical comfort zones.

Theoretical Connections

This study adds to findings previous investigations focused on African American males, particularly those studies grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT). With respect to CRT, the research findings for this investigation highlight three of the four central tenets: (a) racism as normal, (b) interest convergence, and (c) social construction of race. Ladson-Billings (1998) posits that considerations of CRT in education lead to questions such as, "What roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender inferiority?" This investigation provides an explicit response to this question, as the experiences and perceptions of the student participants illuminate that racism is a normal process within their schooling experiences. Racism as normal is defined as the life context that most people of color routinely face and the everyday life experiences that society has accepted where racism is recognized as normal or ordinary (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009). Racism as normal implies "business and usual" as individuals do not consider or account for race as a variable, which sustains and perpetuates the status quo. In short, the belief that

results from racism is normal is that there is no need to attend to race because there are no problems.

The tenet of racism as normal permeates throughout the findings of this investigation. On numerous occasions, teacher participants clearly demonstrate that they do not attend to race as a variable during their instructional planning or implementation. In fact, findings support that these teacher participants frequently disregarded the needs of their African American male students. Ms. Lucy did not say or do anything that directly implied her acceptance of “racism as normal.” However, that was not the case for the third and fourth-grade teachers. They both discussed similar expectations of the students in their classrooms. They explicitly expressed concerns about the reputations of the African American male students in the school environment and made claims that they did not hold past experiences or reputations against these young men when they entered their classrooms. They indicated their African American male students (regardless of their reputations) were given a “clean slate” each year. In actuality, the “clean slate” did not mean they were going to help the young men change or provide them strategies to improve their reputations.

These teachers did not believe or expect their African American male students’ behaviors were going to change; their goal was to keep them in line and control the behaviors of these students while they were in their classrooms. This ultimately allowed the teachers to obtain desired recognition as educators who did a great job teaching African American children. However, the third-and fourth-grade teachers’ attitudes were no different than the prejudicial beliefs they felt were held by some Caucasian teachers. The African American males did not have a chance with either group of teachers. Teacher expectations related to the behaviors of these students were negative, and the teachers did not expect any permanent changes.

The second central tenet for CRT, interest convergence, also emerged in this investigation. Interest convergence suggests that norms in the larger culture change only when the interests of the controlling groups concur or come together (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009; Knaus, 2009). One of the criteria for selection for this study was that qualifying teachers would be those who parents of African American males often requested. It was believed that teachers who were requested by parents as being effective with African American males would be teachers who understood and worked to meet the needs of these learners. Administrators identified Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade specifically as teachers who parents requested for their children. This could not be determined for Ms. Lucy; there was no indication that parents specifically requested her for their child's teacher; however the school administrator felt that she met all of the other qualifications for teacher selection for this study.

In actuality, teachers who were requested by parents for placements of elementary African American males in this school were teachers who were known to assure that students behaved and did not get in trouble. These requests implied to the teachers that their classroom management and instructional methods were sanctioned by both the parents and the school administrators. To the teachers, these requests (and the fact that they were honored) were a reflection that they were well established as excellent teachers of African American males.

Interest convergence occurred when the parents got the teacher they felt best suited their child's needs, and the teacher was afforded the freedom to teach and manage the classroom in her "comfort zone." The parents could count on a year when the behavior of their children would be controlled, and they would not be contacted about problems – and presumably, they held the assumption that behavior control would mean academic achievement as well. However,

the needs of the students (based on their own perceptions of their learning needs) were not being met. In this case, the parents and the teachers were the controlling groups whereas the marginalized group was the students.

Because of the recognition received as being teachers requested by parents for their children, the teachers believed they were held in high regard by the administration of the school. This belief was interpreted as reflective that these sanctioned teachers had an option in following the directives of the instructional leader (principal) in the school. Based on conversations with the teacher participants, there was a school-wide mandate that during the ninety-minute instructional math block, forty-five minutes were to be dedicated for the implementations of center activities. In this instance, Ms. Lucy followed the prescribed mandate; however, Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade did not adhere to these mandates. They ran their classrooms as they saw fit. For instance, Ms. Chanel explicitly shared that she did not implement centers following the guidelines of the administration at the school and that she even got in trouble for it sometimes. This did not seem to be a deterrent to Ms. Chanel as she continued her math block as she deemed necessary.

The findings in this study also highlighted a third CRT tenet of social construction, which also blended into elements of “racism as normal.” The social construction of race is based upon certain assumptions that inform the system of images, words, attitudes, and unconscious feelings about race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Hartlep, 2009). While race is always noticed, there is negation of the distinctly human, higher-order traits, which include personality, intelligence and moral values/behaviors (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Most people only see the physical traits of others, which make up a small portion of the true person. Currently, the social construction of race about African American males includes the suppositions that these individuals are likely to

get in trouble, possibly get caught in the penal system, and many are seen as people to be feared (simply their presence unnerves individuals that they are out to hurt them) (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). Ms. Chanel and Ms. Fourth Grade demonstrated the influence of the social construction and reinforcing of these notions with their expectations of African American males in elementary school. These two African American teachers did not hold the same expectations for their African American male students and Caucasian male students. This was particularly true for student behaviors; teachers followed through with consequences for the inappropriate actions; however, they made excuses or provided justifications for behaviors displayed by their Caucasian students.

Ms. Chanel made justifications for the behaviors of Joe (pseudonym) when he and Max got into an argument that resulted in Max calling Joe a “big fat foot farmer.” Both students were disruptive in class, which prevented them from completing their assignments. Ms. Chanel immediately reprimanded both students. During the informal conversation that followed this observation, Ms. Chanel explained that Joe’s parents were getting a divorce and that he had just recently learned about it. This was going to make the upcoming holidays hard for him; however, once Joe had time to process the changes taking place in his family, his behavior would improve, and he would be just fine. Ms. Chanel did not provide an explanation for Max or the cause of his behavior, implying that the behaviors he displayed were his normal interactions, and they would stay the same. Ms. Chanel held the expectation that Joe’s personal family situation was at the root of his behavior eruption, and there was no doubt he would become accustomed to the situation and stop causing problems. Max, on the other hand, was a child who had been given a “clean slate” at the beginning of the year because of his reputation as an African American male

behavior problem, but this problem was not expected to improve. Ms. Chanel would control Max as best she could during his third-grade experience, and he would go on as he was.

