AMERICAN AFRICAN MEN SHARE THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AMERICAN AFRICAN MALES

by

SABREEN JAI

(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

In America, failure and African men are dialogically linked as an inevitable occurrence. This culture of failure could possibly be instigated and perpetuated through the very institution that is designed to prevent societal failure and nurture embryonic academic and social success, our nation's schools. For the vast majority of African males, this house of preparation has yielded a disproportionate return of failure. While the academic failure of American African males (AAMs) has elicited volumes of qualitative academic studies, the voices of the purported failing population, American African fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, and others have been absent from the academic conversation. The purpose of my study is to provide an audience for the truant voices (Hunter & Davis, 1994) of non-academic AAMs and their perceptions of educational success or failure of their own sons or social sons (Rukmalie J., 2002). Heretofore, the voices of non-academic AAMs have been unexamined as potential resources in addressing the undaunted achievement gap. It is my goal to provide teachers, counselors, and researchers

with a seminal component, indeed a vital link in the failure of American education to effectively

serve and service the systematically neglected population of AAMs.

I argue that the pervasive allegations of illiteracy and the academic achievement gap are

merely symptoms of a greater problem that has yet to be fully acknowledged and addressed in

America. That problem is race, racism, and the eternal harboring of Eurocentric social,

economic, cultural, and educational male-dominated hegemony.   I, therefore, suggest that a

more accurate description of the so-called achievement gap is *achievement trap* and that the

knowledge that is assessed is not self-value-building for the descendants of the Africans brought

to America as slaves. While AAMs may be *gapped* in their achievement of assimilation in

Eurocentric educational values, they are invariably simultaneously *trapped* in a seemingly

permanent discourse of academic inadequacy, intellectual illiteracy, and un-achievement.

INDEX WORDS: American African males, African American males, Critical Race Theory,
                  reading, achievement gap, achievement trap, culturally responsive
                  pedagogy

AMERICAN AFRICAN MEN SHARE THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY

LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AMERICAN AFRICAN

MALES

by

SABREEN U. JAI

B.S., Tennessee State University, 1972

M.Ed., University of Alabama in Birmingham, 1998

Ed.S., University of Georgia, 2005

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011

AMERICAN AFRICAN MEN SHARE THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY

LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AMERICAN AFRICAN

MALES

by

SABREEN U. JAI

Major Professor:	JoBeth Allen
Committee:	Tarek Grantham
	Margaret Wilder

DEDICATION

It is with supreme veneration and respect that I dedicate this treatise to the greatest men I know—to my daddy, Thomas L. Moore, a builder among builders, an entrepreneur who defied cross burnings in our yard, but prayed for those who did it, who taught me to pursue my dreams, but guard my heart from hatred. Thank you, Daddy. It is because of that challenge that I transformed what could have become hatred into activism. To my brothers who watched the men in our family very closely and also became great strong men, shaped and formed into a strong resemblance of our father and his father before him—Thomas (affectionately called Ba-Bro) who has been our shelter from the storm in so many ways; Michael who should have been a famous comedian, but chose to serve in the medical health industry and they are so fortunate to have such a caring soul; Glenn who possesses the ingenuity of Bill Gates, Ross Perot, and Steve Jobs rolled into one, but his keys don't fit the locks. Undaunted and staying on the grind daily, Glenn says, "There's no such thing as never—just not today." I admire and believe in you, Glenn. And to my brother, Raynard, who can always always make me laugh, always has a listening ear and an open heart, and who has been there for my children and for me unquestionably. Thank you, Baby Ray.

To my precious sons, Dia, my first born, my rock, gave me my first grandson, is always on my side, and has no problem being called a "Momma's Boy." To Isaiah, born under my sign of balance and centeredness, who accepts whole-heartedly the injunction, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." I see great things for you, Hakeem. And to my youngest son, Noah, with a heart of gold and a desire to do the right thing, never stop believing in karma.

Good always comes back to you. To my son, Gerrard, I am so proud of you and your resilience. Hold fast to your dreams, my son, and stay just the man you are.

To my grandsons, Khyri, Isaiah, Emmanuel (Manny), Joshua, Charles, and those unborn, who are now protected by the strong arms of their fathers and the comforting bosoms of their mothers, know that we are striving to make this world a better place for you. To my sons-in-law: Abdul, a father, a teacher, a coach, a husband to my daughter, Ihsan. If I had crafted you myself, I would have missed some of your goodness. You are an excellent example for all of the young men you mentor. Thank you for all that you are. To Xavier, the look in the eyes of Shawn, your son when he looks at you says it all. You must be special to be loved so sincerely. To Willie, like Xavier, to be loved by your children is a gift, which you appreciate very well. Thank you for loving Kia and taking good care of her and the children while they are so far away.

To my uncles, Uncle Samuel Moore who is the kindest, most knowledgeable and considerate teacher/mentor I know. Your goodness has impacted me more than you'll ever know. To my Uncle Victor Moore, who balanced the benevolence of my father with the reality of voice, defiance, courage, and the determination to be a man he himself can be proud of. To my Uncle Joseph Owens, who taught us at an early age how to laugh at our mistakes and not to take ourselves too seriously, and who can still make my mother laugh so hard that she cries. To my Uncle Samuel Owens who, like my granddaddy, did not waste words, but his actions said it all. His reach is still here helping us along the way, even though we can't see him. For all those years of devoted service on a job that never acknowledged your worth, thank you, Sam. To the memories of my granddaddy, Rev. Victor C. Moore, a gentle giant who made my grandmother feel butterflies even in their 60s, a man of few words, but who commanded attention when he spoke. I dedicate this paper to you, the men in my family and to my participants who are like

these men in many ways. I so appreciate your candidness, willingness, and commitment to lend your voices to this humble undertaking.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my students who show me every day that they are so special and have so much to offer the world. America owes it to itself to rethink its portrayal and programming of you and rewrite with you the script for your success. To all the strong, brilliant, courageous brothers who stand on the shoulders of your great ancestors and refuse to be defined, I dedicate this dissertation to you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I decided to pursue a doctorate degree, I was a mature woman with grandchildren. I understood that it would take some hard work, which I believed I was prepared to do, since my children were grown and my youngest was in high school. After all, my biggest challenge was writing my lesson plans and getting them in by Monday morning, which generally took most of my Sundays. So, all I needed to do was get my lesson plans done by Sunday afternoon, so I could study the other half of the day. Yeah, right. Not only did I need half the day on Sunday, I needed to add another day in the week to complete all of the readings, write papers, and complete projects on time. I quickly found out that I wasn't working on my doctorate. My doctorate was working on me! I have survived because of the love and support of too many to call by name. So, please accept this noble attempt to recall as many of you as I possibly can and if I neglect to mention anyone by name, please charge it to my head and not my heart.

First and foremost, I want to honor the all-encompassing embracing energy of goodness, renewal, rejuvenation, spirit, guidance, and all the good karma brought my way. It enveloped me, set, and kept me on this path from beginning to end. I am eternally grateful. The days when I was tired and weary, I was propelled forward by this energy that was not only a constant reminder of my charge, but also provided me a gentle surge to lift me up again. Many times, this surge came through my parents, Thomas and Willie Mae Moore, who supported me mentally, physically, financially, spiritually, in every way possible. Their kind words and encouragement gave me strength when I thought I couldn't take another step. I once heard someone say that the Almighty gave us parents to act on her behalf. I believe it. There are no words to express my

deep love and respect for you, MuDear and Daddy. I pray that I am blessed with the good fortune to give you back some of the joy and peace that you've given to me.

Other times, this energy came through my sisters and brothers. Thomas and Michael have supported me and my children financially, spiritually, mentally, and in every way I can think of. I love you both so much. My sisters, Velma (lovingly called Bay-Bay) and Renee have always been there in an up close and personal kind of way. They have rubbed my feet, washed my clothes, cooked, taken care of my children physically and financially, and did whatever they could do to help me through this journey. They waited on me hand and foot when I was under the weather. Thank you, Bay-Bay and Renee, for relieving my concern for our parents during their moments of weakness. For you both have been their doctor, nurse, chauffeur, comforter, eyes, ears, and legs—angels indeed. Never a complaint, grumble, or even a sigh—you've always given of yourselves cheerfully and lovingly. I love you both so much and am forever indebted to you. Thank you for reading for me and forever blessing my work. If I can live up to the "me" that you see, I will have accomplished much. May you be blessed bountifully as you have blessed others. To my sisters-in-law, Wilma and Donnetta, you are my sisters in spirit and soul. Thank you so much for all that you have done for my brothers, my parents, my children, and for me. You had truly been troopers and I love you for that. I thank all of my cousins, nieces, and nephews for your faith in me. I love and appreciate you all. Thank you, Mother Mildred Cain for you unfailing support and love for my family. We love you so much. To the sweet memory of Mrs. Lucille Ford, thank you Mom, for your tender loving spirit. I know you're smiling that beautiful smile. I feel it radiating and encouraging me forward. I love you forever.

My children, all eight of them, were the wind beneath my wings. I've talked about my sons before, but my daughters have been real troopers. Kia, who lives in Las Vegas, calls constantly to check on me and to make me laugh and remind me to "take a chill pill" when it seems my work is overwhelming. Shawn makes me proud following in my footsteps with five babies, but having a lot more patience. Each and every one of her babies is a joy just like she is. She never lets me forget how much she loves me. Ihsan, my baby, thank you for calling every morning on our way to work, just to see how I slept and how my morning is going. It means so much to me. Thank you for always being willing to read a passage or listen to a brainstorm. I appreciate you baby. Ashanti, my boo, is also my mini-me to the third power. Thank you, my baby Ashanti, for all that you do from cleaning, shopping, cooking, bossing, keeping the boys in check, doing it all before I even ask. I love having you around. Najwa, my grown defiant baby, keeps me on my toes, always pushing me to broaden my thinking and nudging me beyond my self-imposed limitations. Thank you for enlightening me and grooming me to be who I am in so many ways. I want to thank my daughters, Danielle and Hollie, for being the mothers that you are to my grandbabies. You are wonderful caring mothers and my babies are so fortunate to have you in their lives. It has meant so much to me to be able to study knowing that those I love are protected and safe. I pray for your continued strength and happiness. To my niece, Dink, thank you for being your sweet you and taking my baby in while she was in school in Savannah. I appreciate your sacrifice. You, Carlton, Jaden, and Jordan were a bundle of joy and love and I appreciate you forever!

Let me extend a warm fuzzy to my extended family and *sistas*: Myra and Gaye, the very first people I met on my first day at the Big Blue, TSU!—then, Sennie, Johnnie, and Valena (may her soul be blessed) shortly after. We have had a strong 40+ year friendship with no end in

sight! We've celebrated our first real jobs, those we've quit, and the discrimination suits we've

won! Myra, we even had our first-born, our marriages, and our divorces all together. You've

been there for me every step of the way, literally. We have laughed, cried, fussed, and rejoiced

together through all these years. Now, I celebrate this milestone with you as well. I love you all

and look forward to many many more laughs and triumphs. Crystal, girl, where do I start? You

fed me, ran errands, ran taxi for my children, stuffed and addressed envelopes, gave me stamps,

house shoes, I could go on and on. You have literally been my lifeline. You and Briunna, my

granddaughter in a real sense, have been a backbone to me. I love and appreciate you all very

very much! To Freda, my confidante, friend, and faithful sista, like Crystal you have been here

for me in countless ways. You found my house, or shall I say houses. You found my daughter's

house and your advice—where would I be without it. You are a dear dear unforgettable friend.

To my sisters, Diane, Teresa, Vernae and the entire Cox Family, thank you so much for always

being there for me and my children, for your love, and your faithful support. Shelia and Naimah,

I hear your laughter in my soul. Our chats have done so much to cheer my spirits. I can just

think about our journeys together and I get fired up to keep going. I love you both very much.

To my sista, Faye Mathis, and my niece, Minita, thank you for teaching me the ins and outs of

Las Vegas, of knowing when to hold up, fold up, walk away and when to run! Thank you for

showing me love on my first and subsequent visits to Los Angeles. To Cynthia Barnes, although

our paths crossed during our mature years, I feel like I've known you all my life. You are one of

the kindest, purest, and most unpretentious souls I've ever had the pleasure of meeting and for

that I am thankful. I have been blessed through your spirit. I love you L.A. guys very much. To

Aunt Gladys Elliott, a 94-year-old "real" Diva who has demonstrated strength and fortitude that

is matchless. I cherish your knowledge, Aunt Gladys, and pray that I possess a smidgen of your

wisdom and class when I grow up. To Boosie, Minnie Sullivan, my other mother, your

sweetness and humble spirit should be a vaccine and prescribed to humankind. I love you and

cherish your sweet spirit. To my dear sista, friend, comrade, and confidante, Dorothy El-Amin, I

love you more with every passing day and I owe so much of who I am to you. And although I

can't touch you physically, I know you're touching me and blessing my every step. Peace be

with you always and bless your soul.

I want to thank my principal for more than 10 years, Dr. Yvonne Sanders-Butler. It is a

very special blessing to have a boss who is a friend, confidante, and dear *sista*. Dr. Butler, you

are the leader of all leaders—a true "servant leader" as you say. I am indebted to you and could

not have done this without your support. Thank you for your wisdom and understanding,

allowing me to grow under your leadership, and to do me.

I extend warm and special thanks to Dr. Curtis Grier in the DeKalb County Research

Department for his wisdom, patience, and thought provoking questions. Your contribution to

this effort was powerful and profound.

Thank you, Browns Mill family, for your support, contributions, and encouragement; Dr.

Tan Goodjoines for your friendship, support, counsel, sharing your dissertation, great stories, and

always the promise of a good laugh; Lee Griffin and Merle Wilmot, we've grown together over

the years with our children, our experiences, and our scholarship. Thank you for your

unwavering friendship and support; Stephanie Dean for sharing your book, *Lest We Forget,* for

these six years, articles, stimulating conversations, and arguments, too (smile); Gerald Riser for

believing in me, encouraging me, always ready to lend a helping hand and even "being" the hand

in many cases; for giving me books that you thought would help me along the way—and they

did, and for always taking me back in time with a song or old saying from back in the day;

and the many laughs we shared. I want to thank my principal, Alicia Smith, for your enduring

support and understanding. To my Assistant Principal of Instruction, Lawanzer Smith, thank you

for the unfailing laughter and my carpal tunnel syndrome due to your perfectionism. I love it!

Thank you, Brandon Butler, my Assistant Principal for always having my back and for your ever

present understanding. To the greatest instructional coach a teacher could have, Anissa Mathis.

Thank you, Ms. Mathis, for all of the heads-up on new and innovative strategies, methods, and

materials. You are a wonderful coach, teacher, and friend. To all of my family at Browns Mill,

those who have moved on and those still here, for any smile or kind word you gave,

encouragement, help with a project, or well wishes, thank you, thank you, thank you. I love you

all!

Hakim Mutakabbir, my dear brother and friend, thank you for the long long

conversations that opened my mind and my heart to new and different ways of thinking. Thank

you for letting me be myself…always and loving me in spite of. I appreciate you more than you

know. I respect you. I love you.

To Dr. Scott Ritchie, my friend, my classmate, thank you for always being there and

finding a way to always respond to my requests. Your input along my journey has made a huge

difference in this project. Thank you and much love. To Lois Alexander, Gwen Holley and the

Red Clay Writing Group, thank you for the "Presses, the Blesses, and Addresses." I definitely

could not have made it without you. To Gwen Williams, Chinwe Obijiofor, Liz, Oretha,

Constance, Debra, and all of my friends at my surrogate writing group, Peachtree Writing

Project, thank you for keeping it real, always giving me a ride to our meeting places, telling me,

"Don't worry about it, Sabreen. We got it!" I love and appreciate you guys so much.

To the members of Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ, thank you for your prayers and well wishes through the years. I love you all. To the Atlanta Masjid, thank you also for your prayers, well wishes, and support.

To my cousin, Dr. Nathaniel Pollard, who has been one of my most profound inspirations. From our Algebra instructor, Mrs. Martin, in high school to my grandmother and your aunt, you have always be the receiver of great accolades. You taught me how to drive and you demonstrated the patience of a teacher even then! I will never forget how proud our whole family was when you were the first American African to graduate with a Ph.D. in Mathematics from the University of Oklahoma. You have always been and continue to be my big brother, my mentor, my teacher, my friend and I love you very much.

To the members of my dissertation committee, Drs. JoBeth Allen, Margaret Wilder, and Tarek Grantham, the true wind beneath my wings. I have learned so much from you not only in your classes, but as my wise but sensitive leaders throughout this journey. I will forever cherish your guidance, counsel, and camaraderie. I am grateful that it was you that lead me through the turbulent terrain of writing a dissertation. I would not have wanted anyone else but you. Thank you and may you be blessed in all of your good endeavors. I want to also thank Becky Hendren in the Language Education Department, who has always encouraged me and even when I might panic because of turning in something late, she always kept a positive outlook. Thank you, Becky. I appreciate you and your support through the years. Finally, I want to extend my most sincere gratitude to Michael W. Dean with The University of Georgia Graduate Enrolled Student Services Department. Michael meticulously reviewed my final treatise and ever so kindly coached me in producing this final product. Thank you, Michael, and I pray for success in your endeavors as you have so generously helped me in mine.

To my dearest Fritz, my soul mate, my best half, my protector, my Big Daddy… in the midst of this journey, the angels sent me you. Grace guided us back to each other after more than forty years apart. You have been my first in too many ways to recall. So much of the success of this undertaking goes to you. For when my computer crashed with years of work vaulted inside, you came along and bought me a new computer with all the frills and warranties that I would have automatically dismissed—saying ever so cavalierly, "You don't have to worry about *that* happening again." My Big Daddy! Thank you for giving me joy I only dreamed of, for giving me comfort I always wanted to give to others, for giving me security I never thought possible, and for taking me places I never could have imagined going—in FIRST CLASS! Thank you for *alI* that you are to me. I love you and appreciate you more than you'll ever know!

To the many of you who have given me a kind word, a smile, a prayer, a thought, or any gesture of encouragement, I extend my warmest thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

ACHIEVEMENT GAP OR *TRAP?* AMERICAN AFRICAN ADULT MALES SHARE

PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL AND CLOSING THE EXISTENTIAL GAP IN

READING ACHIEVEMENT

In 1914, Dr. Thomas Pearce Bailey, Dean of the Department of Education and professor

of psychology and education at the University of Mississippi proffered a commentary on racial

creed in *Race Orthodoxy in the South.* Included were the following points.

…blood will tell; the Negro is inferior and will remain so; this is a White man's country;

no social equality; no political equality; in matters of civil rights and legal adjustments

give the White man, as opposed to the colored man, the benefit of the doubt, and under

no circumstances interfere with the prestige of the White race; in educational policy let

the Negro have the crumbs that fall from the White man's table; let there be such

industrial education of the Negro as will best fit him to serve the White; only Southerners

understand the Negro question; let the South settle the Negro question; the status of

peasantry is all the Negro may hope for, if the races were to live together in peace; and

the above statements indicate the leanings of Providence (Bailey, 1914, as cited in

Newby, 1965) (Bailey, 1914)

I watched in cautious exhilaration as Barack Obama approached the dais waving humbly

to the ecstatic audience. Mingled in the crowd of well-wishers demonstrating the audacity of

hope I saw the great Kings Imhotep, Mansa Mussa, Menelek II, Askia, along with Kunta, and

Frederick, Marcus, Medgar, Emmett, Martin, my grandfather, and a host of other African men

singing, screaming, and chanting victory. Now, after more than 200 years of physical, mental,

and social castration, one African man has penetrated that barrier of racism, risen above Dean

Bailey's relegation of *industrial education,* and demonstrated to the world that he, the first Black

American President of the United States, is above the level of "the brute" (Douglass, 1983). He

liberated the voices of Black men across the globe by showing that he was ready, willing and

able to lead this nation. His slogan, "Yes, we can!" reverberated in boundless proportions

throughout the universe particularly for the silenced voices of African men.

In America, failure and African men have historically been linked as an inevitability, the

natural order of things, particularly educationally. Research indicates that this culture of failure is

overwhelmingly reported through the very institution that is designed to enhance societal

appreciation and nurture embryonic academic success—our nation's schools? For the vast

majority of African males, this house of preparation and cultivation has been the womb of

failure. Voluminous studies have been conducted to address the purported academic failure of

Black males (Cleveland, 2003; Davis, 2003; Gibbs, 1988; Grantham, 2004a; Hrabowski, Maton,

& Greif, 1998; Jackson, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999) and dominant discourse

ubiquitously suggests that American African males[1] as a whole are functionally illiterate, failing

---

[1] A note of explanation: Throughout this paper, you will notice the term *American Africans*.
This is intentional. I believe that failure is more or less a matter of discourse. In the case of
American Africans, I believe it is important to understand our identity first as dispersed Africans
who were captured and subsequently enslaved in America. Africans were welcomed to
American shores primarily in the capacity of servants and the title of American came only
through protest. As Derrick Bell so aptly explicates, "America has been able to define itself as a
White country by marking Blacks as that which does not constitute it" (Browne-Marshall, 2007)
p. xii. Africans who migrated to the shores of America voluntarily seeking a better life willing
choose to become nationalized citizens of America, thus African Americans. On the other hand,
I refer to children of enslaved ancestors as American Africans and therefore, make the distinction

to achieve essential academic gains statistically in more than four decades (Holzman, 2004; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2008). This discourse insidiously implies that American African males are inherently uneducable, apathetic, or lazy. Despite the plethora of research and innovative instructional strategies, the staggering statistics of failure persists.

While several studies have concentrated on the voices American African adolescent and teenaged males in middle school and in high school (Ford, 1996; Grantham, 2004a; Grantham, 2004b; Hopkins, 1997; Hrabowski et al., 1998; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Lee, 1994; 1994a; Moore, Flowers, Guion, Zhang, & Staten, 2004; Sewell & Majors, 2001; Tatum, 1999), few studies have focused on the American African male (AAM) in elementary school and the influences of adult males on his thoughts and feelings about education and schooling.

This chapter serves as an introduction to my study, providing a historical backdrop for the American African presence in this country, for American African males in particular, and the link to educational achievement. The struggle of AAMs to survive in America is well documented. They are impacted disproportionately by joblessness, homelessness, AIDS, inadequate health care, and practically every other societal ill. In addition, there is a high correlation between school failure and these subsequent statistics. Indeed schooling has often had the adverse effect on most AAMs. By most accounts of achievement data, they are quickly becoming the most uneducated population in America.

---

between Americans by choice and Americans by force. I also do not use the term *minority* in reference to Africans as this term implies ever so subliminally a major race and a minor race. If these terms, minority and majority, are used in this paper to reference a group of people, it is as quoted information only.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my study is to provide an audience for the hidden voices (Hunter & Davis, 1994) of non-academic or non-teachers, American African males (AAMs) and their perceptions of educational success or failure of their own sons or social sons (Rukmalie J., 2002). Heretofore, the voices of non-academic AAMs have been unexamined as potential resources in addressing the undaunted achievement gap. It is my goal to provide teachers, counselors, and researchers with a seminal component, indeed a missing but vital link in the failure of American education to effectively serve and service the systematically neglected population of AAMs.

Overview of Study

My participants are fathers and mentors of third and fifth grade boys enrolled in my remedial reading class. The Participant Chart in Appendix A gives a description of my participants at the time of this study.

Through interviews, these AAM will reflect on their personal educational experiences, compare and contrast the educational experiences of their sons or relations, and share ideas about American education and what they believe it offers to the young AAMs. Illuminating the voices of the non-academic American African male population, I hope that my study will provide a new voice to inform educational pedagogy. In addition, I hope that my study will present opportunities for innovation in countering the enduring discourse of the failure of the majority of AAMs to achieve literate success in America's schools tantamount to White males. The alarming statistics coupled with the absence of the voices of AAMs to define educational success

for themselves piqued my yearning for explication. My research is therefore guided by these questions.

1. How do AAMs feel about American education and its promise of social and economic success? What successes and struggles did they experience in school?
2. What are the strengths and struggles of education for their sons?
3. What can schools do to improve the educational outcomes for American African males?

The remainder of this introductory chapter is divided into three parts. Part I is a background of the American African male presence in America from a historical perspective not explored in textbooks, an important link to the most prevalent discourse. Part II elucidates the promise of education to alleviate the dire outcome of illiteracy and social oppression. Part III offers both an educational and a social portrait of the current status of African males in America.

Part I: Historical Perspective

Colonialism denies human rights to human beings whom it has subdued by violence, and keeps them by force in a state of misery and ignorance (Memmi, 1965), xxiv.

In America, African history is often viewed as beginning in slavery. Most African children gain little knowledge of their great past from textbooks in public schools. They rarely view themselves as coming from greatness. On the contrary, many African children disassociate themselves from Africa believing it to be primitive and inferior.

African history in America is one of oppression, struggle, and protest. Civil rights[2] were gained through protest as was the right to an equal education. These liberties were not granted Africans on the basis of the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," but as a result of

---

[2] The **Civil Rights Act of 1964** (Pub. L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241, enacted July 2, 1964)

demands and forcing of the hand of government. That was approximately 48 years ago after centuries of discrimination and human violation.

Although African men were often the victims of lynching, castration, and physical and mental humiliation, one of the greatest violations of African men took place between the years of 1932 and 1972. The U.S. Public Health Service (2004)conducted an experiment on 399 black men in the late stages of syphilis. Under the illusion that they were being treated for "bad blood," mainly poor and illiterate sharecroppers from one of the poorest counties in Alabama, were essentially "guinea pigs" for the government experiment (U.S. Public Health Service (PHS), 2004). They were left to degenerate under the ravages of tertiary syphilis, which included tumors, heart disease, paralysis, blindness, insanity, and death (Kambui, 2007). By the end of the experiment in 1972, 28 of the men had died directly of syphilis, 100 were dead of related complications, 40 of their wives had been infected, and 19 of their children had been born with congenital syphilis. This is clearly yet another example of the disregard not only for human life, but particularly a disregard for the lives of African American men.

This devaluing of the lives of American African boys and men in U. S. history illuminates the painful atrocities of racism. Black men are perceived to be significantly more vulnerable, and significantly more "endangered" than Black women. The most current model of this socially-defined deficiency of African American male illiteracy is the perpetual proclamation of low achievement (Cleveland, 2003; Monroe, 2005; Townsend, 2000; A. M. Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). Cleveland (2003) observed that past and present research inevitably converges on the shortcomings of African American students, primarily males.

> …many of these African-American males are labeled and placed in special education
> classes, suspended at higher rates than their white counterparts because of zero tolerance

policies, and end up in the prison-industrial complex where there are more African-American males in prison than in college (p. 85).

What is most detrimental about this negative discourse is that it can engender indifference in those upon whom it is perpetrated and ultimately formulates a negative perception by others. Dominant discourse through the media of educational underachievement, prison overpopulations, joblessness, homelessness, and absentee fathers creates the environment for overrepresentation of the American African males in these populations.

The dismissive and negative depiction of American African males elicits a natural resistance to a system that devalues AAMs' "true self" (Akbar, 1985; 1991) and results in a generational distrust of AAMs toward American social and educational structures, passed along in conversations, stories, and other recountings of frustrations and injustices. Young AAMs are not immune to the mental pain and suffering of their fathers, brothers, and significant others. They in fact often take ownership of the anguish and express it as resistance in institutional settings such as schools.

The systemic allegation of the academic achievement gap could merely be a symptom of a greater problem that has yet to be fully acknowledged and addressed in America's schools. That problem is racism, and the social, economic, cultural, social forces of structural inequality that impede progress in African Americans achievement levels. These forces have massive implications in success and failure in American society. I, therefore, suggest that a more accurate description of the so-called achievement gap is *achievement trap*. In fact, the curriculum taught in most public schools actually devalue African cultural norms, evidenced by the absence of African history in text books or the limiting of American Africans' past in

America to slavery and beyond. Assessment of achievement is more or less systemically

designed to accentuate cultural values of middle class European Americans. . In other words,

American education is severely limited and deliberately omits to a very large degree the impact

and contributions of the African people and the atrocities of their cultural ending in African and

their unfortunate beginnings in this land. But, educational limitations on American African

males represent only a fraction of the hegemonic puzzle. While AAMs may be *gapped* in their

achievement of assimilation in Eurocentric educational values, they are invariably

simultaneously *trapped* in a permanent discourse of academic inadequacy in intellectual inability

and un-achievement.

Many American African boys and men have not been educated about this time in their

history through public education. The visuals of the great majority of AAMs are, conversely, the

omission of their intellectual greatness substituted with inadequacy, criminalization, idiocy, and

moral turpitude. .

Part II: Education Statistics

Forty years ago, Dunn (1968) called the nation's attention to the disproportionality of

African Americans in classrooms for the educable mentally retarded. Nearly 40 years later, the

Schott Foundation (2007) discovered alarming inequities in graduation rates for African

American males. The graduation rate for African-American males for the nation as a whole in

2001/2002 was 41%, that is, most African-American male students did not graduate with their

cohort, White males. The graduation rate for non-Hispanic White students was 70%. Less than

one-third of these students dropped out or had delayed graduations. In other words, the dropout

rate for Black males was twice that for White males. Could there be a relationship between the

disproportionality of African American males in special education programs and the number of

African American males who drop out of school?

Georgia, my current state of residence, enrolls the fourth largest population of African

American males, but graduates only one-third AA males relative to their white male

counterparts. According to Schott data, during the 2007-2008 school year graduation rates,

Georgia had an enrollment of 316,342 AA males. 43% of these students graduated, while 62%

white males graduated. This represents a 19% gap (Holzman, 2011).

The great majority of American African males that do remain in school are placed in

remedial reading and special education classes. Grant (1992) found that Black boys

disproportionately account for 85% of the Black students in special education. Black children

constitute 17% of all students yet comprise 41% of all special education placements, primarily

labeled as educable mentally retarded and having behavior disorders. Ten years later, according

to the 23rd Annual Report to Congress (2001) on the implementation of the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), African American students *continue* to be overrepresented

across *all* 13 legally sanctioned disability categories of mental retardation (MR) and emotional

disturbance (ED) (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This ubiquitous trend of the

overrepresentation of African American male students in remedial reading and special education

programs lends credibility to Memmi's assertion that

What is actually a sociological point becomes labeled as being biological or, preferably,

metaphysical.   (Memmi, 1965).

In addition to these statistics, studies also show that African American males maintain the

highest dropout rates, discipline referrals, and school suspensions. The findings of a national

survey showed that although African American males composed 8.23% of the total student

population, their corporal punishment and suspension rates were more than three times greater than their percentage in the population (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1993).   Needless to say, there is also a direct correlation to the high percentage of African American males in penal institutions. U. S. Department of Justice (2006) cited at yearend 2006, there were 3,042 Black males sentenced prisoners per 100,000 Black males in the U.S., compared to 487 White males sentenced prisoners per 100,000 White males.

The statistics indicate a dismal portrait of American African males. Every AAM is affected by these stereotypes whether directly or indirectly. Because my study is focusing on AAMs, I have intentionally omitted discourse on the AA female population, but this in no way suggests that they are not also profoundly affected by stereotypes. . .

On January 8, 2002, at Hamilton High School in Hamilton, Ohio, President George W. Bush signed into law an essential reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).[3] Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was amended as Sec. 101 of the NCLBA and reads, "Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged."[4] On the surface, this Act of the government appears to be a powerful piece of legislation, the answer to the prayers of present and former civil rights activists, educators, parents, and students as well. In reality, it hails as yet another papyrus existential. Local school systems, administrators, and educators complain that while the lofty goals of increased academic standards and enhanced educational experience for *all* students are laudable, the necessary funding required for enactment have not been forthcoming. In addition, ultimate power remains in the hands of each state as in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

---

[3] Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No 89-10, 79 Stat. 27 (1965).
[4] P.L. 107-110: Sec. 101.

It stands to reason, then, that achievement scores of AA students in states like Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and the South in general appear far more diminutive than students in states where racism was not as entrenched, at least ostensibly so.

> During slavery and beyond the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent. .
>
> Teachers, like all of us, use the dimensions of class, race, sex, ethnicity to bring order to their perception of the classroom environment. Rather than teachers gaining more in-depth and holistic understanding of the child, with the passage of time teachers' perceptions become increasingly stereotyped and children become hardened caricatures of an initially discriminatory vision.
>
> (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978)

Meanwhile, achievement scores continue to plummet for those for whom the law was designed to help. Five years after the enactment of NCLB, the achievement gap persists, with American African males dragging the floor (See Appendices A&B).

Part III: Current Portrait of the African Male in America

During one of my graduate classes, a recent immigrant to America was asked to share his perception of the Black man in America. He was obviously reluctant, but after some prodding and assurances that his sharing was important to social theory, he acquiesced. "Good rappers, 'like pretty women,' mean, criminals, killers, 'don't pull pants up' (motioning with his hands), and drug dealers" were the initial descriptions that he expressed. Although he adamantly declared that he had not allowed these television and movie media descriptions to prejudice him

or his beliefs in the "good in all people," he had obviously come to this country with a one-dimensional view of the Black American male. In Part III, I will capsule the current condition of American African males educationally and socially as represented through the media and statistical data.

An educational snapshot of American African males looks dismal. According to education data collection agencies, American African males perform academically and cognitively at substandard levels as compared to their American European[5] male counterparts. As a matter of fact, they represent the lowest levels of achievement of all segments of populations based on and including gender, nationality, and race (National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2008). In a recent CNN documentary, Reporter Soledad O'brien stated, "In the inner city the typical Black 12th grader is reading at the level of a White ninth grader" (O'brien, 2008). The academic performance, consequently, of American African males and the highest academic performers, European males, symbolize a significant gap. Over the past three decades, this significant disparity has distinguished itself through the daily vernacular of academia as the *achievement gap,* and has rampantly spread throughout national and international media. Thanks to the broad dissemination of this purported academic dissimilitude between the test assessment data of Whites and Blacks, national and international perceptions of American African males abound in negativity.

American African males represent the highest population in special education and remedial reading and are conversely egregiously underrepresented in gifted and advanced placement classes throughout the country (Grantham, 2004a; Grantham, 2004b). On the other

---

[5]I refer to American Europeans or Whites as those represent privilege (McIntosh, 1988), the dominant possessors of power and wealth in the U.S., particularly those who have benefitted from the institution of slavery and racial oppression in the U.S.

hand, they dominate several sports and are some of the highest paid athletes in the US, yet remain highly underrepresented as team coaches, managers, or owners even when their numbers dominate the playing field. The paradox is that American African males can make mathematically calculated decisions on the basketball court, football field, baseball diamond, but score miserably on reading, math, and gifted assessments. They can obviously read and decipher athletic lingo well enough to command top salaries as players, yet represent the highest remedial population. Have the voices of AAMs been hegemonically silenced and their roles defined for social, economic, and political stratification? Are their areas of strength relegated to the arena of sports and entertainment by design and their failure in school structurally designed, systematic, and institutionalized?

My experience as a mother, grandmother, sister, and as a reading teacher, however, prompted me to question these data. Challenging this discourse I argue that rather than American African males failing public education, American public education has failed American African males (AAMs). Furthermore, I contend that this failure phenomenon is by design. U.S. education is institutionally structured to venerate and privilege European values, content, and ways of learning (McIntosh, 1988). Unfortunately, this veneration has been at the expense of deprecating and devaluing the lives, values, and cultures of the people abducted to build this land of plenty, Africans. The women were used as sexual surrogates, nannies, and of course laborers. The men and boys were studded like horses, worked from "can 'til can't,"[6] and often sold, never to see their families again.

---

[6] My grandmother used to say my granddaddy would leave home at dawn and work until night, working from the time when he *can* work to the point where he *can't* do anything but fall asleep.