Ms. Fourth Grade's social construction of race was disclosed in her actions when determining the students' seating assignments. Ms. Fourth Grade made the claim that she tried to move student seat locations every nine weeks at the beginning of a new academic quarter. This was in direct response to the questions concerning Shawn and Usher's seating assignments and the observation that the two Caucasian students in her classroom had been assigned seats within the same group. Ms. Fourth Grade's response to Shawn and Usher's seat assignments were due to their behavior. She continued to explain that for the Caucasian students she wanted to make sure they felt comfortable at the beginning of the year and had someone to whom they could relate nearby. She indicated that these students' desks had been moved to different groups, but on the same side of the room since the nine-week quarter had changed. Ms. Fourth Grade continued to explain that both students were doing better, and they had to get used to the demographics of their class since the school had mostly African American students in attendance. She revealed that the Caucasian male was doing fine and getting along well with the other boys in the classroom. Ms. Fourth Grade made sure the Caucasian male was supported in the location of his seating assignment; however, the same did not happen for the African American male participants, particularly with Usher, who seemed to have socialization issues that were not supported by his seating assignment, which separated him from any of the groups.

In Ms. Chanel's and Ms. Fourth Grade's classrooms, special provisions were made to make sure that Caucasian male students felt supported. Yet, when African American males students were involved in the same behaviors or had similar circumstances surrounding the

behaviors they were also faced with the consequences, but it was simply because they were misbehaving.

Ms. Lucy's social construction in the second-grade classroom involved her perceptions of the academic or intelligence levels of her students. Some students were chosen to be peer helpers if they were academically advanced, which made these students feel valued and important. All three of the student participants who were recommended for the study by Ms. Lucy were strong in academics and served as peer helpers. The class was fairly evenly divided between students who served as peer helpers and those who did not. Ms. Lucy's stated philosophy was that she wanted all children to learn to work cooperatively and help one another. Yet, the reality was that the same students always served as peer helpers. Students who were weaker in academics were always "helped" and they did not get to be the "valued and trusted" by Ms. Lucy. All students needed to feel valued and trusted.

Ms. Lucy consistently demonstrated that she had very divided expectations for children. In essence, she had a permanently high group (who served as peer helpers) and a permanently low group (who got helped by the peer helpers). There were no data indicating Ms. Lucy expected changes or that her expectations for individuals would change. Societal expectations place the African American male in a difficult position. Stereotypes about African American males have long plagued their mere existence. While society has indoctrinated beliefs about equality in schools, the schools have not addressed the needs of these individuals. Societal expectations for African American males are largely negative, and they encounter these expectations as students in schools (Howard, 2008).

In regard to educational experiences in today's society, the focus has primarily been placed on the norms of mainstream America (Hartlep, 2009; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, & Dillihunt,

2005). Teachers are expected to provide instruction that is needed for all students to successfully meet required benchmarks and assessments. This mandates sets teachers up to “treat them all the same.” It is also this frame of mind that results in the lack of acknowledgement of race by teachers within their classrooms. Because of the mandates of policies such as “No Child Left Behind” in which teachers may feel safer if they are considered treating everyone equally, all students are given the same instruction, they are expected to complete the same activities in the same specified time, be at the same level, and ultimately pass the same test.

Teachers have to make difficult decisions on a daily basis. The recognition of race in any form is a delicate topic. Dependent upon the individuals involved in the discussion, it may bring results such as those Delgado and Stefancic (2001) describe in their “racism as normal” scenario discussed in chapter 2. The scenario is centered on the race of the student and the race of the teacher, which determines what reaction, is implied. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) used an example that involved a fourth-grade student who repeatedly raised her hand to be recognized. They depicted several different differences where race played a major role in the perceptions of the individual. In the first instance, the fourth grader is an African American student and the teacher is Caucasian, so the student reaction to the lack of recognition is most likely considered a result of the child’s skin color, and the teacher is viewed as racist. The next instance is described with the student as a Caucasian fourth grader and a Caucasian teacher in which case the student may conclude that the lack of acknowledgment is an oversight or the teacher may be very busy working with someone who needs more help. The last instance shared by Delgado and Stefancic characterized the student as an African American as well as the teacher. The lack of acknowledgment in this instance ignites the reaction that the teacher is rude or does not value the student’s ideas.

The same scenario with different individuals involved may still bring about the same reactions. If a parent goes to meet with a teacher, one or more reactions may occur. If the parent is black and the teacher is white, the parent may accept the information a white teacher provides or see it as a racist gesture if the teacher reports something negative about the child. If the parent is black and the teacher is black, the parent may suggest or have the same response given with the white teacher; however, it may not be seen as a racist gesture (although the parent could take the position the teacher is “acting white”). On the other hand, there could be a simple discussion and the parent might feel the black teacher understands the black child. If the parent is white and the teacher is white, there will be no racial implication. If the parent is white and the teacher is black, information that is discussed could result in a combination of all the previous reactions. The subject of race in these situations is very sensitive when the participants are of a different race (Kohli, 2009).

African American male students have needs that are specific to their race. There is a primary need for these students to be assigned teachers with high expectations. Their teachers must believe (even if there is already some type of negative connotation about the student as an individual) that no matter what the circumstances, there is hope and a chance for change. The philosophy of “treating them all the same” is not the solution and is not meeting the needs of any student. African American males are willing, if given the opportunity, to discuss their perceptions of their needs and the ways those needs are or are not being met when they are heard and given voice to do so without repercussions (Knaus, 2010). Once students realize that their opinions and thoughts are taken into consideration by their teachers, their classroom and learning environment are perceived as positive and trusting (Barksdale & Triplett, 2010). When teachers take time and allow their students to express their needs, there is a deeper understanding of their

life experiences. Understanding the students' life experiences will assist the teacher in providing instruction and activities that relate to their daily life routines.

In order for students to obtain the learning opportunities needed to become successful life-long learners, teachers must know their students as individuals. Teachers must be comfortable in allowing students to take an active part in the plan for their instructional progress. Providing this opportunity will give students a sense of value and trust; it allows learners to take their place in the process of learning (Barksdale & Triplett, 2010). African American male student success is greater when teachers understand themselves and possess a true understanding of their students, promoting a positive self-concept as well as setting high expectations and accepting nothing but the best from their students (Coats, 2010). Essentially, teachers must incorporate and acknowledge the needs of their African American students; they must gain knowledge and a solid understanding of how the mere presence of race works in our society and specifically in our schools (Kohli, 2009).