A social snapshot of American African males resembles the educational picture. In addition to educational failure, the mental, moral, and spiritual strength of the African male was and continues to be the target of racial hegemony, personified and perpetuated disproportionately through other social disadvantages such as high unemployment, criminalization, poverty, and educational failure. The inferiority of the African man was the indispensable paradigm that validated the slave trade, unremunerated labor, emasculation, and justified European belief that the African was uneducable (Higginbotham, 1978). .

As stated before, according to NCES, AAMs fail statistically. According to the U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 1998 the male prison population was 1.2 million. American African males or Blacks represented 577,289, Whites, 495,593. The balance was distributed between American Indians, Asians, and Pacific Islanders, with 121, 417 listed as "Unknown" (Gilliard, 1999). By June 2007, of the more than 1.5 million males incarcerated, there were 4,618 AAMs per 100,000 AAMs in the U.S., 1747 Hispanic males per 100,000 Hispanic males, and only 773 White males per 100,000 White males (Department of Justice, 2008). In addition, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that American African or Black households had the lowest median income in 2006 among the "Race and Hispanic-origin group" of $31,969, representing 61% of the median income for non-Hispanic White households of $52,423 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2007). Not surprisingly, the poverty rates during the same year, 2006, correlates at 24.3% for AAs or Blacks and Hispanic-origin groups and only 8.2% for non-Hispanic Whites, and 20.6% for Hispanics (down from 21.8% in 2006) (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2007).

While the voices of AAMs have been essentially silenced in structured American society, home is his domain, a place where he has a voice in the guidance of his children and the maintenance of his home. Children often learn first-hand the daily struggle of AAMs trying to survive in America. Many American African children grow up with or without fathers who are in some way or another involved in the criminal justice system, either incarcerated, on parole, on probation, or living in trepidation of being guilty of LWB, *living while Black*. The effects of these deplorable situations haunt too many of the beautiful Hershey brown, bright-eyed faces who sit in our classrooms on a daily basis. The result is often a disconnect, an extension of distrust of American social, political, economical, and educational systems passed on directly by male role models and indirectly by females who juggle both roles as survival tactics. I have all too often heard American African men say that American education has not landed big corporate positions for most Black men, so why should they believe in a system that obviously does not work for them. Many argue that you don't see AAMs in large numbers on corporate, hospital, or bank boards of directors, leading talk show hosts on television, or owning prisons. There is a prevailing sense of hopelessness, despair, and anger.

Personal examination and reformation in some cases, cultural and social knowledge and acceptance, combined with reading and literature background knowledge could offer an awesome system of support to AAMs and become a guiding perspective to teachers of AAMs. My dissertation research was illuminated. I no longer struggled to restate what had previously been stated about reading. I no longer looked for something to reform about reading. I now realized what needed to be reformed were unexamined mindsets, racist social and educational structures, *and* pedagogical practices. Cultural responsive pedagogy has been adequately researched and theorized, however, I found limited research addressing the racist thinking and

practices inherent in American society *and* educational systems relative to the achievement of American Africans and AAMs in particular. Teaching new reading strategies through old and racist paradigms perpetuate underachievement and even stronger resistance.

Discussion

American African males have often been forced into a posture of submission for the sake of survival. When human courtesies and common kindness have been withheld because of the color of one's skin and physical and mental survival becomes the daily occupation, is there any wonder why so many AAMs resist the indoctrination of the very culture that imposes the discrimination and defines their adequacy? In America, literacy and academic achievement have been inextricably linked to embedded stereotypes and racial identity, perpetuating a disenfranchised underclass of Black males. This system has been maintained by racism, discrimination, and legal complicity. In short, self-defined literacy or the lack thereof has apparently been the insurance policy of White supremacy. Outside of monitoring the so-called illiteracy of American African children, it seems governmental agencies have done little to alter the academic terrain—and may have actually contributed to the negative stereotypes. Ignoring the social implications inherent in achievement standardization, curricula, and assessment, government has continued to depend on quantitative methods to address achievement concerns (Coleman, 1997; Karen, 2005), leaving a stream of casualties along the way with American African males leading disproportionately.

Black men are perceived to be significantly more vulnerable, and significantly more "endangered" than any segment of the population (Gibbs, 1988; Gibbs, 1988; Gibbs, 1988). The most current model of this socially-defined deficiency of American African male illiteracy is the perpetual illumination of low achievement (Cleveland, 2003; Monroe, 2005; Townsend, 2000;

A. M. Watkins & Kurtz, 2001). Cleveland (2003) observed that past and present research inevitably converges on the shortcomings of American African students, primarily males.

> …many of these African-American males are labeled and placed in special education classes, suspended at higher rates than their white counterparts because of zero tolerance policies, and end up in the prison-industrial complex where there are more African-American males in prison than in college (p. 85).

Despite the many federal initiatives including the recently debunked *No Child Left Behind Act,* after 40 years, American Africans continue to sweep the floor of academic achievement, with AAMs falling on the very bottom (Lee, 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2008; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1993). Dean Bailey's words continue to brandish significant import, "…in educational policy let the Negro have the crumbs that fall from the White man's table; let there be such industrial education of the Negro as will best fit him to serve the White…" (Bailey, 1914, as cited in Newby, 1965).

According to the Nation's Report Card, at no point in America's history have American Africans achieved at a concomitant academic level with European Americans (Lee, 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2008; Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). Have American Africans failed in American education or has American education failed American Africans? Is there an achievement gap or are American Africans trapped in a cyclical discourse of failure as assured by U.S. Senator Richard Russell from Georgia, who stated to the U.S. Senate, "We will resist to the bitter end any measure or any movement which would have a tendency to bring about social equality and intermingling and amalgamation of the races in our (Southern) states" (Simkin, 1997).

As I looked around my graduate classes over the course of six plus years, I can count the number of AAMs in all of my classes on one hand. I have had only two AA professors, one of whom was AAM. They both were in social foundations. There were no AAs on the staff in the department of Language and Literacy. Ironically, the student population most at risk of failure is the population least represented on the education staff. Silenced voices shout loudest.

> ... children in one set of schools are educated to be governors; children in the other set of schools are trained for being governed. The former are given the imaginative range to mobilize ideas for economic growth; the latter are provided with the discipline to do the narrow tasks the first group will prescribe.
>
> Societies cannot be all generals, no soldiers. But by our schooling patterns, we assure that soldier's children are more likely to be soldiers and that the offspring of the generals will have at least the option to be generals.
>
> (Kozol, 1991)

I believe Black males *feel* the representation is wrong, maybe even unconsciously, so they reproduce the pain, the insecurity, and the mis-education (Woodson, 1933) through resistance. So, I go back to speak for those who couldn't speak for themselves, for those who don't know what to say, and for those who didn't think they could have the opportunity. It is imperative to go back for this history provides the foundation for moving forward. This history represents what government has left behind and what school systems refuse to explore. On the principles of Sankofa, we will go back and communally (Morris, 2002) develop the groundwork for a powerful pedagogy.

President Barack Obama and his powerful slogan, "Yes, We Can!" garnered the all-out attention of the media during his bid for the presidency of the United States. Incorporating the voices and stories of American African males in educational pedagogy can serve to counter some of these distortions and uncover or unbury answers to the too long disparate achievement statistics.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

Albert Einstein

I opened the third grade language arts book to read aloud the weekly story for my class, African American students in an urban Southeast classroom. They sat attentively as always, anxiously awaiting my opening lines. You see, telling a story for me is a theatrical performance through the spoken word. They love to be read to, to be entertained. I browsed over the story, I looked at them, and at the story again. The story was entitled *Anthony Reynoso,* a young Hispanic boy living on a ranch. As my eyes savored the beautiful variations of mocha, dark chocolate, caramel, and vanilla mousse skin tones, I thought *what do they know about a ranch in New Mexico*? *What's the probability of them ever seeing a ranch or traveling to Mexico?* Furthermore, aside from scaffolding them into learning about the skill of summarization, how would this story add to their confidence and belief in themselves and their own self-worth? As they sat there watching my every move, wondering why was I just looking at them smiling, I closed the book. I told them I had another book for them, got up, took Jacqueline Woodson's *Miracle's Boys* (Woodson, 2000) from the shelf, sat down, and began my oral performance.

As I completed the end of the first chapter, they begged me to continue. Feigning reluctance because of the need to cover as much material as possible in 45 minutes, I pretended to be coerced into reading two more pages, whetting their appetites even more for the next reading. They seemed completely, wholeheartedly, mentally, spiritually, and cognitively

engaged. By sidestepping curriculum materials and piquing the interest through culturally relevant reading, my students became actively vested in their own learning. They made a connection between the day's vocabulary instruction and their own lives. Not only were the characters people or personalities who could have been their very own relatives, neighbors, and friends, but the situations were *visualizable*; they could see them happening. Some may have even lived the experiences themselves (Morris, 2002). A relationship between learning and living had been established. They were engaged—culturally.

Most educators agree that accessing one's cultural understanding is the threshold of authentic comprehension (Delpit, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). If reading literature or incorporating instructional strategies that speak to students' familiar is this simple, then why have the statistical failure in achievement of American African students remained virtually unchanged? Will engaging students through a cultural connection of literature or communal bonding (Morris, 2002) substantially close the achievement gap? Or is it simply, as they say, "putting a Band-Aid on a stab wound?"

The purpose of the this chapter is to review the literature on the achievement or underachievement status of American African males and the extant pedagogical research that addresses this dilemma. I will explore the gaps in these prescriptive research approaches and establish the necessity of my study.

This chapter is divided into three main sections: 1) A Portrait of American African Males in Education; 2) A review of pedagogical prescriptions for achievement failure of American African males; 3) An explanation of the importance of my study.

A Portrait of American African Males in Education

The educational portrait of American African males reflects the dismal imagery of American African males in the broader society. In the words of Noguera, "Black males in American society are in trouble" (Noguera, 2003). According to some (M. K. Asante, 1991; A. Hilliard, 1990; Kunjufu, 1991), the trouble happens, not necessarily because of incapability or unintelligence, but seemingly more because of social and educational circumventions. What is most unfortunate about this phenomenon is that it is not new. Black males have been in trouble since their captivity and ultimate enslavement in America. This trouble is as old as America itself. In this section, I will provide a statistical portrait of American African males in public schools in three areas: Reading Achievement; Special Education; and Discipline Referrals.

A Reading Achievement Portrait of American African Males

…reading failure has exacted a tremendous long-term consequence for children's developing self-confidence and motivation to learn, as well as for their later school performance (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001).

American African males achievement is represented by the lowest NAEP 4th grade and 8th grade performance; lowest advanced placement (AP) enrollment rates; lowest SAT/ACT scores; lowest high school graduation rates; lowest college readiness rates; and lowest 6-year college graduation rates (Wynn, 2006). What is alarming about these statistics is the fact that this data has remained basically unchanged for more than three decades or at least since the collection of this data began. If the observation made above by the Partnership for Reading which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education is true, imagine the very possible generational lack of confidence and motivation that could be present in many American African

males. In this section, I will give a statistical portrait of the academic achievement of American

African males.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2009, the average scale scores in

reading by race/ethnicity and gender for students in grade four were as follows:

Table 1. Percentage of students assessed in fourth-grade NAEP reading, by race/ethnicity:

Various years, 1992–2009[7]

Race/ethnicity	1992	1994	1998	2000	2002	2003	2005	2007	2009
White	73*	72*	66*	63*	61*	60*	59*	58*	56
Black	17	17	15	17	17*	17	16	16	16
Hispanic	7*	7*	14*	14*	16*	17*	18*	19*	20
Asian/Pacific Islander	2*	3*	4	4	4*	4*	5	5	5
American Indian/ Alaska Native	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

The disparities between the achievement scores of European students and other students of color
is singularly alarming, however, the fact that the disparities continue over a period of time is
even more disparaging.   The 2007 NAEP Trend of Fourth Grade Reading Scores by
Race/Ethnicity reflects a portrait of virtual inactivity. This color graphic offers a poignant visual
of the relatively motionlessness of the gap over the past 15 years. Although 2009 percentages
reflected greater basic and proficient levels of achievement, the difference was statistically
insignificant and the gap remained virtually unchanged

http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2009455.pdf

---

[7] SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for
Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading
Assessment.

Table 2:   Fourth Grade Gap Comparison by Race 1992-2007
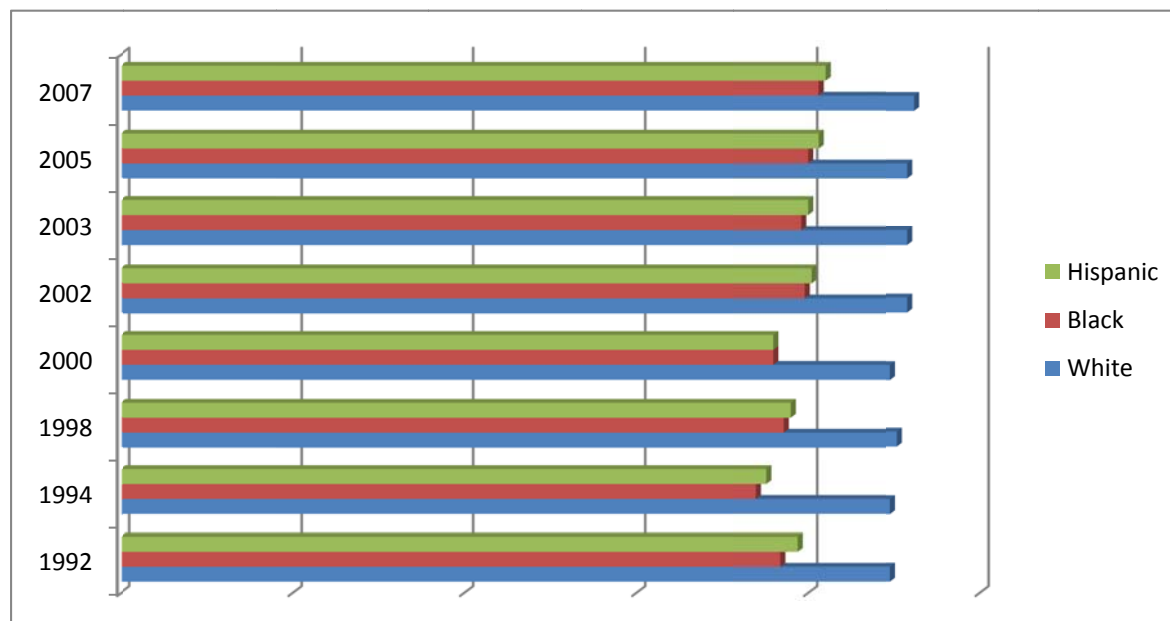
Despite the ominous research and statistics compiled or authorized by the U.S.

Department of Education, American Africans along with the Hispanic population persistently lag

behind students of European descent in achievement. Although there have been gains by the

American African and Hispanic populations, the gap in scores has persistently averaged

approximately 32 points over this span of 15 years (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007), closing no

more than three to four points within one year. Added to my dismay was the fact that the

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) gave very little attention to this disparity

in its report. The findings focused the readers' attention on comparing a population's trend of

gain or loss relative to scores in previous recent years as opposed to the tenacity of the gap over a

long period of time. Why not question this unaddressed ostentatious and persistent crevice that

seemingly refused to close—this unchallenged yawning of security—like the overly-confident

hare racing the tortoise?

The NAEP's implication is that the achievement bar, the *standard,* is already set by White students, so [we're just reporting how close or how far away everybody else is]. What has been the plan for remediation? What *is* the plan for remediation? What are the suggestions for closing the gap? To merely publish a report without an analysis and a plan for remediation is to perpetuate a myth. Murrell (2002) charges that remediation is illusionary because, "The forces destructive to African American achievement are [*embedded in the way we do schooling in America*]" (my emphasis), p. xxiv.

C.K. McGuire was the Assistant Secretary of Education during the Clinton administration from 1998-2001. In 2000, prompted by the urgency of the education gap which was largest among American African males and the apparent lack of attention to the dilemma, he sponsored a national conference to address research concerns, findings, and ideas. McGuire observed that while the problem had been adequately documented, it seemed that the government had been "…dragging our feet in the direction of addressing the specific components of the problem and in creating and using powerful and effective interventions. In other words, there are numerous diagnoses but very few prescriptions, cures, or treatment plans" (Fashola, 2005). Almost a decade later, the results remain essentially the same and the educational physicians still seem to be "dragging their feet." (See Appendix C).

What's So Special about Special Education?

Contributing to the negative portrayal of AAM intelligence and the permanence of the achievement fissure is the matter of disproportionality in special education certification. Keeping in mind that the documentation of inferiority is a necessary component of institutional racism (Spears, 1978), Black males have obviously been targeted as being uneducable. During the 1998-99 school-year, there were 1,111,650 American African students served in special

education programs across the U.S. (Harry & Klingner, 2006). American African children constituted 40 percent of the special education population, but comprised only 17 percent of student population, and 80 percent of the children placed were AAMs (Kunjufu, 2002).

The ubiquitous trend of the overrepresentation of American African male students in remedial reading and special education programs has drawn the attention of educators, researchers, policy makers, and civil rights activists. In 2007, The OCR reported that 3% of Black male students were classified as *mentally retarded* as compared to 1.4% of White, non-Hispanic males (The Schott Foundation, 2007). Black male students represented 9% of student enrollments, however, they were 20% of *mental retardation* classifications (The Schott Foundation, 2007).

A myriad of reasons have been suggested for this disproportionate representation of failure. Cultural differences, teacher biases, problems with identification procedures, poverty, and racial discrimination represent a few of the identified culprits. Cummins (1986) and Hilliard (1990) charged biased referral and assessment procedures of ethnic minority students. Kunjufu (2005a) compiled three volumes on the subject calling it the "conspiracy to destroy black boys." According to Serwatka, Deering, & Grant (1995), the most frequently cited causes are "cultural differences that may lead to a predisposition of a diagnosis of an emotional handicap, a lack of uniform identification procedures, bias in the assessment instruments used in diagnosis, the attendant problems of poverty, and a general pattern of racial discrimination in society reflected in school systems" (p. 493). Focusing on the cultural disconnection, Irvine (1990) noted that White teachers have more negative expectations for African American students than for white students. Monroe (2005) attributes the disproportionality to "the criminalization of black males

and race class privilege" (p. 49).   A white school superintendent expressed to Scott Cummings (Cummings, 1977)) that

> A victim of his environment, the ghetto child begins his school career, psychologically, socially, and physically disadvantaged. He is oriented to the present rather than the future, to immediate needs rather than delayed gratification, to the concrete rather than the abstract. He is often handicapped by limited verbal skills, low self-esteem, and a stunted drive towards achievement (npn).

This mentality later earned the label of cultural deprivation. This superintendent had assigned a grade of "F" before the student even sat down in the classroom. Unfortunately, this mindset is very much prevalent today and possibly significantly contributes to the high enrollment of AAMs in special education classes.

The Phenomenon of Dropping Out: With a Portrait So Glum, Why Stay?

> The trouble with Black boys is that most never have a chance to be thought of as potentially smart and talented or to demonstrate talents in science, music, or literature. The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are placed in schools where their needs for nurturing, support and loving discipline are not met. Instead, they are labeled, shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle of failure (Noguera, 2003).

In addition to the highly publicized racially stratified statistics of underachievement, studies also show that American African males maintain the highest drop-out rates, discipline referrals, and school suspensions. Most major cities have a dropout rate of 40 percent (Kunjufu, 2002). According to the findings of a national survey conducted by the U. S. Office for Civil Rights (1993), American African males composed 8.23% of the total student population

however, their corporal punishment and suspension rates were more than three times greater than their percentage in the population. As may be expected, the suspension and dropout rates are directly correlated to the high percentage of African American males in penal institutions. U. S. Department of Justice (1997) cited 54% of the inmates admitted to federal and state prisons are African American as opposed to 20% in the 1920s and 1930s (Miller, 1997).

Purported attempts have been made to address the problem of overrepresentation on all sub-levels of education, with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law being the supreme intervention and the guidepost for school systems to standardize education. Allegedly proposed to improve "the academic achievement of the disadvantaged," the NCLB Act proved once again to be another piece of legislation that obviously negated the voices of those it proposed to serve. Since 2001, the rates of disproportionality, however, have continued to climb and the gap in achievement remains uninfluenced. In addition, many claim that children ironically indeed are being "left behind" as result of the NCLB policies (Glen, 2006). The National Education Association (NEA) charges that the "draconian penalties" of the NCLB Act force schools to become "one size fits all" systems, significantly impairing their ability to address the concerns of students who are most challenged.[8] Many states instituted high school exit exams in compliance with the NCLB. Consistent with other statistics of failure, American African males opt to drop out rather than complete school after failing the exit exam.

In states with easy exit exams, black male students are 5.2 percent more likely to drop out of high school than their counterparts in states with no exit exams. In states with more-rigorous exit exams, they are 7.3 percent more likely to drop out than are their counterparts in states with no exit exams (Glen, 2006).

---

[8] NEA, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act/ESEA: Our Position.
http://www.nea.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html

To summarize this educational snapshot of American African males, slaves, special ed., "at risk," dropouts, unemployed and unemployable, criminals—powerful labels that induce powerful and often unalterable perceptions—represent strong challenges for American African males and American society. These challenges have been faced by American African males beginning on the first day of school since they have been allowed to attend school. Unfortunately, these same challenges faced by today's American African males stared their fathers in the face and their grandfathers as well. How did you handle these challenges? For what reasons do you believe your son is struggling in reading? In what ways do you believe the school system can help your son be a better reader? In what ways do you believe you can help him to be a better reader? What are your expectations of the school in the development of your son? These are the questions I will pose to the fathers of my American-African male students. The answers to these questions can *only* be answered by American-African fathers, older brothers, and senior mentors. Their insights and answers will shed light on reforming a school system that fails to successfully educate a great majority of American African males.

A Review of Pedagogical Prescriptions for Achievement Failure of American African Males

…embedded within the policies and practices of many of the current reform strategies is the belief that more students, and we argue particularly African American males students, can be better served educationally when traditional notions of teaching and learning are reconceptualized" (Fashola, 2005).

Achievement or the lack thereof has engendered the focus of school reform initiatives for over three decades. With the achievement of American African males being the lowest among all populations, extensive research has been directed toward this phenomenon, including but not

limited to culturally-relevant pedagogy (CRP), single-gender schools (SGS), and African centered pedagogy (ACP). These three strategies represent the most prolific approaches of American African scholars to address the achievement gap of American-African students. In this section, I will review the main tenets, purported effectiveness, and deficiencies of each of these models in reversing the trend of academic failure for American African males.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

It is merely a matter of exercising common sense in approaching people through their environment in order to deal with conditions as they are rather than as you would like to see them or imagine that they are. There may be a difference in method of attack, but the principle remains the same (Woodson, 1933).

When I mentioned this concept of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) or culturally relevant teaching (CRT) to my public school colleagues 10 years ago, it was well received as something new, exciting, and doable. Our student population was approximately 95% American African and our teaching staff was approximately 30% White and 70% American African. Many American-African teachers believed it was the answer to their prayers for "getting our children back." We often watched painfully as our children struggled to thrive and maintain their family values in a school culture that offered little credence to their familial background knowledge and experience.

Several of us began to meet off-campus to plan lessons and incorporate community involvement. The excitement was euphoric. Then came the backlash from the No Child Left Behind Act and the accompanying requirements to create lesson plans and design instruction using the all-encompassing basal with its "all you'll ever need" supply of resources. To make sure we took advantage of this exorbitant financial investment, the county required us to

administer unit and benchmark tests based on the readings, skills, and concepts covered in the basal. Although the standardization of the curriculum did not necessarily "kick CRT to the curb," it substantially engaged us in preparing the students to pass the unit and benchmark tests which were grounded in the basal readings. To be sure, the basal did incorporate *multicultural* literature, including Native American, Alaskan, Chinese, Hispanic, and other cultures (See Appendix D). American African literature was not omitted, but the few stories that were included were primarily limited to stories of slaves and maybe one or two stories of inventors during the entire year. Nevertheless, any culturally relevant teaching would have to be incorporated into the stories in the basal, in order for the student to pass the benchmark. Additionally, teachers' class passing rates on the standardized exams were intently scrutinized generating fear and anxiety about preparing students for the test, so I guess you could say, CRT was orchestrated or basically "kicked to the curb."

The concept of culturally relevant pedagogy is not new. As we can see from Dr. Woodson's words above, CRP was suggested more than 75 years ago. And although Woodson didn't refer to it as cultural education, he called for a critical look at the *miseducation* of American Africans in public schools (Woodson, 1933) due to "forces set to direct the proscribed element [education] in a way to redound solely to the good of others" (Woodson, 1933). Woodson recognized that curriculum was designed with an end in mind—to normalize education with the objective that the ruling class remains the ruling class and for the working class to remain relegated to that position with incremental advancement. Consequently, American curriculum had European culture at its center and subordinated every other culture, particularly African culture. His poignant observation published in 1933 preempts any current cultural pedagogical prognostications.

CRP has also been referred to as *culturally responsive teaching* and *pedagogy, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, culturally relevant pedagogy, multicultural education,* as well as a variety of other terms and/or strategies utilized to address the instructional strategies of teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Although each title may carry some specific connotation, the central theme of these terms suggests that students' home environments or cultural backgrounds are considered and incorporated in the teaching and learning processes in order to maximize student achievement. The intent and expanse of this culturally responsive instruction, however, has stimulated extensive pedagogical controversy.

For the purposes of this study, my review of culturally relevant pedagogy will be mainly focused on CRP directed toward American African student achievement and American-African males in particular. We will examine the commonalities of the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) with attention to relevant differences, exceptions, and particularities. Note that there may be variations in terminology without significant differences in concept. However, where specific variations extend the concept, I will indicate.

Culture Defined

Realize that all education is foundational. That is, the values we practice are introduced early and often in school and non-school settings such as family, media, church, entertainment, sports functions, etc. and can either work for or against development (Madhubuti, 1994).

One of my professors asked our class, "What comes to mind when you think of the word culture?" With shades of variations, most of us alluded to upbringing, behavior patterns, ways of being and doing, systems of beliefs, styles, and mannerisms. One classmate, self-described as an

"upper-class White female" said that she never thought of herself as having a culture. She said she always thought about people of color, Native Americans, and others as having culture, but not her. If she had to assign herself a culture, she said it would be the culture of an academic because that is what she knew and grew up around—academic parents, grandparents, relatives, and friends.   In other words, her life was consumed with intellectual thought and, in her case, European-based thought. It was the lens through which she viewed the world.

Banks (1989) defines culture not as artifacts or tangibles, but "…the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies…" Delpit posits that culture is "nothing more or less than the shared ways that groups of people have created to use and define their environment" (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). In light of these definitions, there is no wider gap in culture than that which exists between slaves and slave owners, oppressed and oppressors, the colonizer and the colonized (Memmi, 1965), between Blacks and Whites. These differences manifest in every sphere of group life—discipline, verbal and physical interaction, food choices, dress, lifestyles in general.   In the cases where there is acceptance of oppositional culture or difference, there is possible room for understanding. Where acceptance is lacking, there is no room for understanding.

Many educational researchers assert that teachers' knowledge and acceptance of these cultural differences will open the possibilities of achievement success for American African children. Culturally responsive pedagogy has been endorsed by prominent educator-researchers (Delpit, 1995; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Hale, 1982; A. G. I. Hilliard, 2002; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995c) as a viable method to successfully educate American African children. It is lauded as a way to validate and affirm the culture of a people to whom America once

refused citizenship. It can be a vehicle of communication between teachers and students and teachers and parents.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and American African Males

Tatum (2005), an American African male teacher expressed an enlightening and powerful perspective of the impact of *culturally responsive pedagogy* for American African males.

> Teachers who use a culturally responsive approach with their [B]lack male students understand their own culture in relationship to that of their students. They recognize that the failure of [B]lack boys in school does not truly represent who these boys are; instead, these teachers view failure or low levels of achievement as obstacles to overcome with committed, quality teaching. Culturally responsive teachers are reluctant to acquiesce to the idea that black boys living under stressful conditions have a legitimate excuse not to perform well. They are able to check their assumptions or misconceptions about what it means to be black and male in the Unites States, p. 78.

Tatum (2005) is challenging teachers of American African males to come outside of themselves and the comfort of their lives to see the world through the eyes of American African males who may not be privy to that comfort. He cautions them to not merely be pacifist or empathetic, but to teach with knowledge of the terrain that must be navigated as an American African male.

Hopkins (1997) on the other hand, highlights another culture. He blames the American educational system as perpetuating a culture of failure in regards to American African males. Hopkins surmises that the culture of failure and its proliferators are the real brokers of non-achievement and diminish "any semblance of agency for American African males" (p. 81). He asserts that American African males are aware of the myth that public schools prepare them for a

better life, for "survival and citizenry" (p. 80) in U.S. society. Because the focus is overwhelmingly on what American African males cannot do—read on grade level, behave acceptably, dress correctly, hold down a job—little focus is granted on what they can do correctly. The culture of hopelessness invades and suffocates the self-confidence and belief that success can be reality.

The misreading of American African male culture could account for the disconnections between students and teachers, particularly White teachers. My father told me that he can remember a time when a Black man could not look a White man in the eyes. It was a sign of disrespect and challenge. Black men had to look toward the ground or away from the White man when he addressed him. It was necessary for Black men to always be conscious of "their place." White people read the body language of Black males and interpreted it as submissive, defiant, or threatening. Foster (1974) suggested that White teachers perceptions of certain behaviors as arrogant, rude, provocative, and threatening were the primary culprits of African American male suspensions in school. Majors (1992) devoted a study on the *cool pose* of the American African male. He reasoned that in the face of constant failures and disparaging opportunities in America, American African males developed a demeanor of "cool," a coping mechanism to preserve some respect, dignity, and masculinity in a world that emasculated them on a daily basis. This "cool pose" continues to be read as defiance and incites fear in those who once harnessed that behavior as a mechanism of control. Fourteen year old Emmet Till lost his life because of the misreading of a behavior that was culturally acceptable to him. That case has yet to be solved.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Teacher Education Programs

Culturally relevant pedagogy is far more than an academic pursuit. According to some researchers, it involves commitment and subjectively examined intentions. It involves study and

self-deprecation if necessary. King (1991a) proffered a stern caveat against unleashing new

teachers or any teachers for that matter to teach students of diversity without offering the option

of social reconstructionist liberatory teaching in preservice programs. Responding to an open

ended question on social inequity, King found that her teacher education students in an elite

private university, "most of whom come from relatively privileged monocultural backgrounds"

(p. 133) in fact were significantly oblivious to the structural inequities of the social order. Most

students believed that inequality stemmed from slavery, prejudice, and discrimination (p. 138).

Contemporary studies of race indicate that while critical examination of "others" abound,

Whiteness studies are becoming more and more necessary and that many European teachers are

unaware of their biases, privileges, and prejudices (Hyland, 2005; King, 1991a; Lawrence III,

1987; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Consciously, subconsciously or

unconsciously, they often harbor instituted and systemic views of Africans and do not question

their own behavior and thinking about those ideas. Consequently, when there is a failure to

connect to American African students in the classroom, the problem is always in the "other" and

personal views are never questioned.

Ladson-Billings asserted that culturally-connected instruction for American African

students must go beyond speech and language pattern incorporation and acknowledgment

(Ladson-Billings, 1995c). She coined the phrase *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings,

1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1995b)*,* defined as instruction that "empowers students intellectually,

socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and

attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings asserted that culturally responsive pedagogy

carried an ultimate goal of developing a "relevant [B]lack personality" (Ladson-Billings, 1990)

in which children can achieve academically through cultural connections threaded throughout the

curriculum (King, 1991b; King, 1991c) as opposed to disenfranchising themselves from their home culture. Villegas (1988) asserted that to merely focus on speech and language connectors minimized the influences of societal structures and limitations.

As a teacher educator, Delpit (1995) observed that teacher educator programs are culprits for the perpetuation of racist mentalities, and deficit thinking. Teacher candidates are told that "culturally different" children are mismatched to the school setting and therefore cannot be expected to achieve as well as white, middle-class children. They are told that children of poverty are developmentally slower than other children, p. 178.

Reflecting on the wonderful strategies that she learned in graduate school, she questioned why they did not work with her American-African students (1995). She discovered that as her classroom "became more traditional," the more her Black students improved in their reading and writing, evidence that what worked for some absolutely did not work for others. Her American African students responded better to a teaching style that was represented as taboo in her teacher education program. She, consequently, extended the definition of culturally relevant pedagogy as removing "the blinders built of stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research, and racism" (p. 182). The one-size-fits-all method of teaching will not close the achievement gap. Specifically, for American African males, both content and methodology warrant examination. King (1991c) charges teachers with the responsibility of activist teaching, educating students to change society and not just to exist in and perpetuate an unjust world.

In the hands of teachers who place little to no value on the cultural diversity of students and their importance, who believe that their goal is to move students toward assimilation of the status quo, it is just as detrimental as the system that has failed American African students,

particularly males for the past 50 years. Teaching cultural lessons does not produce culturally diverse teachers. Learning cultural lessons on the other hand moves teachers toward cultural understandings so that they can become culturally diverse instructors. Structural discrimination continues to reproduce indiscriminate teachers and much of the responsibility lies on teacher education programs in colleges and universities.

Irvine & Armento (2001) designed a multicultural textbook for teacher educators in an effort to bring to life the theoretical concepts of cultural diverse teaching often "deposited" (Freire, 1970, 1993) in preservice teachers preparing for their jobs as teachers. Citing statistics of school failure to successfully educate culturally diverse students, Irvine cautions that there is "significance and urgency of implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy" (J. J. Irvine & Armento, 2001). Because the ultimate responsibility for student education is viewed to be that of the teachers, *culturally relevant teaching* accordingly becomes the responsibility of teachers. Teachers are to make accommodations in instruction for incorporating elements of the students' culture. But, as the above researchers have elucidated, culturally responsive pedagogy is only as strong as its propagators are in preparation and intentions.

Hilliard (1997) attaches spirituality to cultural teaching, using terms like "touching the spirit" and the "divine dance" between the teacher and students (p. xv). He affirms that anchoring the students within the context of their particular cultural referents is the beginning of true learning. These social references may be foster care and the separation from parents and siblings, or they may involve being in a family structure where the father has been jobless for a while, or where the mother may work two jobs and is not available for help with homework. An understanding rather than a transformation of cultural and familial references undergirds successful cultural pedagogy. This requires a sincere effort to first gain knowledge of students'

place, where they are and where we must meet them in order to move them toward inherent greatness and accomplishment.

Discussion

In response to the persistent and publicized failure of American African children to make achievement gains on standardized tests, American African researchers began to expound on methods to address this purported phenomenon. Acknowledging the fact that European America had invested extensive amounts of time, money, and resources to "prove" the inferiority of Africans (Bailey, 1914; A. G. I. Hilliard, 2002; Lynch, 2005; Niemi Jr., 1978), American African scholars represented both subjective and professional views to an objective dilemma. Additionally, with the pool of new teachers being primarily White women and the majority of students in inner city and/or urban public schools being American African and children of color (A. M. Villegas, 1991; A. M. Villegas & Lucas, 2002), a racial, cultural, and linguistic disconnect represented a strong possibility (Gay & Howard, 2001). Teaching and education that could capitalize on Black students' familial connections—teaching that was culturally responsive or relevant was practically unanimously extolled by Black educators, theorists, and researchers (Hale, 1982; Howard, 2003; Irvine & York, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1995c).

Most extant literature on culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on the necessity of incorporating students' cultures during planning and instruction (J. J. Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The broad implication is that teachers must embody a belief system about the abilities of all children that includes validation of students' home environments and backgrounds, high expectations of all students, and teacher reflection (Gay, 2000; Irvine & Armento, 2001). Without which, efficacious culturally responsive pedagogy is impossible.