Implications

The findings of this investigation indicated that there is a mismatch in the African American male elementary-aged students' perception of their learning needs and their teachers' interpretation of these needs based on their demonstrated instructional and classroom management practices. Based on these findings, implications of this study relate to issues of assisting practicing teachers, school administrators, and teacher educators in recognizing and implementing systems to effectively and appropriately meet the learning needs of these students.

Implications for practicing teachers. Practicing teachers should have the opportunities and experiences to develop self-awareness that includes investigation of their own racial and cultural experiences, move beyond mundane professional development, and have a safe and non-

threatening environment within their school buildings to address their concerns and fears concerning the topic of race. The interpretation of race should begin with self-awareness (Knaus, 2009).

Teachers must be willing to take a look at their own perceptions of race. Self-awareness is of the utmost importance. Ladson-Billings (1994) and Thompson (2004) contend that teachers have not examined their own cultural backgrounds; therefore, they bring misplaced assumptions based on their own racial and education experiences. Self-awareness is vital to the personal growth of the teachers but has to be coupled with professional development (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 2004). Thompson (2004) asserts that the professional development plans and opportunities must be implemented in order to give teachers the opportunity to share stories and reflect on their own practice as it relates to their students' race and diverse needs. While there is a dire need for professional development, it must go beyond the traditional in-service sessions most teachers attend. Oftentimes, teachers attend these sessions with opinions where they are either eager to learn (to improve their efficacy with African American students), open-minded but not enthusiastic (if they have to be there, go ahead and listen to what they have to say), or resentful (why attend a workshop that only focuses on African American students) (Thompson, 2004). Often individuals who have limited understandings of race and hold a less than enthusiastic attitude about developing awareness and possibly making changes are the first to claim, "I don't see race; I only see people" (Thompson, 2004, p. 246). Teachers who consider this stance are in denial that they have issues or questions about race and how to address this topic with their students, parents, and the school community (Delpit, 1995). While there are "professional development and in-service trainings" devoted to addressing the racial and cultural

issues within the schools, there is still a lot to be done based on the observations and views of the teacher participants in this study, and it must be done in a different way.

The development of professional and in-service trainings that really allow teachers to be actively involved are needed. With honesty, openness, and active inquiry, there is a good chance that teachers will heighten their confidence to address the issue of race that has caused labored discussions when trying to find the “politically correct” words (Delpit, 1995). In order for teachers to address and examine their experiences and beliefs, they need a safe and non-threatening environment that allows them to admit, “I don’t know” or “I am not comfortable” handling and discussing the topic of race. If they are given this opportunity, teachers may share their thoughts and address issues that relate to their students and the school environment as a whole. Ladson-Billings (1994) says it is critical that teachers not only think but also put into action their views and perceptions concerning race, even if these opinions challenge the system based on the notions within the mainstream social realm (Boykin, 1986; Boykin & Ellison, 1994; Boykin & Toms, 1985).

Implications for school administrators. School administrators are the instructional leaders or “master teachers” within the school building for teachers and students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Their leadership is essential in creating learning opportunities and environments (professional development) to support teachers in the quest for greater understanding as well as in establishing and implementing expectations that enhance cultural awareness. It is essential that school leaders create learning environments for teachers that provide opportunities to ask questions and freely express their knowledge or the lack of knowledge concerning race within their classroom and school setting. Bell and Thomas (2010) share the importance of administrators initiating and providing a diversity professional development model that ensures

all teacher and extended school staff participants have a vested interest in the process and outcomes. In essence, participants should engage in activities that build on their strengths but also identify areas needing improvement. Often professional development experiences are not based upon expressed need but instead on remediation and quick fix approaches (Bell & Thomas, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 1995). This is not going to work if schools are to fully address the complex issues of assuring that the needs of African American males are met in every classroom. Thompson (1995) suggests ongoing professional development experiences that involve teachers in diagnosing their learning needs, designing and implementing the change effort, and producing better outcomes for students.

The enhancement of teacher understandings about racial issues will only be achieved when administrators establish expectations and initiate and recognize the need within their school environments. This enhancement can be produced if administrators support and provide opportunities to help teachers learn about their students beyond the classroom and school walls. Events such as Multicultural Fairs or Multicultural Education School nights only equip teachers and students to a “foods-and-festivals approach to individual cultures...to make a piñata or sing a spiritual” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 131). Schools must take many steps beyond this surface approach by researching what other schools and schools systems have implemented as a springboard of new, informative, and actively involved events. Ladson-Billings (1994) suggests that specific and well-planned community service programs and activities provide the “step beyond the surface approach” many schools have yet to establish.

Implications for teacher educators. Thompson (2004) contends, “Few teacher education programs prepare teachers to be effective in urban classrooms serving diverse groups of students” (p. 241). He urges teacher education programs to take a closer look at the field

experiences, student teaching, and clinical practice sites assigned to their candidates. Teacher education programs should carefully select sites that will provide their candidates with classroom experiences that will emphasize diversity on multiple levels.

Partnering professional development schools with teacher education programs provides an opportunity for on-site training. On-site foundation and methods courses can afford teacher education candidates the opportunities to see theory in action as well as provide occasions to implement some of the instructional practices that have been described and researched as effective. It is within this context that teacher education candidates can discuss and share their experiences first hand. Delpit (1995) wrote that all participants in a classroom situation can benefit from listening to and discussing the experiences of others.