These criteria suggest that teachers indeed hold the key to closing the achievement gap in their hands. If teachers help all students to see themselves as well as others represented in the context of learning, it makes for "a curriculum that is more complete, honest, and accurate and that better represents the full picture of the past and of any field of study" (Irvine & Armento, 2001). The simplicity of being able to open a book of "cultural" lessons and successfully teach culturally diverse students would be the answer to racial problems in the American classroom!

But, some researchers extend the concepts of CRP beyond familiarization of students' home cultures to include and prioritize teacher education and self-examination. Irvine & Armento (2001) acknowledged the importance of teacher self-reflection in the context of "instructional goals, methods, and materials" (p. 11) for teaching culturally diverse students. But, refrained from encouraging teachers to examine their own biases and prejudices *before* teaching students of diverse cultures (King, 1991a), a process that King (1991a) claims is indispensible. "…regardless of their conscious intentions, certain culturally sanctioned beliefs my students hold about inequity and (Irvine & Armento, 2001)why it persists especially for African Americans, take White norms and privilege as givens" (p. 133). She stated that while her students said that they deplored racism and social inequities, in fact most were ignorant of the shaping of their own identities by the uncritical acceptance of the dominant social order, "a dysconscious racism" (King, 1991a).

Therefore, if culturally responsive teachers have the role of minimizing "the cultural and academic mismatch…" (Irvine & Armento, 2001), self-examination is prerequisite to teaching students of cultural diversity. Irvine and Armento (2001)encourage teachers to be "reflective" probing "the school, community, and home environments, searching for insights into diverse students' abilities, preferences, and motivations" (p. 11), however, these actions suggest an

ethno-exam of students' but not necessarily of the teachers themselves. While Irvine (2001) acknowledges that American Africans and Hispanic Americans lag farther behind in achievement than other culturally diverse populations, their prescription for closing this gap rests in culturally responsive lessons and teaching, an academic solution. It is inferred that what works for one group should and will work for all, just change the material taught. Little to no emphasis is given to an introspective look at their own biases as teachers.

King (1991a) would argue that this prescription would merely be different information taught by the same ideological thinkers, ultimately perpetuating the status quo. Ladson-Billings (1994) alleges that curriculum takes a back seat to method and argues that methodology or "…the way we teach" (p. 13) that has the most impact. Ultimately, what we believe comes across in our delivery. If we believe that all students can learn, students pick up on that. If we believe some can and some can't achieve, they pick up on that, too. Invariably, the ones who we subconsciously target as unable to achieve are the first to respond to deficit teaching. No one lives *up* to low expectations.

Single-Sex Schools for American African Males

There have many historical accounts of American Africans who have taken responsibility for reversing the plight of the people--Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Martin Luther King to name a few. To this end, in 1991 in an effort to address the failure of the public school system to successfully educate American African males (Salomone, 2002), the Detroit Board of Education proposed to establish three experiential male academies. The goal of the experiment was to holistically improve the life chances of American African males through cultural validation, and humanizing education, offering self-conceptualization of being *at promise* as opposed to *at risk.* In addition to academic achievement, another overriding aim of the academy

was to offer hope to a population of American Africans plagued with social and economic

deprivation and to prevent another generation of statistical failure—high school dropouts,

unemployed, criminal activities (Harvard Law Review, 1992; Hopkins, 1997). The emphasis

seemed to be on remedying an education catastrophe of ubiquitous failing of American African

boys and providing a atmosphere and environment of lessened intimidation, where ills could be

addressed without fear of inappropriateness or disrespect to females and/or disrespect to

themselves. The separation of the sexes was in actuality a demonstration of "all due respect" to

females. As Singh (1998) recognized "just as coeducational classrooms have been shown to be

hostile in many ways to female students, it has been argued that the coeducational environment is

not optimal for African-American boys" (p. 158). Pessimal situations sometime require

unorthodox measures to stimulate necessary results.

Despite overwhelming community support and more than 600 students already accepted,

U.S. District Judge George Woods declared the academy unconstitutional and denied judgment

on the basis that all-male academies fundamentally went against antidiscrimination laws

(Hopkins, 1997) . "The judge said that no matter how important it was to improve the education

of black males in Detroit, any plan that excluded girls was not permissible" (The New York

Times, 1991). While acknowledging that AAMs faced nearly insurmountable societal odds, he

urged educators and community members to come up with a compromise. Baffled parents,

children, and community leaders walked away from the courthouse hard pressed to believe that

indeed the U.S. government could be counted on to support serious efforts to ensure the success

of American African people. Crushed, the Detroit School Board decided not to appeal.

What Opponents of Single-Sex Schools for American African Males Say

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Organization of Women's Education and Defense Fund (NOW) were major opponents of the Detroit Male Academy(Harvard Law Review, 1992; Hopkins, 1997). NOW charged that the Detroit Academy would discriminate against girls and constitute a reincarnation of the *Plessy* decision of *separate but equal,* which was determined in *Brown* to be "inherently unequal."[9] In addition to the challenge of NOW and the ACLU, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) argued that tampering with any aspect of segregation could be igniting the fires of past discrimination (Hopkins, 1997).

The primary argument against single-sex schools for boys has been, therefore, the inequality of segregation. The omnipotent failure of American African boys in public coed education, unfortunately, posed no immunity to the argument.

What Advocates for Single-Sex Schools for American African Males Say

Single-sex-education is not new in America, however, it has primarily been practiced in private and parochial schools (Sax, 2005). Catholic, Islamic, and other religious-based schools have in the past consistently brandished higher achievement scores than those in public schools (Figlio & Stone, 2000). Studies show, however, that what account for these better scores are teaching styles, extracurricular activities, and a more specialized school day (Figlio & Stone, 2000; Jones & Krelis, 1984).   The metal hit the road as the saying goes, when public education was asked to fund single-sex education for American African males. In keeping with the theme of my paper, I will review the arguments specifically for single-sex education for American African males.

---

[9] Comments of the National Organization of Women on the Department of Education's Notice of intent to regulate on single-sex education, 67 Fed. Reg. 31,098, http://www.now.org/issues/education/single-sex-education-comments.html

When one or ten persons are experiencing a similar problem it is usually their own

individual problems, but when tens of thousands of people are experiencing a similar

problem, it is a societal problem, and it will take societal systemic focus to fix it. The

Black boy crisis in America is at epidemic proportions in terms of his ability to

participate in our mainstream society (Wright, 2005).

Advocates for single-sex schools for American African males (SSSAAM) argue that

these schools serve to allow for the variability in maturation minus the diminution of self-esteem

(Kunjufu, 1991; Wright, 2007) as experienced in public coed schools.   In addition, single gender

schools can offer greater leverage in discipline protocols given male tendency toward aggression

and restlessness (Hawley, 1993; Riesman, 1991), especially in light of the disproportionate

suspensions and special education referrals of American African males.

Comprehensive school reform suggests dissecting problems that may have in the past

been taken for granted. Kunjufu (1990) advised that if schools would consider gender

differences, fewer males would be in special education classes. He recommended that either

boys start school one to two years later to acknowledge the fact that girls mature at a faster rate,

approximately two years ahead of boys. He observed "…boys may not be behind in reading if

we only compared males to males, rather than comparing male scores to all students. Males may

be two years behind girls in reading but may not be two years behind each other" (Kunjufu,

1990).

In a society such as America that has been wrought with racial, sexist, classist, and other

types of oppression, the tendency may be to focus on normative equality. However, equality for

one could be oppressive to another (Jacobson, Olsen, Rice, Sweetland, & Ralph, 2001; Oakes,

1985; Sax, 2005). This type of "umbrella concept" (Cooper & Jordan, 2005) to deal with race,

culture, and gender, may have served to endanger (Gibbs, 1988) American African males specifically in light of their learning styles and interactive personalities (Hale, 2001).

While some proponents of SSS argue that the separation of sexes minimizes the distractions (Mael, 1998), SSSAAM primary goal was that of building self-esteem by representing the best of the race to students which was often lacking in public school curriculum. Indeed, at the crux of the SSSAAM was and still is a new paradigm—productive behaviors, positive role models, self-identity, community strengthening, as well as academic skills (Ascher, 1991). What Europeans in America have to their advantage is that everything in society uplifts their image. American heroes have always been European—Superman, Batman, Wyatt Earp, Marshall Dillon, John Wayne, the list goes on and on. Conversely, the overriding public image of American African males is that of a criminal, killer, dead-beat dad, basically negative and untrustworthy. These negative images often color the thoughts and decisions of teachers, law officers, judges, and citizens (Ascher, 1991). The prototype of SSSAAM builds upon positive images of American Africans which is incorporated in the structure of the curriculum unlike the traditional public school curriculum where American Africans are sparingly distributed. In addition to the culturally rich curriculum, SSSAAM are strongly supported with outreach programs such as mentoring, before and after-school tutorials, community and church networks, colleges and fraternities (Hopkins, 1997).

The strongest voices for SSSAAM have been American African parents, teachers, community members and students themselves (Hopkins, 1997). In an interview conducted at a SSSAAM, a parent was quoted,

At Nijia all of the teachers care. I mean all of them. If any one of them can do

something for a child there, they will. Everybody goes out of their way to try to make

things run smoothly in the "village" (p. 85).

A fifth grade student responded to a question about how it feels to go to a school with

only boys, "It makes me feel real good because they teach us a lot of different things. They

teach you about the great pyramids, our history and things like that. Yes, I like being at Kemet

(p. 91).

A secretary at a SSSAAM responded to a question on the importance of the school,

stating that she "views the academy as an integral part of the community, and vice versa." Her

hope is that this model of communal love will prove to be the rule, not the exception, for inner-

city communities" (p. 88).

Single-Sex Schools and Optimal Learning Environments for American African Males

Single-sex school proponents claim that these schools are viable alternatives to coed

education (Hopkins, 1997; Wright, 2005). While academic improvement is certainly an

important goal for SSSAAM, the top priority appears to be the saving of lives—social, spiritual,

mental, physical, communal, and academic lives. The strongest proponents of SSSAAM have

been American African families, teachers, and males themselves.

Kunjufu (2005a) has voluminous data on the interests and learning styles of boys [and

girls] and is a strong proponent of differentiating instruction and assessment. There is scientific

evidence that American African children learn differently than not only Europeans, but that

American African males learn differently than other boys and girls (Ferguson, 2001; Hale, 2001).

For AAMs, however, this difference is read negatively.

Benjamin Wright transformed a failing urban school system in Seattle, Washington into a success story. He credits single-sex education with his success. I attended an *African American Male Academic Success Conference* in Philadelphia in 2007[10], at which Mr. Wright was a presenter. I asked Mr. Wright, "Can any teacher teach Black males? Does teaching Black males require any specific training or education?" He responded,

> The teacher of the Black male must first have courage and then dispel the many many myths about Black boys that he or she brings, like…All Black boys are interested in sports and music…Black boys have low self-esteem…(personal correspondence).

At this point, he went on to list the many myths that teachers bring into the classroom. But, the part of his answer that I want to express is this. The Black boy needs teachers who are first and foremost, clear about who they are, self-confident in their abilities to teach these gifted young men. Ask yourself, 'Do I love myself? Do I trust myself? Do I believe that these boys possess the same potential for growth as anyone else? Do I believe I possess what it takes to help these Black males actualize their greatest abilities to learn?' The teacher must conduct a serious self-examination and answer these questions truthfully and unapologetically. If the teacher cannot answer these questions in the positive and in truth, please DO NOT ATTEMPT TO TEACH BLACK BOYS [capitalized for emphasis], or any children for that matter. Broadly speaking, public school coed education has not been advantageous to American Africans, and especially not for American African males (Wright, 2007). The achievement gap persists after more than 30 years of tracking and the educational statistics of American African males is frightful enough to take a chance on almost any reasonable intervention.

---

[10] African American Male Academic Success Conference: Promoting Hope and Promise for the Future. (October, 2007). The Urban Education Conference: Opening Minds, Opening Doors. Philadelphia, PA. L.W. Farmbry & Associates: Urban Education Fund.

Given the AAMs' high rates of suspension, retention, and dropout (Noguera, 2003), an alternate plan for addressing the concerns of AAMs in Detroit in 1991 would have probably have had tremendous impact on the statistics today (The New York Times, 1991). The judge had another vision. He felt that girls' needs should have been addressed as well. Basing his decision on a discriminatory motive toward girls, the motion was denied. To not grant the establishment of the male academies as an experiment failed to attend to the concerns of the AAMs at all. The focus was judiciously reversed to demonstrate a more apparent concern for the segregation of females, and less for the more severe problems of AAMs.

African Centered Pedagogy

What manner of education will provide African-Americans with the voice to sing the sacred liturgy of their own culture. What manner of education will mold the African personality to thrive in a culture that has demeaned its character, denied its existence, and coordinated its destruction: How shall we sing our sacred song in a strange land? This is the fundamental contradiction that stands before African-centered pedagogy in the United States. (Lee, 1994; Lee, 1998)

During the 1930s when Elijah Muhammad (a.k.a. Elijah Poole), founder of the Nation of Islam in America, began to teach American Africans to redefine themselves, they were encouraged to discard their last names and replace them with Xs. The X indicated "unknown," as in Malcolm X. Their true names were unknown because American Africans carried the names of their slave owners. The inference is that freedom from the shackled identification by someone other than oneself is the first step towards freedom. As I indicated in the example with my students, the validation of students' lives is the bridge that effectively connects the unknown to the new. The value of African life in American education has been anchored under the bridge,

with minimal visibility. However, negative statistics of African life such as underachievement, criminal behavior, poverty, etc. invade our airwaves, living rooms, offices, classrooms, and society in general on a daily basis.

Oppression of the human spirit has proven to be an arduous and ultimately an ineffectual task, so many continue the struggle for true humanity through spiritual and mental enlightenment. According to Asante (M. K. Asante, 1991), *menticide* is the destruction of our minds and is the one principal pre-occupation for those who seek to oppress for which there is no limit. "You cannot grant or accept agency for a people who have been marginalized, whether by others or themselves, without fundamentally altering the character of the society" (M. K. Asante, 1998). To seek and find the core values of the lives of African people and exemplify this essence in the presence of degradation and oppression represent the goal of African centered pedagogy (ACP) or Afrocentricity.

Defining Afrocentricity

The concept of *Afrocentricity*, the centering of learning about African Americans through their culture, ancestors, and belief systems of Africa, is not a completely new phenomenon. Indeed, early 19th & 20th century historians and theorists such as Woodson, Garvey, and DuBois articulated and implemented movements for Black intelligence centered on an African worldview. In more recent times activists/researchers (Van Sertima, 1976) and academics (Asante, 1991-1992; Asante, 1991; Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994) have attended and nourished this theoretical concept. Asante credits an *Afrocentric* education with "placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (M. K. Asante, 1988). This customized education is "concerned with African peoples being subjects of historical and social experiences rather than objects in the margins of European experiences" (Asante, 1991-

1992). *Afrocentricity* is a contemplative response to the systematic tracking and subjectivity of African peoples all over the globe, but specifically African Americans. It is a proactive chorus of African essentiality in the success of African peoples—in spirit, body, mind, and soul (Hilliard, 1997).

The philosophy of Afrocentrism asserts that the racism in Eurocentric education is so deeply imbedded that African Americans can only free themselves through the "centering" of their origins on African-Egyptian origins of civilization and thought (Asante, 1991; Hilliard, 1997). At the root of the Afrocentric philosophy is the recognition that African history has in many cases been omitted from American curriculum at all levels and when it has, it has been diluted, misrepresented, and presented from a Eurocentric point of view (Asante, 1991-1992; Hilliard, 1997; Lee, 1994; C. D. Lee, 1998; Murrell, 2002), that American curriculum has structurally insured European hegemony and African inferiority, and that American Africans have been given a deficit model of achievement—one that diminishes African contributions and cultures. Foucault (1970) acknowledged that the curriculum field as well as educational literature in popular culture and academics is a Eurocentric "regime of truth." What is to be taught in schools, what knowledge is important or not, and the minimum required for successful completion are determined based upon Eurocentric values and thus formulates the canonization of "Whiteness" (Gordon, 2001).

Afrocentricity and the Impact on African Males

For the majority of American African males, public schools, unfortunately, have neglected to prepare them to realize the American dream of prosperity. They have for the most part proven rather to be storehouses of failure. The acknowledged venue for acceleration in knowledge and culture has ironically hailed as the direct opposite for American African males.

Noguera (2003) asserts that the "trouble begins at school," with American African males

superseding every other population in the experience of academic failure (Holzman, 2004).

> …there is something dreadfully wrong with an education/socialization process that leaves
>
> us ignorant of our past, strangers to our people, apes of our oppressors; and creatures of
>
> habitual shallow thought and trivial values… (Hilliard, 1997).

Accordingly, the three main objectives of *Afrocentricity* are 1) to depict Africans and

people of African descent as the actors of their own history; 2) to rehabilitate and exalt Blacks in

Diaspora and African cultural heritage and experiences; 3) to locate Africa as the knowledge

center of Blacks (Adeleke, 2001; Asante, 1998; Keto, 1995). Afrocentrity seeks to build upon

the resistance begun by Blacks during the 18th and 19th centuries, when the phantom of American

freedom was offered at a cost of self-denial. Its chief aim is to center the African student within

the "context of familiar cultural and social references from their own historical settings" (M. K.

Asante, 1991).

The ultimate objective of *Afrocentricity* or African-centered pedagogy is to remedy the

failures of Eurocentric *prescriptions* with a strong sense of culture and self—to heal the "double-

consciousness" of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others (DuBois, 1989).

Afrocentricity boldly addresses the fact that the language of the classroom omits the voices of

African peoples and thereby perpetuates a system where European values remain superior and

African values are inferior and dismissed. *Afrocentricity* prioritizes the knowledge of self and

the ancestral wealth of knowledge and spirit of those whose shoulders upon which American

African children stand, especially American African males. *Afrocentric* pedagogy centralizes the

importance of male involvement in moral, social, economical, spiritual, and cultural matters of

the entire African race. Understanding and accepting who they are situate the most important step in identity formation for American African peoples, particularly American African males.

No doubt the theoretical frameworks of African-centered pedagogy are as varied as the shades of Black skin. As an argument for educational and social improvement of American-African males, I will focus my attention on the unifying thread of Afrocentricity. That thread is the validation of African history to humankind; its connection to American-African life; and the critical study of dominance and *othering*. It is the "…strategy to seek one's centrality or one's human agency away from the fringe or the periphery" (Bekerie, 1994).

Notwithstanding Europeans voices of protests, Afrocentricity has also hailed the criticisms of American Africans as well. While giving credence to African knowledge and the need for students to know, American African protests have invariably questioned the segregating tone of Afrocentricity during an era when race dialogue is crucial (Gates et al., 1993-1994) or when students' multicultural knowledge is jeopardized by an African centered pedagogy (Ravitch, 1993-1994). European critique has conversely often attacked the epistemology of *Afrocentricity* and charged the authors with racist motives.

> Afrocentrism has deep roots in the African American community and represents a
> traditional belief with some impressive exponents…Much of what is currently taught in
> Afrocentric curricula in schools and universities lacks intellectual foundation and, what's
> worse, promotes racial animus…careless scholarship…racial intolerance (Chavez, 1994).
> Afrocentrism, for its part, tries to rewrite history. But as a form of historical revisions,
> it's entirely bankrupt. It's nothing more than a series of tendentious assertions rooted in
> [B]lack cultural nationalism (Walker, 1994).

Of course, Afrocentric proponents would proclaim that it is precisely because of these theoretical espousals, that there exists a need for *Afrocentricity* (Asante, 1991; Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994).

Afrocentricity in Public Schools

In Afrocentric schools, the curriculum is designed around an African-centered pedagogy**.** Teachers and staff are encouraged to practice self-reflection and are educated in subject matter and pedagogy. For public schools, though, this would present more of a challenge.

The term public infers variety and diversity of cultures, races, status, interest—the list goes on. Public schools, therefore, encompass all aspects of diversity. An Afrocentric curriculum could be just as limiting as a Eurocentric curriculum if the spirit of the curriculum erased the contributions of African others. In addition, teacher and staff preparation could present a major challenge not only academically, but in teacher receptivity as well, possibly even in schools with majority American African populations.   Lee (1994) posits that although implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum in a multicultural public school maybe a stretch, including the liberating goals of Afrocentric pedagogy could be accomplished by doing the following:

1. Foster the development of the skills in literacy, numeracy, the humanities, and technologies that are necessary to negotiate economic self-sufficiency in the society;

2. Instill citizenship skills based on a realistic and thorough understanding of the political system, and support such citizenship skills by promoting questioning and critical thinking skills, and teaching democratic values;

3. Provide historical overviews of the nation, the continent and the world which accurately represent the contributions of all ethnic groups to the storehouse of human knowledge (p. 308).

Although these methodologies are integral within the Afrocentric pedagogy and demonstrate appreciation of a cultural and political worldview, they represent only a fraction of the self-pride, wealth, self-sufficiency, and power propagated by *Afrocentricity.* The successes experienced by Afrocentric curricula have been concentrated mainly in private institutions and public charter schools (*Betty Shabazz International Charter School.*2010; *Urban Prep Academy.*2011; Watson & Smitherman, 1996; Wright, 2005). Generally, public schools do not proliferate such a worldview (Lee, 1994), yet these engagements represent critical practices to initiate the process to reverse the dire circumstances of American-African males.

Understandably, many proponents of Afrocentric pedagogy do not seek public schools as a medium of transformation. "The political perspective that guides public education will depend on who controls the schools in a given community. It is precisely these limitations of the present public education system that necessitate the articulation research and implementation of an African-centered pedagogy" (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). On the other hand, other proponents of African-centered pedagogy see public schools as important forums for instruction and learning, not only for American African students, but "as a system of understanding and meaning-making that all children should be exposed to and enriched by" (Murrell, 2002).

Discipline, Achievement, and American African Males

Research suggests that Black students are two to five times more subjected to disciplinary procedures than Whites (Irvine, 1990; Monroe, 2005; Oliver, 1989). Studies also suggest that the larger the Black student population, the greater the percentages of punitive injunctions

(Welch & Payne, 2010). Moreover, American African males are disproportionally represented in the numbers of cases of punitive consequences (Ferguson, 2001). These consequences may include but are not limited to in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (Welch & Payne, 2010), none of which address the academic needs of the student. Student achievement, self-confidence, and cognitive ability all suffer, resulting in yet another gap, a discipline gap (Monroe, 2005).

Theorists have purported that this process of disenfranchisement is part of a broader aim: to minimalize and disempower American African males (Lee, 1994; Lewis, 2003; Oliver, 1989). Since landing on the shores of North America, American African males have endured emasculating attacks from being sold on auction blocks, to being studded on various plantations, to being humiliated in front of their women and children (Franklin & Moss, 1994). Welsing (Gibson, 2010) named this process the "inferiorization process."

> …the conscious, deliberate and systematic process utilized specifically by a racist (white supremacist) social system, as conducted through all of its major and minor institutions...to mold specific peoples within that system (namely, all peoples classified by the racist system as non-white) into 'functional inferiors,' in spite of their true genetic potential for functioning (paragraph 4).

The underlying purpose for these actions was to maintain power and superiority, but the attacks were directed toward American African males particularly because, "It is they who Whites fear and who also represent the greatest threat to the continued political and economic subjugation of Blacks" (Oliver, 1989). It was, therefore, expedient to consummate the process in schools, the "race-making institutions" (Lewis, 2003) where race and racism is inculcated in lessons, interactions, self-definition.

Subjugation has been situated throughout all systems, social, economic, and education as well. But, through education, the inferiorization becomes legitimated and "appropriate" actions substantiated. Therefore, the actions of the inferiorized dictate and warrant the consequences administered. We therefore, have Black males disproportionately represented in remedial classes, special education classes, suspensions, and expulsions on an academic level. In the society at large, they have the highest numbers in unemployment and incarcerations. Although they may commit the same or even lesser deviant behavior than their White counterparts, their punitive consequences are much greater.

> African American boys are not accorded the masculine dispensation of being naturally
> "naughty." Instead, the school reads their expression and display of masculine
> naughtiness as a sign of an inherent injudicious, insubordinate nature that is a threat to
> order and must be controlled (Ferguson, 2001).

The disproportionate statistics on discipline referrals and special education enrollment of Black males substantiates Ferguson's assertion. Monroe (2005) attributes the high incidences of referrals to core causes reflected in the broader society: (a) the criminalization of Black males, (b) race and class privilege, and (c) zero tolerance policies (p. 46).

The primary outlets of the criminalization of American African males are the media, educational discourse, and the academic achievement statistics. These data imply inadequacy, illiteracy, and disruptive behaviors. Teachers entering the classroom are often shaped by these projections and which, accordingly, shape their practices.

It is common knowledge that there exists a discriminatory divide across America which situates populations by race, gender, class, and economic status. Teachers in urban public schools often come from stratified populations that may be culturally, racially, socially, and/or

economically different from that of the student population. Inherently, teacher unfamiliarity with cultural and social practices may cause incorrect interpretations of actions.

Finally, zero tolerance, which was largely practiced in the criminal justice system has been widely adopted by schools systems. The impact of which has been devastating to American African males. Robbins (2005)observed, "…the supposed neutrality of zero tolerance permits authority to be indifferent to history and color and how those considerations impact the perception of crime" (p. 8).

Schools and the promise of education has signaled for the oppressed a way out. Gaining knowledge supposedly levels the playing field. But, that would be dependent on who owns the field. In the case of disciplinary procedures in public schools, as in the broader society, American African males seemed to be tagged for the inferiorization process and the owner of the field seems to make the call.

Summary of the Literature

Although American-African males are the most at risk for failure in American public education, their voices are the least represented in educational theories, from the college classrooms to the curriculum planners, to the elementary teachers, to the PTA. Viewpoints and ideas of the average parent or "brother on the street" or American African male outside of the professional academia arena have been woefully underrepresented. The gap in the literature, therefore, is the lack of representation of American African males who may have been or have sons labeled as remedial readers. What are their perspectives of the school curriculum, teaching strategies, and pedagogy? Their understandings of how they learn and how their children learn may prove critical in how and what we teach.

The voice of American-African people have been minimized and exploited in the structuring of American curriculum and assessment (Lee, 1994; W. H. Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). I maintain that the ideas and opinions of American African males are inextricably linked to their success and must be consciously and systematically incorporated in every exponential component of educational design and implementation. Through my study, I seek to give voice to this population for consideration in future educational planning of the success of American African males.

It is our responsibility as African American parents, educators and citizens to develop educational settings—formal and informal—where cultural understandings (political, historical, literary, technological, financial, health, law, etc.), are not transmitted accidently, but by design (Madhubuti, 1994).

In the following chapter on methodology, I will explain my process for accessing this information from my participants—the fathers and mentors of my students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

There is a preoccupation among us: Because we claim to offer good education to all and because many minority people seem to reject it, we are plagued with the question of "What is it with them anyway?" or "What is their situation that school seems to go so badly?" Their situation. Should we really try to explain their situation? There are more primary questions: how to keep arranging for school failure to be so visible in our culture, or, conversely, how to keep making minority groups so visible. We might do better to ask how it is a part of the situation of every minority group that it has had to be explained, or about the degradation every minority group has had to suffer from our explanations.

(McDermott, 1987)

In America, voice is privileged and coveted. It has been granted to the select few who have in turn spoken for the masses. In addition to being privileged for the few, the right to be heard has been suppressed for many. Overwhelmingly profiled in adversity—criminals, illiterate, aggressive–American-African males have been assigned a leading position in America: problematic (Davis, 2003). Profiled early in the educational process, American-African males are too often the face of school "failure": policy makers have insured that AAMS have the lowest number in academic achievement, the highest numbers in special education for behavioral problems, the lowest numbers of college graduates, and ultimately the highest numbers in incarceration. Few researchers have analyzed and acknowledged this occurrence to the depth of McDermott, who wrote, "We help to make failure possible by our presence, by our explanations,

and by our successes; similarly, those who fail in school, by their presence, by their being explained, by their failures, make our successes possible" (McDermott, 1987). Perhaps this is because the "explanations" have come from the voices of the existing power structures in schools and society. Seldom have we asked the parents, especially the fathers, of AAMs for their perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

…with all the good intentions, excellent craftsmanship, and even with the reliability and eloquence of a particular story, representing Others is always going to be a complicated and contentious undertaking (Madison, 2005).

The purpose of my study was to access the voices and views of American-African males on their educational experiences and those of their sons, brothers, and young boys with whom they have a significant familial relationship. Because these adult American-African males have most likely also sat in these classrooms and endured the broad labeling and negative cultural messages, they ostensibly are in a better position to look at American education for American-African males with a critical eye. These voices have been for the most part silenced or misinterpreted in the formation of curriculum standards and pedagogy. Whether silenced by choice, omission, or necessity, American-African males are typically less vocal in their son's academic pursuits in elementary school. Considering that American-African males are most often identified as "at risk" for failure at the elementary school level (Noguera, 2003; Smith, 2002; The Schott Foundation, 2007), the ideas, beliefs, and perspectives of American-African men on their son's education could provide pivotal information for school systems, teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers in reversing this damaging trend.

I conducted a phenomenological interview study. In qualitative research, the interviewer as opposed to a printed survey or questionnnaire is the critical instrument for obtaining interview results (Poggenpoel, 2003). The researcher is the key element for creating a rapport with participants, for observing for details during the interviews, for transcribing, and relaying the unbiased analysis of participants' voices. These are the primary features of qualitative research: (a) the researcher is actively involved and the means through which the study is conducted, and (b) the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As a reading teacher, my desire is to make a personal and professional connection with the fathers and father figures in the lives of my students. Through this qualitative phenomenological interview study, my goal was to "amplify their meanings and intentions to a larger group of listeners and observers" (Madison, 2005), to gather and analyze the data to discover new knowledge about American-African males perceptions' of education and reading literacy in light of their own educational experiences that could drive and shape pedagogy and instruction for the improvement of learning outcomes of my students and other students as well. The limitation of my study is that it is a relatively small sample and may not lend itself to broad generalizations.

My study is guided by three primary interview questions.

1. What were the school experiences of American African men related to literacy? How do they think their schooling prepared them for life?

2. What are the perspectives of American African men on the literacy instruction of young American African males?

3. What do American African men think schools should be doing to improve reading achievement outcomes for young American African males? What will they do to improve reading achievement outcomes for young American African males?

Theoretical Framework

Critical [research] begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness

or injustice within a particular lived domain (Madison, 2005).

Alice Walker asked the question, "What is the work my soul must have?" (Walker,

2003). Year after year, I gaze into the beautiful eyes of some of the brightest, happiest, most

enthusiastic little boys you would ever want to see. Most of them love learning and are

energized when engaged in a subject that truly captures their interest. And year after year, I pray

a little harder that their excitement is not shattered by the fast curving ball of life. It is my soul's

yearning.

Racism masked in the normative structures throughout America for so many American

African males has emulated that fast curving ball. Early failure in schooling has to a great extent

prescribed failure for too many AAMs in American society. Beyond that, few approaches have

incorporated their voices in confronting this failure. Critical race theory (CRT) frames my study,

foreshadowing the reality that racism moves far beyond merely hating another person because of

the color of one's skin or moving into neighborhoods without Black people. Critical race theory

centers racism as being structurally inscribed in American life, judicially, economically,

educationally, and culturally.

As a critical researcher, my study of the voices and views of American-African males is

grounded in the history of marginalization and exclusion of these voices. The inclusion of their

voices, therefore, is a requisite for transforming the educational landscape for American-African

males, particularly in the elementary school.

Critical Race Theory

> I am convinced that there is something real out there in America for [B]lack people. It is not, however, the romantic love of integration; it is surely not the long-sought goal of equality under law, though we must maintain the struggle against racism else the erosion of [B]lack rights will become even worse than it is now. The Racial Realism that we must seek is simply a hard-eyed view of racism as it is and our subordinate role in it. We must realize, as our slave forebears did, that the struggle for freedom is, at bottom, a manifestation of our humanity which survives and grows stronger through resistance to oppression, even if that oppression is never overcome (Bell Jr. , 1995).

Critical race theory (CRT) posits that the victims of racial oppression are best capable of the explication of their oppression. Voice is therefore one of the central tenets of critical race theory. Employing the framework of critical race theory, I argue that racism and inequality are inherent in and throughout the American system of education. I maintain that the curriculum, instructional strategies, placement and assessment procedures incorporate and allow for the perpetuation of racist, prejudicial, and oppressive principles that ultimately denigrate and emasculate the African American male. I assert that while a slight percentage of this deficit discourse may be accurate, progress has been deemphasized because black education "...has been overstudied from mainstream establishment epistemological perspectives…" (King, 2005). Inclusion of the voices of those most affected and their perspectives of change must be included in reformation dialogue.

Another essential component of CRT is activism. CR theorists not only theorize the racially problematic systems in society, but endeavor to change them and their impact. The wholesale failure of the American African male is questionable and requires

examination. Their concerns and perspectives are required for authentication. These claims are otherwise invalid. My study initiates the activism of change first at my home school and is an implication for global educational change.

Critical race theory also presupposes that racism is normalized in America and its frequent and blatant forms often go unnoticed and unaddressed, rendering it an ordinary occurrence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The impact of racism, however, has been and continues to be both "psychic and material" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), implying the superiority of whiteness along with the accommodating advantages and the deprecating image of color and its associative disadvantages. Because it is accepted as the norm, it poses a strong threat to correction perceived as commonplace by the masses. Academia is not exempt from this ravenous grip of racism. Indeed it is in this setting, practiced in its most subtle form through colorblindness and prescriptions of *equality,* that it has its most far-reaching effect.

My study is therefore framed around the theoretical suppositions of CRT that racism is so thoroughly threaded throughout economic, social, cultural, and educational structures in American society that is appears normal and ordinary. The victims of this presupposed surreptitious racism are the only ones qualified to speak contextually on its impact in their lives.

Design of Study

In this section, I will provide a snapshot of the characteristics of my school population and the selection process for my participants, I will also expose information about myself and my positionality in order to make clear my interest in this study.

School Demographics

I am the reading specialist at a K-5 elementary school in a central Georgia suburb. The school community has primarily been populated by middle income families. However, during the past three years, loss of jobs, the country's recession, along with the construction of area apartment complexes, the social economic status (SES) of the school has been significantly altered. During the 2008-2009 school year, based on the number of free and reduced lunches, our school qualified as a transitional Title I school. During the 2009-2010 school year, it will become a full-fledged Title I school entitled to all of the financial and staffing benefits of the Title I Program. The school had a student population of 783 as of January 2009, with staff of 37 homeroom teachers, two interrelated teachers, one math and one reading specialist, all of whom are people of color. The three staff members of European descent serve as Assistant Principal of Discipline, Counselor, and Media Specialist. This year, I service first through fifth grade students. Of the 62 students that I service, 51 are American African males.

School Culture

Referred to as a "family" by our principal, our school staff and students are a close-knit group. There is a strong belief in the holistic development of the students and of ourselves and staff members. Our principal enjoins the same principles of study, collaboration, good health, and peace of mind for the staff as she encourages for the students. Several grade levels have collaborative monthly meetings (Critical Friends Groups) where they discuss effective and ineffective classroom practices, student work, and grading procedures. Our staff meetings are lively and filled with activities that boost teacher morale and stimulate teaching practices. We are also acclaimed as the first sugar-free school in the country. For more than 10 years, our lunches have consisted of fruits, vegetables, and sugar free snacks and desserts. Birthday celebrations are

unique. For years, parents were innovative in celebrating children's special days, giving gifts of books, beautifully wrapped toys and school supplies. Each morning after announcements, our school is buzzing with energy as we all dance to the "Morning Vitamin" blasted over the intercom, preparing our minds and bodies to absorb the learning and knowledge in which we are about to engage.