In order for teacher candidates to have the time to truly immerse themselves in their classroom experiences; teacher education programs will need extended field experiences, student teaching, and clinical practice. The most valuable piece of any teacher education program that prepares future teachers is their student teaching or clinical practice experience (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Most student teacher experiences last for a semester over a span of ten to twelve weeks dependent upon the program and type of experience. Extending student teaching or practicum to at least a two year process and including seminars that relate directly to experiences with supporting student needs could strengthen the knowledge base and skill level of beginning teachers. Expanding the student teaching or practicum experience to two full years could give teacher candidates enough time to get to know their students, the school, and the community to which they have been assigned (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 1995; Thompson, 2004). Assigning teacher education candidates to a specific school attendance zone would begin this two year process. During the first year, the candidate would be dedicated to learning about the

community by attending churches and neighborhood gatherings and by volunteering in community or recreation center programs, which could serve as their service learning projects. Teacher candidates would also spend time with students from diverse backgrounds so they can learn more concretely about cultural and racial diversity, gender diversity, religious diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and so forth. The intent of this year is solely for the candidate to build awareness of the community and recognize the value and strengths of the community while community members have an opportunity to establish a relationship with him or her. Essentially, the members and families of the community would feel and accept the responsibility of helping the teacher candidate learn in a very indirect and implicit fashion.

At the conclusion of the first year, the teacher education candidate would transition from community immersion to school and classroom immersion where the candidate begins to spend more time within his or her assigned school. At this point of the transition, the teacher candidate is well known by the students, parents and community, and they are also aware of and recognize the social capital that students acquire from their home and community. If they are aware and familiar with the capital within the community environment, there would be smoother transition and ability to integrate these important learning experiences into the lesson planning. The absence of extended exposure to a variety of diverse learning environments situated within school and community settings hinders teacher candidates who leave teacher education lacking the tools needed to make sense of what will transpire in their future classrooms.

What may be the most essential requirement to gain admission to a teacher education program is assuring that policies or processes are established and implemented to assist interested individuals in determining if becoming a teacher is what they really want. The implementation of curricula that incorporate rigorous and more in-depth courses and extended

field experiences have no value if individuals are uncertain about their intended career path or do not understand the realities of the modern classroom environment. Ladson-Billings (1994) declares the perspective teachers must express a true interest and commitment to work with students of color. Teacher education programs may benefit from having their candidates take self-analysis and disposition inventories as suggested by Thomas (2004). These inventories may provide indicators that address the level of diversity awareness (including but not limited to race, culture, social, economic and gender) about individuals who declare an interest in teacher education.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for further research to explore the perceptions concerning school experiences of African American elementary-aged students and their teachers and what factors (academic, cultural, social) influence these perceptions. The current research focused solely on the students and teachers in context of the school environment. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of their perceptions and the experiences that influence their thoughts, ideals and beliefs, their initial educational setting must be included. The home and community context must be added (Moje, 2008). Extending the context of future research to the home and community will add to the current research [by examining] how knowledge and understanding of students' personal backgrounds will allow "teachers to make explicit connections from students' lives, values, and experiences outside of the classroom to experience and knowledge inside the classroom" (Howard, 2002, p. 441). Teachers must be willing and fearless in their quest to learn about the culture, daily life, and historical details of African Americans (Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings 1994).

The addition of the home and community to the context for future research will also allow researchers opportunities to gain insight into the parental opinions that influence the perceptions of these students. Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, and Dillihunt (2005) also suggest future research that involves the parents and how the socialization within the home provides indicators for the child's cultural themes which affect learning preferences (i.e. communal, individualism, competitiveness and verve). This supports Howard's (2001) findings that African American students expressed their desire to have classrooms that mimicked the "family-community-like environment" (p. 146) that incorporates more cooperative learning situations. Reminiscent of the learning the student participants in this study expressed as beneficial to their needs. Based on Thompson's (2004) work, parent perceptions of school and teachers depends heavily on the era that the parent attended school and the memories of their relationships with the teachers. This seemed to guide the selection of characteristics parents/guardians want in their child's teacher. However, without bringing the parents/guardians which includes the home and community context this leaves a large gap in the findings and interpretations of the schooling experiences of the African American male

The suggested recommendations for future research are dependent upon the capital of the individuals involved and how capital leads to achievement. Bourdieu (1986) discussed three forms of capital which included economic, cultural, and social capital. Economic capital includes money and property, which are the primary means of reproduction. Cultural capital includes embedded dispositions and customs acquired in the socialization process. Social capital includes an individual's ability to obtain or acquire things based on his or her family name, the schools he or she attended, and the social circles of which he or she may become a member. The capital that students would most likely bring to the school environment is social capital. Coleman (1988)

refers to teacher-student relationships as social capital and proposes that this capital is vital in the school socialization process.

Bourdieu and Coleman conducted research concerning social capital as it relates to the parent-child relationship within the school environment and recommended broadening the research scope to include the teacher-student relationship. Scholars have suggested that the incorporation of the home and community within the research of student learning needs is vital (Howard 2008, 2002, & 2001; Thompson, 2004; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, & Dillihunt, 2005). Similar to Mooney and Thornton's research (1999), future investigations must examine the teacher-student relationship as it relates to social capital. In their research, African American students felt their academic success was based largely on the relationship they had with their teachers. The findings of the present study also suggest there needs to be in-depth investigations on the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. Several student participants in this investigation questioned their teachers' commitment to helping them because their academic relationship failed to provide the support they needed. Research on social capital indicates that capital is gained within the socialization process. While some African American male students may have social capital within their homes and communities, the social capital for some students does not seem to translate effectively into the school environment. Future investigations must explore these dynamics more closely, examining why social capital transfers into the classroom for some African American males but not for others. Researchers must explore what factors impede this process and encourage it.

Additionally, future research must investigate how trust, value, and respect between student and teacher may impact the disconnection students may feel towards their teachers. This disconnect often leads to the absence of social capital within the classroom and ultimately affects

the students' academic and social successes (Barksdale & Triplett, 2010). For elementary-aged African American male students, more research in this area must evolve because the formative years set the stage for the academic growth of these students. According to national statistics and data on African American male student academic performance, these students are usually several grade levels behind by the time they reach middle school. To what extent might these issues of trust, value, and respect impact their acquisition of social capital within the classroom, and how might the lack of social capital retard their academic performance? These types of questions must fuel future scholars who are committed to investigating achievement gap issues.