Selection Process & Description of Participants

As the reading specialist, my responsibility is to teach reading to second through fifth grade students who score less than the 800 required to pass the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and kindergarten through first grade students recommended by the teacher who are functioning below grade level in the classroom. These students are labeled as *Level I* students.

Each year, I call all of my parents during the first two weeks of school just to introduce myself and inform the parents of how well their child is performing in the class. During the first two weeks, of course, all of the children have a good report. If I notice any glaring concerns such as allergies, illnesses, or extreme behaviors, I share them with the parents as well. Generally, however, my intent is for my first phone call to be positive.

Subsequent to that first phone call, I speak with most of the parents several times during the year, either at *Level I* meetings (informational meetings with parents of children who are coded at *Level I*) or through telephone conversations. The usual contact for academic consultation is done through the mothers. During the 2008-2009 school-year, I only met two fathers at parent-teacher conferences. This limited participation is unfortunately indicative of the general participation of fathers or male guardians of my students and therefore, the propelling stimulus behind my study. These invisible voices could hold the keys to reversing the deficit

trend in achievement of American African males. These voices that may be stilled by choice or by marginalization could be the breakthrough from being defined by others to becoming self-defining and thus define as well standards of achievement.

I wonder if they are aware of the power of their knowledge?

I wonder do they know that they *can* make a difference?

I wonder if they will feel the connection to the elders

…and to the future?

I can encourage them to try.

The names of all of my male students in third and fifth grades will be selected and the names of the male guardians listed on their information cards will be recorded on index cards. These grades were selected because of the critical requirement for these students to pass the state's standardized test, the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (GCRCT). Students in grades third and fifth who do not pass the test are unable to pass to the next grade and are retained. I will call each of these guardians and ask if they are willing to participate in a study on American-African male views on American education for American-African males in elementary school. I will inform them that if their names are selected, they will be contacted within a week. Three names selected from the willing participants on each grade level will be randomly selected for a total of six participants. I will again contact them to ascertain their participation in the study.

These American-African fathers, brothers, uncles, guardians, mentors (including ministers) who are personally and educationally involved with the male students in my class may live in or out of the home, but must have direct involvement in the mental and intellectual guidance and/or education of my student in terms of reading assistance, homework help, project

preparation, and/or behavior. Participants must be 18 years or older. These participants are under no obligation to participate and will participate in the interview process voluntarily. They are also under no obligation to complete the process and may terminate any or all interviews at any time.

The alternative plan should I not have enough male participants from my current class, is to request American African male adult parents from my former classes.

Researcher Subjectivities and Positionality

The acknowledged Others become subjects when the audience and performers actually identify with the substance of who they are, where they are, and what they do (Madison, 2005).

I recently went home to Alabama with my son and daughter. My daddy was encouraging my son in his new venture as an independent truck driver. He went on to tell us a story, which I had heard many times about endurance and undaunted determination. It was a story that probably chronicled the all-too-familiar events of many of my father's days and many of my son's days to come. He told us about the time my grandfather (Big Daddy), my father and his oldest brother (Uncle Varn) would work from sun-up to sun-down cutting down the trees on their property and loading them on the truck. "It was haaarrrrd work," Daddy said. And when they went to sell the pulpwood how they watched from the truck (the boys were told to stay in the truck) as the White man starred at my granddaddy (chewing on a cigar, smiling, and spitting to the side), said he didn't "buy nothing from no niggers." "I can still see Big Daddy taking off his cap and looking down to the ground as the White man walked away from him," Daddy painfully recalled. "Varn [my uncle] was soooo mad. But, he didn't dare get out of that truck. Big Daddy had told us not to get out no matter what." Determined and undaunted, Big Daddy went to Ole'

Man Vince (another White man) and he bought the lumber from him. As I watched Daddy tell

the story possibly for the 100th time (you see, we loved and still love to hear Daddy's stories), I

could see the pain he still felt for his daddy in his eyes. He seemed to be saying to my son that

there is nothing you can't overcome; if one way doesn't work, find another way.

Uncomfortably close to the pain and degradation of discrimination experienced by my

granddaddy, daddy, brothers, husband, and sons, I could tell my own story of its residual effects

on American African mothers, daughters, and wives. I could offer lessons on comforting,

encouraging, and crying. But, my story is not their story. My pain is not their pain. This story

must be told by them, in their own words. And so in my study, I seek to "amplify their meanings

and intentions to a larger group of listeners and observers" (Madison, 2005) and publish the

concerns and the insight of American-African men on the education of their sons.

Subjectivities

Growing up in Birmingham, AL during the 1950's and 60's had its experiential impact

on my perception of justice in America. It was a time of extreme racial unrest. Observing the

racial discrimination toward my grandparents, my father, myself—then watching Dr. King shot

down by an assassin's bullet because of his call for justice, little did I know, became a prophetic

injunction for my life's mission.

Year after year I watch more and more American African males fill the seats in my

classroom. Many have internalized a culture of failure and expect little of themselves or anyone

else for that matter. Others openly express dissatisfaction with being in a "reading class," an

obvious metaphor for failure. No doubt, the roots of this phenomenon probably extend much

deeper than the three to four years that these students have been in school.

As I formulated the questions for this study, I pondered whether the men in my study would bring a different paradigm—whether they would be so far removed from my personal experiences or had not conceptualized the politics of education from a racial standpoint. I answered myself—"This is possible." Schram (2006) posits, "Looking for the paradox helps to expand the possibly narrowing impact of unexamined hidden agendas you might be carrying into your research," (p. 137). And Madison (Madison, 2005) contends, critically conscious research "…is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s), one in which there is negotiation and dialogue…" (p.9) with the ultimate goal of improving circumstances in the world of the Other.

My study, therefore, is generated from an emic perspective (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; M. Patton, 1990) utilizing and valuing the voices of the men *inside* the area of focus. During the course of the interviews, there may be times when the experiences of the participants may compare with my own, which I may share with my participants. Seidman (1998) notes that this kind of occasional sharing could encourage the participant to be more willing to share on a more "inner" (p. 73) level. He cautions, however, that overusing this technique could be distracting and cause participants to focus more on my stories as the interviewer as opposed to sharing their own. In an effort to monitor and minimize the hierarchical relationship inherent as the researcher, I realize that *my* questions and *my* guiding of the conversations carry their own import. I will constantly monitor my own thoughts and feelings or subjectivities as cues for further and deeper questioning and clarifications.

Positionality

Madison (Madison, 2005) refers to positionality as "a turning back on ourselves" (p. 14). Along with bringing attention to the hierachial structures which I assert impede the academic

success of Black males, it is also essential that I examine and outlay my own personal biases, power, and authority which could influence my study. Michelle Fine (Fine, 1994)frames three positionalities in qualitative research.

1. The *ventriloquist* who transmits information in an effort toward neutrality or invisibility in the text

2. The position of *Voices* represents the voices of the participants themselves, their meanings, and experiences that oppose the status quo. The position of the researcher is present, but is negligible.

3. The *activism* position is one in which the researcher takes a clear position as an advocate for marginalized groups against hegemonic practices.

Clearly, illuminating the voices of American African men as a contribution toward the academic success of Black males, suggests a position of activism. At the same time, I realize that I will be interviewing adults who are related to and have familial and social ties with the students that I teach. Acknowledging this possible perception of power and authority, I will inform my participants that their words and view will in no way be held against the child, nor will it affect his grades in any way.

My experiential knowledge of the educational struggles of American African males is incomplete as an American African female. From an emic (M. Q. Patton, 2002) perspective, I am strongly impacted by the experiences of my father, brothers, husband, sons, students, and American African males in general. Simultaneously, this position limits my understanding of the import of their possible internalization of failure, leaning more toward an etic (M. Q. Patton, 2002) point of view.

These diverse positions and their implications must be considered in an approach to research. The examination of positionality is a necessary step as a reflective effort to check for biases and intentional or unintentional manipulation of data, method, or authority. Positionality calls me back as a researcher to accountability in representation and interpretation.

Data Collection and Analysis

At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience…At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth (Seidman, 1998).

A critical race (CR) framework suggests that marginalized populations are more capable to communicate their needs based on their lived experiences. Framed in CR, My research is a critical phenomenological interview study. The phenomenon that I am studying is the perspectives of adult American African males of the impact that race and/or racism had on their educational successes or struggles and how closely their experiences resemble the experiences of their own sons or young male relations. This "unique voice of color" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) illuminating common everyday experiences and their perceptions of education within a racial context can offer profound insight on how we can improve the educational outcomes of future generations. I also want to know, if and to what extent they implicate racism through commission and/or omission in American educational structure and design and its impact on the motivation and interest level of AAM students. The goal of my study is to unveil the introspective voices of American African adult males on American education and their views on creating optimal learning environments, strategies, and approaches for the successful teaching of

reading to American African males—what they believe need to be changed and what need to remain the same.

Design

My design is structured primarily around Seidman's three-interview series: three 90-minute interviews spaced three days to a week apart (Seidman, 1998). I am particularly interested in Seidman's approach because of the in-depth characteristic of the interviews which are designed to understand "the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1998). I will conduct three approximately 90-minute interviews, held in participants' homes or wherever is convenient for participants and conducive to the reflective environment required for information gathering and sharing. Interviews will be scheduled one week apart. I will ask participants to state their age range: 18-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50 and above in order to identify generational commonalities and/or differences for analytical purposes as well as to identify tensions in views within generations, across generations, gaps and divides.

Grounding the focus of the three-interview approach in a phenomenological context, Seidman (1998) contends that each interview requires structure and adherence. Each interview is designed with open-ended questions that will allow participants to reflect deeply on past experiences and events. Because each interview serves a particular purpose both individually as well as within the series, it is essential to adhere to the requirements and order of each interview, which is a building block for the subsequent interview.

In-depth reflections are necessary for participants to probe and contextualize their experiences (Seidman, 1998), which may not be an easy accomplishment, especially when there are parameters of expression. For instance, the first interview establishes the participants' experience in context. Participants are asked to give an oral history or reconstruction of their

experiences within the particular topic. Questions are more "how" oriented as opposed to "why" in order to reconstruct a "range of constitutive events" (p. 11). So, if a participant wanted to explain why a particular experience happened a certain way in the first interview, he would be requested to refocus and only talk about *how* it happened. This could be a challenge for me as the interviewer as well. Therefore, while I do want my participants to feel comfortable enough to express themselves openly without inhibition, I must structure my questions to ensure that participants can "reconstruct a range of constitutive events in their past" (Seidman, 1998).

Seidman's second interview continues to situate the participants within the experiences in order to gather more detail. Participants are still asked not to evaluate or offer opinions, merely to recall as many details within the experience as possible… micro steps that ultimately construct the present picture.

The first and second interviews set the foundation for the third. In the third interview, participants are asked to reflect on the meanings of their experiences; that is, on how and which factors came together to influence their present. Seidman clarifies the term "meaning" as the "intellectual and emotional connections" not to be confused with "satisfaction or reward" (p. 12). Therefore, participants are not making affective validations but thoughtful and insightful observations on particular incidents that brought them to where they are now. This process of interviewing will not only serve as a meaning-making exercise for me as the interviewer, but for the interviewee as well. Through the recalling and telling of their experiences within the context of a particular reference, the participants may come to better understand their own experiences and how they have impacted their lives and the lives of their sons or males relations. The making of meaning is the "center of our attention" (p. 13).

While Seidman (1998) guides the how of my interviewing, Madison (Madison, 2005) is a constant reminder of the why. Seidman emphasizes strict adherence to structure and technique, but I draw from the critical stance of Madison (Madison, 2005) and search for "deeper truths" as opposed to "the need for verifiable facts and information" (p. 26). In my quest to represent the voices and views of the targeted adult American African male population, Madison is constantly in my head, reminding me of the accountability of my power of representation and its responsibilities. Seidman (1998) prefers a somewhat detached posture during the interview relationship, "friendly but not a friendship" (p. 81). Madison, on the other hand, connected to my desire to "penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of—the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach" (Madison, 2005). This posture I believe allowed me to position myself more as a confidante who could be trusted with their inmost thoughts as opposed to being "friendly" just to get information.

Although I have asserted that American education, indeed American society, has systemically exempted the voices of American African males, my research may suggest otherwise. Notwithstanding my quest to be critical, to influence change in the status quo of academic failure, to make audible the inaudible voices of American African fathers, brothers, ministers, uncles, mentors and others, my responsibility first is to truthfully represent those who have given me their trust. If their words support my arguments—great! If they don't, it is what it is. I will report it honestly.

Data Collection Method: Interviews

It is important to make the distinction that Seidman's (Seidman, 1998) qualitative interview structure is based on phenomenological life histories. My study is phenomenological but not *life* histories. Critical to Seidman's interview structure is the time allowed for

participants' reconstruction and reflection on experiences within the context of their lives. This process is also very important in my study. Because my study focuses on the common and possibly contrasting educational experiences of my participants, adult American African males, as well as American-African male youths, my interview structure slightly bends the form of Seidman's life history interviews.

Like Seidman, in my first interview, I asked participants to reflect on their own behavior, learning style, and experiences in school, with particular emphasis on reading: *How were you taught to read*? *How do you believe you learned best? How well do you believe the teachers and the school attended your behavior and to the way you learned in terms of behavior modifications, reading materials, classroom activities, or teaching strategies?* I asked them to recall as much as possible reading experiences in elementary school attending to the highlights and the tragedies, teachers, principals, school culture, racism—everything that they can recall. If participants are unable to sufficiently remember elementary experiences, I will ask them to recall learning experiences in middle and high. Bending the structure, however, during the first and second interviews, I will use a combination of Seidman's first and second interview structure. I will ask participants to recall experiences *and* give details of those experiences.

My second interview differs contextually from Seidman's because it concentrates not on the participant, but on his male relation who is or has been enrolled in my class. However, I respected the structure and asked the participants to reflect on the behavior, character, and school experiences of their male relations: *How do you believe he learns best? How well do you believe the teachers and the school attend to the way he learns in terms of behavior modifications, reading materials, classroom activities, or teaching strategies?* Again, as in the first interview,

I also asked my participants to try to recall any highlights, struggles, behavior challenges, or any perceived impediments to the child's learning.

My third interview followed Seidman's in that I asked my participants to be reflective of the meanings (intellectual and emotional) of their personal experiences shared in the first interview as compared to that of their relations' experiences shared in the second interview. In this interview, I wanted participants to bare their souls, to reflect on the meanings of both their experiences as well as those of the child's. In other words, after reflecting on their personal experiences and their child relations' experiences, I wanedt them to speak their concerns and suggestions as if they were standing before the U.S. Department of Education and their voices were the only ones to be considered in making recommendations for future practice in educating American African males.

As indicated above, I conducted three interviews (Appendix E), held in participants' homes or convenient locations for participants and conducive to the reflective environment required for information gathering and sharing. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and lasted approximately 90 minutes. I monitored for tensions in the views within generations, across generations, gaps and divides.

Participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts of all three interviews for validity including inaccuracies, misunderstandings, or anything that participants may felt depicted them in a vulnerable light (Seidman, 1998). This process has been referred to as member checking (Merriam, 2002), which will be explained in the next section. Participants received these transcripts within 45 days of completing the final interview. I hand delivered the transcripts. Interviews were scheduled weekly with two being rescheduled, totaling 18 interviews

within a two-month timeframe. I made allowances for unexpected cancellations or interruptions that arose by incorporating an additional two weeks for interview time.

Data Analysis

Field Notes are written messages that may be used to describe, clarify, and illuminate what is happening while the interview is being conducted. Seidman put little emphasis on field notes or note taking. He explained that "working notes" (p. 64) could help to keep the interviewer focused on what the participant is saying and to keep the interviewer from interrupting the participants (Seidman, 1998). On the other hand, Esterberg (2002) asserts that taking field notes is one of the most important tasks in conducting field research, noting that they are "your written record of what you have observed" (p. 73). She cautions that field notes should, if possible, *not* include generalizations or opinions.

During my mock interview, I took field notes. Taking notes helped me to focus my attention on my participant's words and actions. I made my participants aware of my note taking and informed them that it was a way for me to remember occurrences that happened during the interview that may have been significant in my analysis. I took notes on facial expressions, gestures, reactions, happy or painful recounting, and any nonverbal cues offered by my participants and observations that had an impact on me as well. As I collected data from the interviews, I immediately began the process of transcribing.

Coding is the process of organizing the data into categories and areas of interest. It is the organizational framework (Glesne, 1999) of the study or the "serious housekeeping" (Esterberg, 2002) that must be taken care of before I can begin the analysis. I chose to begin coding after transcription, asking myself, "What was discussed during the interview that is important to my questions?" I read the transcription along with my field notes several times identifying and

bracketing points of interest (Seidman, 1998). Some researchers suggest analyzing the data

during data collection (Esterberg, 2002; Ezzy, 2002) in order to alleviate the possibly daunting

task of management, and get a jump on clarifications or inconsistencies that may have appeared

during the interviews. Reflecting on his personal strategy, Seidman (1998) reveals that although

he "lives with the interviews, constantly running them over in my mind and thinking about the

next," (p. 96), he avoids any in-depth analyses until he completes his interviews.

Looking for common experiences, I identified themes across all of the interviews and

grouped them together in categories or what Glesne calls "code clumps" creating an

organizational framework (Glesne, 1999). Grouping, categorizing, or clumping not only assisted

me in identifying similarities, but in assimilating my data for my audience (Madison, 2005).

Ordering my data by topics that arose in the data, comparing and contrasting, and even

eliminating data that may be irrelevant to my study helped me to hone in on the most pertinent

data. Carspecken (1996) notes, "Code with analysis in mind". My purpose was to hear the

experiences, perceptions, and suggestions of the fathers of my students in terms of creating a

culture of learning for American African males. To analyze my data, I coded and compared data

from interviews, noting generational particulars, to generate themes to cross compare and

contrast American-African males' personal experiences as well as their experiences with those of

their sons.