Conclusion

African American males continue to underperform academically all other racial subgroups (Graham & Anderson, 2008; Howard, 2008). While a great deal of research has been conducted on this matter, this research investigation found that African American male students wanted their voices heard within the classroom, wanted their teachers and administrators to value them, wanted their teachers to challenge them, and wanted their teachers to use hands-on activities and electronic media to engage them. Findings from this study indicate that teachers discussed utilizing these approaches but did not actually implement them in their classroom activities, thus creating a "valley" where students were on one side and teachers were on another. Although some of the African American male students expressed their voice and cried out for help either silently or loudly in an attempt to bridge this valley, teachers did not acknowledge their needs, which caused the students to feel devalued and anxious about their future school success. Barksdale and Triplett's (2010) concluded "high levels of stress and worry in elementary children might be lessened if children knew that their voices were heard and valued" (p. 29).

By no means do the findings of this study imply the teacher participants did not care for their students. In reality, they wanted the best for their African American male students. The teachers felt that the instruction they provided their students would help them succeed not realizing their instructional decisions contributed to widening a “valley” between them and their students. In today’s society and the era of accountability, teachers are expected to differentiate their instruction to meet the learning needs of all students. However, teachers are remanded to the “same” curriculum, and they are faced with the task of trying to stay on track with “same” time lines in terms of pacing guides (negating the fact that some students acquire knowledge at a different rate). Given this context, teachers are often forced to move forward and they may go back to re-teach or review concepts that students have not mastered if time permits.

All of this must be accomplished so students who have different learning needs pass the “same” test(s). With an emphasis on “sameness” in the educational system, teachers are forced to feel that they should treat all their students “the same” since they strive for the “same” result, which unfortunately does not happen because of the variance between students. Teachers like the ones in this investigation try to provide the best instruction to each of their students in their classrooms in spite of the demands placed on them. However, these demands are part of the profession that they have chosen, and it is one that requires an individual to continually engage in professional development so he or she will feel more comfortable stepping out of one’s comfort zone and listening to other perspectives to try different approaches within the classroom.

For African American males like Byron whose experiences appeared in the prologue of this investigation, educators must be courageous and willing to venture into the valley to learn more about their experiences. What these educators will find is there are African American male students like Byron whose ability to learn complex material and skills is apparent in venues

within the community but external to the school, so incorporating into their instruction the interests, aspirations, and activities that these young African American boys encounter within their communities will ignite their passion for learning. To accomplish this goal, however, educators cannot focus on “sameness” because each student is truly different. Teachers and school administrators must understand and accept the reality that African American male students may encounter challenges with teachers, administrators, and staff that may result from perceptions about their behavior from previous academic years whereas other students may benefit from these individuals making excuses for them. These types of behaviors may lead to teachers constructing seating assignments or other class arrangements that may actually factor into an African American male student’s decision to misbehave further or disengage from the instructional presentation.

Additionally, educators must come to the realization that teachers, administrators, and staff regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status must engage in the honest examination and exploration of their biases and prejudices. Educators must be willing to engage in conversations with one another that may challenge previously held beliefs and practices. Moreover, educators must be bold and unapologetic in their efforts to differentiate instruction between students rather than relying on an approach of equality which this investigation finds further divides students from learning. These very educators must understand that learning truly is a socially-constructed process that should include the voices and experiences of all those persons involved in it. Educators who are courageous and willing to take these bold steps will learn that these young African American males will forever respect, value, and trust them because they will feel respected, valued, and trusted as learners.

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Appendix A

Teacher Participant Criteria

Based upon the following statements please select three teachers who teach either first, second or third grade:

1. Parents frequently request their child be placed or assigned to this teacher's classroom.
2. Students often visit or speak highly of the teacher.
3. The teacher demonstrates good classroom management (i.e. rarely sends students to the office).
4. The teacher demonstrates continuous academic growth noted by formal and informal student assessments.

Appendix B

Sample Email to Teacher Participants

From: Kimberly Erwin - kderwin@vt.edu
Date:
To:
Cc:
Subject: Your assistance is needed – How can we help your children?

Dear:

Ms. XXXX suggested I contact you for your assistance. I am currently a Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Tech and in the process of collecting data to complete my dissertation. I would like to request a time to meet with you to discuss some research that I would like to conduct in your classroom. I would like to work as partners in an attempt to help children in your school and across the nation learn. If you think she would be open to discussing my research in greater detail as well as participating, please contact me via email at kderwin@vt.edu or via phone 336-404-4727. Upon your response, I would like to set up a meeting with you at your earliest convenience, the sooner the better. I want to learn about the great things you are doing with children and hear your success stories and challenges.

Thank you in advance, for your consideration of this request!

Kimberly D. Erwin
Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix C

Teacher Participant Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects
Teacher Participant

Title of Project: African American Males: Needs and perceptions of instructional practices
Principal Investigator: Mary Alice Barksdale, Faculty Advisor
Co-Principal Investigator: Kimberly D. Erwin, Doctoral Candidate

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

This study is designed to explore the learning perceptions and needs of African American male students and their teachers' interpretations of their needs during the classroom activities and learning opportunities that take place. The participants in the study are the first, second or third grade African American male students and three teachers in the school who were chosen based on selected criteria. There will be no more than three teachers and nine students who will participate in the study. The purpose of this study is to provide descriptions and perceptions of the instructional practices of African American male participants, as well as their teachers' perceptions of their own instructional practices, particularly with regard to these students.

II. Procedures

Meetings with the researcher (Interviews, Observations, Focus Groups)

During the study, teacher participants will meet with the researcher to participate in two formal interviews that should last between 60 and 90 minutes in length. Three classroom observations will be conducted in the teacher's classroom; each observation will be followed by an informal interview. Each informal interview will last no longer than 30 minutes. All interviews will be scheduled at a time and location selected by the teacher.

Student participants will meet with the researcher for a total of two times for individual interviews and three times as a focus group. The location of the interviews and focus group will be determined by the school administration in an effort to provide the most comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere for the student participants. The interview and focus group times will be scheduled based upon the teachers' recommendation to alleviate multiple distractions throughout the school day.

All interviews will be recorded and transcribe for the teacher participant to review and make any changes necessary to provide a clear meaning of their thoughts and experiences shared. Student participants will also be given the opportunity to read over their interview transcriptions. If requested, the researcher will read over the transcription with the student to make sure they are aware and comfortable with the information that will be shared. Focus Group Sessions with the students will be recorded and transcribed; all transcriptions will be read to the group to again

provide an opportunity for the students to hear what information will be shared.

Field Notes recorded by the researcher

The researcher will record field notes during all classroom observations. These field notes will include notes on what occurred during the lesson and how the teachers and students responded. In the field notes, the researcher will not use the actual names of involved teachers. Rather, each teacher will select a pseudonym for her/himself, and these pseudonyms will be used throughout the field notes.

The researcher will record field notes about her experiences in the classrooms. Again, pseudonyms will be used to identify teachers. The field notes will include information about what student participants and teacher participants say and do while involved in the lesson and/or classroom activities. Students will not be referenced by name. The students will be identified by their chosen pseudonym. The purpose of field notes recorded in the classrooms is to document how actual classrooms activities are implemented.

III. Risks

This research project follows the model of participatory action research and is expected to pose no more than minimum risk normally associated with holding the position of a teacher in a primary school.

Researcher field notes will include no actual names; only pseudonyms. This classroom observation and interviews will take place during normal school hours and are expected to pose no more than minimum risk.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits is made to encourage teachers to participate in the project. Teachers may contact the researcher after the close of the project to obtain a summary of the research results via email (kderwin@vt.edu).

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

In observation field notes, interview transcripts, and researcher's journal, no names of teacher participants or children in the school will be used. Pseudonyms will be used exclusively. The name of the school will not be used in any publication about the research project. Every effort will be made to assure that the identities of individuals participating in the research will be kept confidential. Nonetheless, there exists the potential that in reading a publication about this research project, it would be possible for someone to deduce the location of the school and the identities of the participants.

Tapes of the interviews will be kept by the researcher in a locked file cabinet within the security of her home office and not made available to any other individuals. After they have been transcribed (using pseudonyms); the tapes/recordings will be destroyed and/or deleted.

It is possible that the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection

of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation for participation in this research project.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Participants in this research project are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants are free not to answer any questions or respond without penalty.

VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- Participate in the parent, teacher, student and researcher conference to provide the parent with information concerning the project (August)
- Participate in two individual formal interviews, one at the start of the study (August), and one at the end of the study (Late October/ Early November) Participate in approximately three classroom observations and three follow-up (informal) interviews (September 1, 2010 - October 29, 2010)
- Allow the researcher access to my classroom during instructional time as an observer.

IX. Subject's Permission

Even if you sign this form, you are free at any time to withdraw from the project itself or from the research on it. There will be no penalty for withdrawing. To withdraw, you may contact Ms. Kimberly D. Erwin at (336) 404-4727 or email: kderwin@vt.edu . If you prefer, you may contact Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale, Faculty advisor at (540) 231-3166 or email: mbarksda@vt.edu.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information and have agreed to participate in this study.

| | |
|---|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| Signature of Participant | Date |
| _____ | _____ |
| Kimberly D. Erwin, Virginia Tech | Date |
| _____ | _____ |
| Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale, Faculty Advisor | Date |

David Moore, Chairperson
Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Compliance
(540) 231-4991

[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]

Appendix D

Parental Consent Form

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Parental Permission for Student (Minor) Participation in Research Study

Title of Project: African American Males: Needs and perceptions of instructional practices
Principal Investigator: Mary Alice Barksdale, Faculty Advisor
Co-Principal Investigator: Kimberly D. Erwin, Doctoral Candidate

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

This is an invitation for your child to participate in this research. Should you choose to allow your child to participate, you will help us enhance our understanding of child's needs, thoughts and feelings about the lessons and learning activities his teacher presents in the classroom by sharing their experiences.

II. Procedures

If you agree to for your child to participate in the research he may be asked to do the following:

- Participate in two individual interviews each lasting no longer than 30 minutes to one hour.
- Participate in three focus groups sessions that will last no more than one hour to one and a half hours in length.
- Discuss his thoughts and feelings about the activities that take place during three scheduled classroom observations

All interviews and group sessions will focus on your child's experiences as a student. The interviews and focus group sessions will be audio taped and transcribed.

Your child as a student participant will also be given the opportunity to read over their response from the interview questions. If your child request, the researcher will read over the transcription of the interview to make sure your child is aware and comfortable with the information that will be shared. Focus Group Sessions will also be recorded and transcribed; all transcriptions will be read to the group to provide an opportunity for your child and the other group members to hear what information will be shared from their discussion.

III. Benefits

There is no monetary reward for your child's participation, nor is there any guarantee that your child will directly benefit from this experience. However, your child will be helping us to understand what they feel and think about their learning experiences and how we can help them to be successful at school.

IV. Confidentiality

During the first interview, your child will select a pseudonyms (pretend or make belief name). This is the name your child will be called during the interview and it is the name that will represent them in the data and publications. No one will have access to this data other than the researchers.

There are limits to confidentiality in this study. For ethical reasons, if your child reveals that (a) they have plans or intentions to harm self or (b) have plans or intentions to harm other persons, we will report this information to the school principal. Your child will be reminded of this at the beginning of each interview.

It is possible that the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

V. Freedom to Withdraw

Even if you sign this form, your child is free at any time to withdraw from the project itself or from the research on it. There will be no penalty for withdrawing. To withdraw, you may contact Ms. Kimberly D. Erwin at (336) 404-4727 or email: kderwin@vt.edu or you may contact Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale, Faculty advisor at (540) 231-3166 or email: mbarksda@vt.edu. If you prefer, you may contact Mr. David Moore, Chair of Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board, at (540) 231-4991.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information and have agreed to allow your child to participate in this study.

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Kimberly D. Erwin, Researcher/Investigator Date

Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale, Faculty Advisor Date

[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]

Appendix E

Student Participant Assent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Student Assent Form

I. Reason

I am a student at Virginia Tech. I am doing a study about children and their work in school. I would like your help. I want to learn about what you think about things you do in your classroom.

II. Process

If you work with me, you will be asked to:

- Meet with me two times to talk about what you think
- Meet 3 times in a small group with me and two other kids in your classroom. We will talk about what you think and feel about work I watch in your room.

A tape recorder will be used. Later, I will write what you said. We will read what you said together to make sure I wrote what you said and thought.

III. Benefits

You will not be given any rewards or gifts for help on the study.

IV. Confidentiality

You will pick out a pretend name for yourself. This name will be used in our meetings. I will use the pretend name when I write about you. I won't write anything with your real name. I won't tell anyone what your real name is. I won't tell anyone about what you say to me.

If you say that:

- You have plans to hurt yourself, or
- Have plans to hurt other people, I will tell your school principal.

You will be reminded about this when we have meetings.

Someone at Virginia Tech might look at some information from the study. Virginia Tech protects people who help with research projects.

V. Free to leave or to stop helping

It is your choice to help with the study. You can stop helping if you want. You won't get in any trouble if you decide not to help. You won't get any trouble if you decide to quit. You can stop at any time.

If you have questions, you may call Ms. Kimberly D. Erwin at (336) 404-4727 or Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale at (540) 818-8620.

VI. Giving Permission

I agree that:

- This permission form was read to me and explained.
- I had a chance to ask questions and I could understand the answers.
- I have been given a copy of this form, and it is mine to keep.

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|------|
| Sign Your Name | Printed Your Name | Date |
|----------------|-------------------|------|

Investigator Statement

I have carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above protocol. I hereby certify that the best of my knowledge the participant signing this assent form, understands the nature, demands, risk and benefits involved in participating in this study.

| | |
|--|------|
| Kimberly D. Erwin, Researcher/Investigator | Date |
|--|------|

| | |
|---|------|
| Dr. Mary Alice Barksdale, Faculty Advisor | Date |
|---|------|

David Moore, Chairperson
Virginia Tech IRB
(540) 231-4991

Appendix F

Timeline

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| September 6 – no school | 9/7-interview w/teacher participants | 9/8 Initial Interview with Teacher participants | 9/9 | 9/10 | |
| 9/13 | 9/14 General Observation (Student Participant Selection) | 9/15 General Observation (Student Participant Selection) | 9/16 General Observation (Student Participant Selection) | 9/17 | Share transcription Initial Interview teacher participants |
| 9/20 Teacher #1 Parent/Student Teacher Researcher Meeting – Consent/Assent Forms Signed and meetings | 9/21 Early Release Day for students and teacher Training | 9/22 Teacher #2 Parent/Student Teacher Researcher Meeting – Consent/Assent Forms Signed and meetings | 9/23 Teacher #3 Parent/Student Teacher Researcher Meeting – Consent/Assent Forms Signed and meetings | 9/24 | |
| 9/27 Opening Individual Interview with Student Participants (Teacher #1) | 9/28 Opening Individual Interview with Student Participants (Teacher #2) | 9/29 Opening Individual Interview with Student Participant (Teacher #3) | 9/30 Observation #1 – Teacher #1 Classroom Focus Group | 10/1 | |
| October 4 Observation #1 – Teacher #2 Classroom Focus Group | 10/5 Observation #1 – Teacher #3 Classroom Focus Group | 10/6 Observation #2 – Teacher #1 Classroom Focus Group | 10/7 Observation #2 – Teacher #2 Classroom Focus Group | 10/8 | Share transcription Initial Interview student participants |
| 10/11 Observation #2 – Teacher #3 Classroom Focus Group | 10/12 Observation #3 – Teacher #1 Classroom Focus Group | 10/13 Observation #3 – Teacher #2 Classroom Focus Group | 10/14 Observation #3 – Teacher #3 Classroom Focus Group | 10/15 | |
| 10/18 Closing Individual Interview with Student Participants (Teacher #1) | 10/19 Closing Individual Interview with Student Participants (Teacher #2) | 10/20 Closing Individual Interview with Student Participants (Teacher #3) | 10/21 | 10/22 | |
| 10/25 Closing Interview with Teacher Participant #1 | 10/26 Closing Interview with Teacher Participant #2 | 10/27 Closing Interview with Teacher Participant #3 | 10/28 | 10/29 | Share transcription Closing Interview student participants |
| November 1 Follow Up | 2 Follow Up | 3 Follow Up | 4 Follow Up | 5 Follow Up | Share transcription Closing Interview teacher participants |
| 8 Follow Up | 9 Follow Up | 10 Follow Up | 11 Follow Up | 12 Follow Up | Follow-up Time (If Needed) |
| 15 Follow Up | 16 Follow Up | 17 Follow Up | 18 Follow Up | 19 Follow Up | Follow-up Time (If Needed) |
| 22 Follow Up | 23 Follow Up | 24 NO SCHOOL - Holiday | 25 NO SCHOOL - Holiday | 26 NO SCHOOL -Holiday | Follow-up Time (If Needed) |

Appendix G

Teacher Participant Interview Questions

Initial Questions (Opening Interview)

1. How long have you lived in the area?
2. Where were you born?
3. In what teacher education program did you complete your teaching degree? What degree do you have?
4. Why did you choose teaching as a profession?
5. Do you have your Master degree or National Board Certification? When did you get this/these?
6. If you have a master degree, what institution did you receive your master degree?
7. How long have you been teaching?
8. What grades have you taught?
9. What key instructional activities do you use in your classroom?
10. What key instructional strategies do you use in your classroom?
11. Considering the African American males in your classroom, tell me what activities you feel are critical in helping these young men be successful?
12. In the same vein, tell me some of the critical methods you use to work with these young men?
13. How do you decide which or what instructional practice(s) you will use with your African American male students

Informal Question (Post-Observation)

1. Describe (students' pseudonym) reaction to the learning experiences during the observation today. How do you think (students' pseudonym) did during this time? Do you think they experienced success, to what degree? Tell me about their level of success or the lack there of?
2. What appeared to motivate (students' pseudonym) to participate in the lesson today? What do you think made a difference?
3. Think about the lesson today, did any of the activities of lessons hinder the motivation of these students?

Closing Questions

1. What instructional practice(s) or activities do you think these young African American male students relate to in terms of grasping concepts being taught? In this case, tell me more about your thinking.
2. How do you match their learning preferences to your teaching style/practices?
3. If you detect there is a possible mismatch? Is this a critical issue? Explain to me how you think this mismatch occurs? How do you address this issue?
4. Does it appear that these students (African American male students) seem to feel valued as a member of the classroom? How do you know this, give examples?

Appendix H

Student Participant Interview Questions

Initial Questions (Opening Interview)

1. How old are you?
2. When is your birthday?
3. Where were you born?
4. Do you have brothers or sisters, how many?
5. Are you older or younger?
6. What are some of your favorite things to do?
7. What are the kinds of things you do at home, afterschool and on weekends?
8. Do you play mostly by yourself, with a friend, with a brother or sister, with a friend or with a bunch of kids (those you know and those you do not know)?
9. What makes you want to learn in school?
10. Do you think your teacher tries to make sure you like the activities that are in the classroom? Give me an example of an activity you like. Tell me about it.
11. Do you do some of the same type of activities at home? Tell me about the activities. Where do you like to do them?
12. What things do you like about school or in your classroom?
13. What things do you not like about school or your classroom?
14. If you could have a special day (think about a day you had a GREAT time) just for you what would you want to do in school?
15. Tell me what would make you choose to do this?
16. Is it something you do at home or in your community?

17. If you could be the grown up in the classroom, what would you change about your class?

18. Why would you want to make this change?

Informal Questions (post-observation)

1. What is your favorite subject or activities in school?

During the Observation today...

2. What did you like best about (subject) the lesson today?

3. Explain to me what you liked about the lesson?

4. Why did you like it, did it remind you of something you do at home?

5. Was there anything that you did not like about the lesson today? If yes, tell me what you did not like.

6. What part of the lesson was easy for you? What made you consider this to be so easy?

7. Why do you think your teacher chose to let you do this?

8. Was anything hard about the lesson? Why do you think the teacher chose the activity? Did you tell her it was hard? Why was the activity hard for you? If so, why?

9. What your overall feeling about the lesson, would like to do that type of lesson again? Give me an example of what makes you want to do the lesson again.

10. Did the lesson remind you of things you do at home or in your neighborhood with your family and friends?

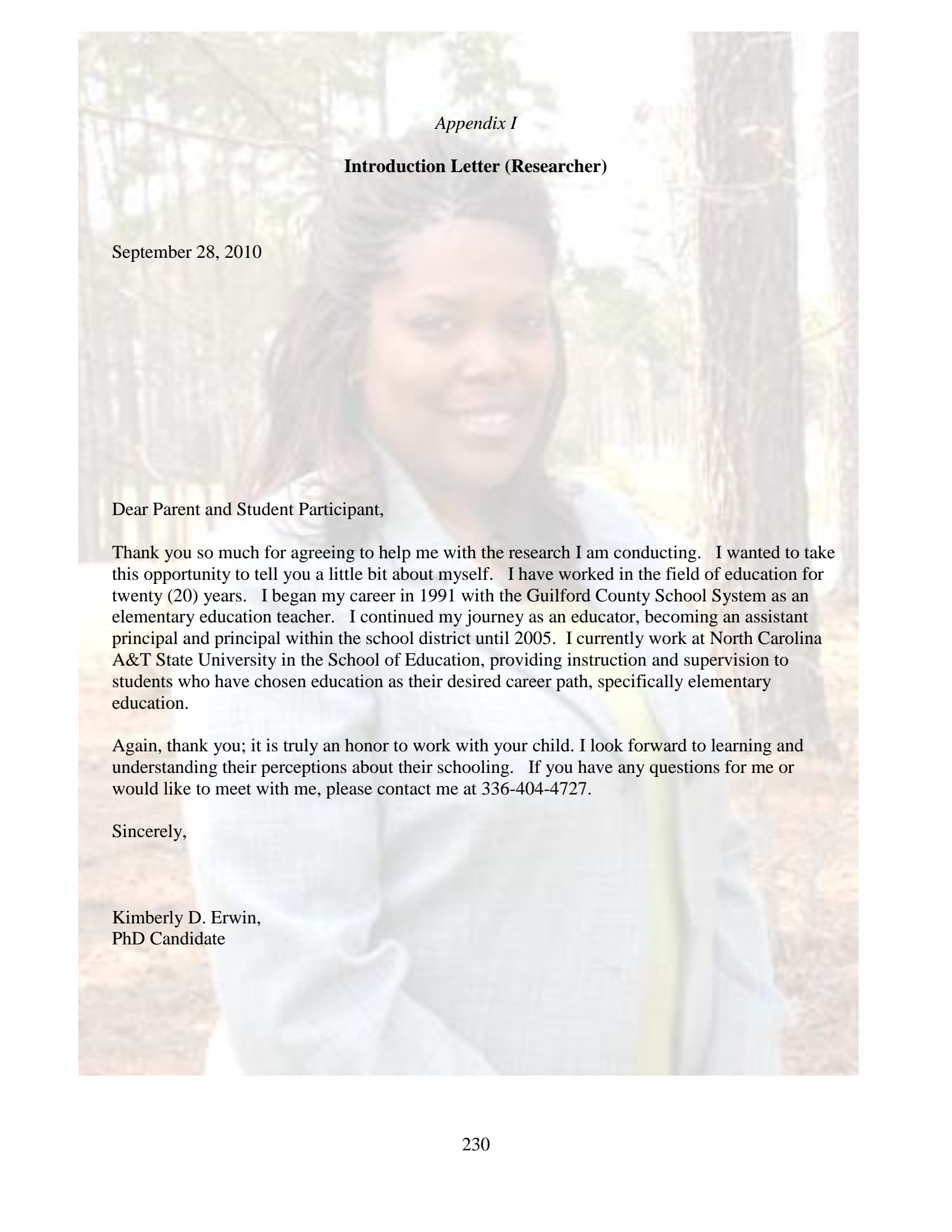
Closing Question

1. How would you describe your feelings about how you learn (chosen subject/activity) at school?

2. Do you think your teacher knows what things you like to do and what helps you learn?

3. Does your teacher do the things you like and that help you?

4. If you could decide what activities help you learn, what would they be?



Appendix I

Introduction Letter (Researcher)

September 28, 2010

Dear Parent and Student Participant,

Thank you so much for agreeing to help me with the research I am conducting. I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you a little bit about myself. I have worked in the field of education for twenty (20) years. I began my career in 1991 with the Guilford County School System as an elementary education teacher. I continued my journey as an educator, becoming an assistant principal and principal within the school district until 2005. I currently work at North Carolina A&T State University in the School of Education, providing instruction and supervision to students who have chosen education as their desired career path, specifically elementary education.

Again, thank you; it is truly an honor to work with your child. I look forward to learning and understanding their perceptions about their schooling. If you have any questions for me or would like to meet with me, please contact me at 336-404-4727.

Sincerely,

Kimberly D. Erwin,
PhD Candidate