Ethics and Intergrity

Ethical behavior in research connotes recognizing "every individual as a valuable being

worthy and deserving of understanding, fair judgment, and our caring attention" (Madison,

2005). As a researcher, I understand that the establishment of my trustworthiness extends

beyond that owed to my participants, but to my audience and those who have entrusted them

implementation of this study to me as well. In this section, I will discuss some considerations in the ethical posturing of my study.

Rapport

Being mindful of rapport throughout the interview is essential in helping to create for the participant the feeling of being respected and of being genuinely heard (Madison, 2005).

In theory and practice, I found myself at odds with Seidman on the issue of establishing rapport. He ostensibly supports equity in the interview relationship between researcher and participant, purporting that as interviewers, we must "keep our egos in check, realize we are not the center of the world, and indicate that other's stories are important" (p.3). Yet, he confesses that he is uncomfortable with the assumption "that the more rapport the interviewer can establish with the participant, the better" (p. 80). He recommends "erring on the side of formality rather than familiarity"—keeping the relationship "friendly but not a friendship" (p. 81). While this advice may be practical for some, it may have adverse affects for others. Particularly in my case where I am the teacher of the child whose parent or guardian I will be interviewing. These are the people with whom I had already formed a relationship and called on to be chaperones, make contributions to classrooms activities or resources, as well as serve in other capacities.

When I envisioned myself in the position of participant with Seidman being my interviewer, I must admit I had feelings of inferiority—of being a *subject*. I imagined myself seeing through his "friendly" façade, believing it was all just an act to get information for his study…that he had no genuine interest in me as a person. It was a surreal reminder to me of how spirit and energy speak even through the print on a page. In this case Madison (Madison, 2005) not only guided the *why* for me, but the *how* as well.

Madison's perspective spoke more to the kind of person I am and the type of relationship I wanted to build with my participants. I felt Madison's perspective, which she refers to as "mindful rapport."

It is important to keep in mind in the beginning that rapport is the feeling of comfort, accord, and trust between the interviewer and interviewee. Bring mindful of rapport throughtout the interview is essential in helping to create for the participant the feeling of being respected and of being genuinely heard (p. 31).

That was my approach in establishing rapport with my participants and it worked well for me.

Informed Consent

For the protection of participants and myself as the researcher, I informed all of the participants of the purpose of my study and requested that they indicate their willingness to participate by signing a consent form. Participants were informed that they may withdraw, without penalty, from this study at any time at no risk. I was particularly impressed with Madison's (2005) lay summary because the respect for the participant's right to information is clearly outlined.

Lay Summary

Madison (2005) describes the *"lay summary"* as primarily beneficial to the participant because it precisely and substantially lays out who I am, what I will be doing, why and how they were selected, and their role in the process. Drawing from my research design, the lay summary is a full explanation of my project to those who will play a primary role, the participants. I reviewed the lay summary with the participants during the initial interview and answered any questions that they had. Participants were requested to acknowledge their consent by signing the

lay summary and consent form after reading, understanding, and accepting to participate in the study, which they all did willingly. A sample lay summary is included in Appendix F .

Remuneration

As an expression of appreciation of their time and contributions, I gave each of my participants a total of $20. In addition, I assured them that the publication of their voices would be utilized in the planning and organization of lessons and instruction for their own sons and relations as well as other American African males.

Confidentiality

The anonymity of all participants has been protected through the use of pseudonyms in the final report. Interviews and interview materials such as field notes are kept on a jump drive in an undisclosed location accessible to me alone.   At the acceptance of my dissertation, files will be destroyed.

Responsibility to the Scholarly Community

As I stated above, my ethical responsibility extends to the scholarly community which I represent, University of Georgia, my professors, and my employer. I will not deceive, fabricate evidence, falsify, plagiarize, knowingly misrepresent, any data collected, read, or represented in this study.

Potential Problems of this Study

There are potential ethical dilemmas in any research project (Madison, 2005), however, I do not foresee any problems in this study. I am interviewed consenting adults and advised them of their right to discontinue at any time. However, I did explain that their input had the potential of positively impacting the academic achievement of their sons or relations particularly as well as American African male students as a population.

Summary

My study will illuminate the voices of a population steeped in negative connotations, American African males. Through interviews I ask six American African men to share their experiences, perspectives, and recommendations for reforming education. Through their insight presented in my study, I hope to provide schools, teachers, parents, and students, with vital information toward creating a climate of success in public education for American African males.

Framed in critical race theory, my qualitative interview study is an exercise in activism, unveiling the intelligence of those who have been denied a place for success in the cognitive sphere of America. Eliciting dialogue with these American-African fathers will serve two purposes: 1) to examine the educational experiences of American-African males throughout "the educational pipeline" (Jackson, 2003; Jackson & Moore III, 2006) and their perspectives on the role of race and racism and 2) to utilize this data in curriculum planning, pedagogical strategies, and school and educational reforms for the purposes of increasing reading achievement for American African males toward closing the achievement gap.

The following three chapters represent the findings of my interview study. In Chapter 4 my participants discuss their own experiences in school. They talk about their successes as well as their challenges, discipline, and what they believe schools could have done to contribute more to their success. Chapter 5 is devoted to their discussion of the learning experiences of their sons and mentees, their strengths and challenges. Chapter 6 summarizes their recommendations to schools, teachers, parents, and American African males, fathers, and mentors.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: COUNTERSTORIES OF EXPERIENCES

Critical Race Theory defines *counterstorytelling* as "writing that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT adherents claim that counterstory is capable of initiating "a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In this chapter, we will hear from fathers and mentors of some of my third and fifth grade students as they share personal accounts of their youth and educational experiences. From my analysis of the interview data, I identified four major themes relative to the academic success and/or failure of American African males: 1) cultural exclusion of American Africans in textbooks and curriculum; 2) relationship of reading achievement and social/economic success; 3) importance of discipline in educating American African males; and 4) importance of fathers and male mentorship.

European whiteness was established as racially superior in American society over any people of color, and African blackness registered significantly more inferior in relation to all other pigmentations. No other continent can claim American invasion, stealth, transport, and enslavement of its men, women, and children to be sold as chattel property for more than 200 years. Assigning and constructing racial identity thus became a tool for hegemony and "organizing social inequalities of various sorts, in shaping the very geography of American life, in framing political initiatives and states action" (Omi & Winant, 1994). Since racial formation and stratification were the common threads throughout all cultural structures in America,

European domination along with the simultaneous racial discrimination was accepted as ordinary, and normal. African exclusion from prominence except menial labor was their allocated destiny.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, in the face of African demands for equality, factions of European American leadership became preoccupied with structuring education for Blacks. The goal was to both assuage African expectations of justice and ensure the continuance of political and economic domination (Watkins, 2001). Eventually, when African people were granted the right to be educated, it was necessary for American education or schooling (Shujaa, 1994) to acculturate students in the superiority of European whiteness, culture, thinking, and intelligence and the inferiority of anything African. Durkheim (1899) proffered more than a century ago that education is ultimately a social tool and "…it is the leadership among the adherents to the politically dominant cultural orientation that exercise the most influence on the 'concepts, values, and skills' that schools transmit". Education for Blacks in early America was therefore purposive and "taught conformity, obedience, sobriety, piety, and the values of enterprise" (Watkins, 2001).

Today, European information, culture, and history dominate textbooks and curricula. Although there is a plethora of available information on the contributions and accomplishments of Africans and American Africans, it pales in significance to any other information on the contributions of European Americans presented in or out of school and rarely makes its way to the white pages of textbooks. Well into the 21th century, only a carefully selected few individuals and even fewer accomplishments have been privileged enough to be included in school curricula.

The absence of the merits of American African contributions in the school system coupled with the powerful media images, educational data, and incarceration statistics tell their own story—one of personal pathology being the tell-tale factor of their fate.   The consistently dreary numerical accounts of academic failure depict a people lacking inherent capacity to excel. These quantitative analyses seem to corroborate the vitriolic cynicism etched in the consciousness of American scholarship aforementioned by Dean Bailey, "…blood will tell; the Negro is inferior and will remain so; this is a White man's country; no social equality; no political equality; in matters of civil rights and legal adjustments give the White man, as opposed to the colored man, the benefit of the doubt, and under no circumstances interfere with the prestige of the White race…" (Bailey, 1914).

Cultural Exclusion of American Africans in Textbooks and Curriculum

"Education in general on a broad scale does not relate to them. The curriculum leaves them out." (Mr. Weeden)

Cultural familiarity is a fundamental tool in instruction (Bond, 1998; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Gay, 2000). We gather cultural and familial information from students, family members, community, books, and society in general. This knowledge helps us as teachers to make connections with the students through their familiar.   In other words making cultural connections with students serves to establish a point of reference for foregrounding new information. In America, according to my participants, however, every point of reference in their schooling was Eurocentric in nature explicitly and implicitly. Contributions that could have been gained from their cultural, racial, or familial backgrounds were ignored and unacknowledged.

When questioned about evidence of cultural responsiveness in their curriculum in terms of American African male images of success, four of my participants answered in the negative. Dr. Martin Luther King was unanimously mentioned more than any other personality, followed by George Washington Carver and Frederick Douglass. This limiting or elimination of culturally relevant references can severely anesthetize the interest of students. As the youngest of my participants, 35-year-old Mr. Jackson noted,

"When you're reading about the same thing over and over again, which is the…way that White people were portrayed, you're reading about the Julius Caesars' and Macbeths and all this and everything, you know it kinda gets old. I mean it kinda gets old."

The "kinda gets old" was an expression of resistance. Coupled with the expression on Mr. Jackson's face with his raised eyebrows and direct gaze, it unequivocally communicated the reality of the "in-your-face" disregard and the necessity for change. He reflected on the non-existence of the strategy in reverse cultural order.

White kids don't have to read about Othello all the time. They don't have to read about—I can't even really think about another historical Black figure that was represented in books that you had to read about, besides the aforementioned two [Dr. King and George Washington Carver]. But, I think that's definitely a major part in why Black kids kinda find it disinteresting.

Cultural exclusion of American Africans in the American classroom had and still has severe consequences. First, students and their cultures were overtly devalued. Second, the bridge to literacy was through knowledge of the dominant culture and not your own, an automatic denial of essence. Third, disinterest as a result of detachment was evaluated as

incompetence and illiteracy—not a natural response. As early as first grade, 38-year-old Mr. Gentry recognized the absence of his familiar from the classroom and books.

> My teacher's name was Ms. Ribble. I remember going home and we took the books home with us and I asked my aunt why are all the kids White? I remember asking her, even all of the names in the book were Caucasian names, Jane, Susan, and Billy and to be perfectly honest with you, none of my friends that I knew in my neighborhoods even the adults I had never heard any those names before. So it was hard for me to associate myself with what I was reading.

Describing his aunt as "being a bit of a firecracker," he said his aunt explained to him that "… we live in a White world. White people don't like us. If it was up to them we'd still be in the cotton fields and hanging from trees." Mr. Gentry's experience and his aunt's explanation demonstrate a transfer of the spirit of resistance as a result of the American African experience. The resistance that I speak of is dramatically different from the resistance model proposed by Ogbu (1998) where students believe that because opportunity is limited, pursuit of education has little value. The resistance expressed by my participants is based on their assessment that textbooks and schools were perpetuating incorrect information, indoctrination, and an absence of Black cultural intellectual contributions. They resisted lies and miseducation (Woodson, 1933). "History does not furnish a case of the elevation of a people by ignoring the thought and aspiration of the people thus served" (Woodson, 1933).

Mr. Weeden, a 42-year-old retired sailor believes that this structure of exclusion is entrenched within the school system and society at large. Reflecting on the normalcy of European images, history, and culture in his schooling, Mr. Weeden contemplated,

I feel that it is something that you are being given that you can't connect with. It's

nothing that will keep you connected to it like European history or how European history

does with those students—which that's their family and that's their ancestry—and we get

lost as a result of that.

Mr. Weeden puts forth a strong argument for culturally relevant education in just a few words.

"But, maybe the pushing out of schools opens the arms of prisons and pulls them in."

According to Schott, "Currently, the rate at which Black males are being pushed out of

school and into the pipeline to prison far exceeds the rate at which they are graduating and

reaching high levels of academic achievement" (Holzman, 2011; The Schott Foundation, 2007).

Mr. Weeden commented on this same pattern, suggesting that alienation from school sometimes

led to young men getting "caught up in the things that we shouldn't get caught up in, trouble in

school and later on in life, jail, not having the skills needed to get out here and get a job, not

being able to pass the entry exam to get into college, things like that."

Woodson (1933) would have agreed, suggesting that it was never intended for American

Africans to connect but to submit—submit to the superiority of the European ways and culture to

the disparagement of one's self. To eliminate one's cultural heritage in their education is to not

only discredit their worth, but to indoctrinate in the process.

…to handicap a student by teaching him that his [B]lack face is a curse and that his

struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's

aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime (Woodson, 1933).

Other participants shared Mr. Weeden's concern about the absence of cultural

representation. When asked about how they believed the inclusiveness of their own, someone

who looked like them, would have impacted their learning, participants were emphatic about

how they believe it would have helped American African males. Aspiring teacher, 57-year-old

paraprofessional Mr. Gooden spoke looking deeply into my eyes.

> I think seeing themselves in books like that would be a strong influence. Seeing more
>
> people of color will create more of a desire for them to read than seeing other cultures.
>
> But if they see their culture, I guarantee you they would read more. I think they [AAMs]
>
> would have read more and wanted to learn more. "Oh look at this. He's in the same
>
> situation I'm in right now." [Imitating how he believes students may have reacted.] But,
>
> we have to tell it. The books not going to be there unless we write them so some of us
>
> have to sit down and write some books, and stop making excuses.

Mr. Gooden believed that students could have been encouraged to believe that they too

had opportunity through the stories of others like them. He was convinced that culturally

relevant stories and pictures could have served to engage American African male students and

create an environment for real discussion. He passionately performed a monologue as if

speaking with students.

> But, we can see people like us, "Well you're not the only one that's going through what
>
> you're going through, but look what they did to move on. They went and picked up a
>
> book and started reading. That's what we want you to do."

This ritual seemed to touch Mr. Gooden deeply. His eyes gleamed as he lightly hit his

fist on the table for emphasis, evoking that we (American Africans) "must write our own

stories," stressing that "no one else is going to do it."

One message here is that the most effective learning takes place when students are

engaged in the process. The other message that is equally if not more important is that children

recognize when they are excluded. Mr. Jackson offered a parable using books and movies,

When stuff doesn't pertain to me or it doesn't interest me or it's not dealing with me or my people, I probably tend to kinda look away. It's like sitting down and watching Schindler's List. If you're really not in the mood to watch Schindler's List, you know… It's about Jewish people and what they went through, you're gonna sit there and not really pay attention to it, you know what I mean. But, if you throw *Roots* on, you'll sit there and kinda look at it a little bit stronger. Or you throw in *Friday*, a movie kinda like showing you of your own people, you'll kinda look at it a little bit stronger. I'm sure that goes for White people, Mexican people and everybody. That's just the way it is. But, you know, school kinda crammed things down you that really isn't relative to you sometimes and your attention tends to veer off. (Jackson)

Most of us have stories about how a particular teacher helped to shape our understanding about something or motivated us to learn something we thought we couldn't. I remember in third grade, before integration, my teacher called on a boy in my class to add three numbers "in his head." Everyone knew he was struggling, but no one said anything. She called on me and I gave the correct answer. She didn't embarrass the young man, but the next day, she brought money to help him to count three digit numbers. She told him he could keep all the money when he got the problem right. You better believe he got those problems correct each time.

What my teacher did was use what interested the young man to motivate him to learn to count. Most of us were from working class families. He probably was poorer than most of us. But, Ms. Ponder was not only interested in us learning academics; she was interested in us as children. She wanted us to learn life skills. Noguera (2003) suggests that teachers have enormous power in the identity formation process of American African male students, to help

them understand what it means to be who they are. He encourages teachers to "find ways to incorporate information related to the history and culture of students into the curriculum" (p. 15).

Mr. Worth, a 37-year-old father of three boys, recalled that as far back as he can remember he has always had an entrepreneurial spirit. But, when asked if he could remember seeing or reading about American African males that defied the odds and became successful entrepreneurs, he leaned back in his chair shaking his head rapidly with a smirk.

No, no, no. I don't remember reading noth—Christopher Columbus, stuff like that, that's what we were taught. [Reflectively] It's coming to me. There were really no pictures of Blacks or African Americans doing things that we are actually out here doing these days. They put us in there but most times they would put themselves first and say that we were a part of it. But come to find out that I—as I got older—come to find out that we were actually the ones that did it. They took the credit for it.

Responding to whether he thought having access to these stories and pictures during classroom instruction and discussion would have made a difference, he laughed heartily and said, "YES, I THINK SO! I THINK SO!"

None of my participants remembered observing pictures and representations of successful American Africans or reflections of themselves in textbooks. They maintain that the curriculum was consumed with European stories, characters, failures, and successes. It was the only standard by which all else was measured. American African exclusion and European inclusion was presented as the norm, the only examples worth including. What did stand out in Mr. Myatt's mind was the indoctrination, the propaganda, and the constant process of acculturation. He recalled being taught that the Civil War was fought because Whites in the South wanted to keep the institution of slavery, while those in the North fought to set us free. So, President

Lincoln freed the slaves because he thought slavery was wrong. Speaking in slave dialect, bucking his eyes and bobbing his head, he mimicked, "Cause he was trying to make us free." He then laughs heartily and says, "Naaaaah, it's all just a game." We went on to say that he believed that the promise education for Blacks was just that—a promise, just like 40 acres and a mule. He felt that it was never intended to become the great equalizer that Blacks expected.

Mr. Myatt was a 55-year-old father of three boys, who was so animated and reflective in his gestures and delivery, that I could imagine the advantages of having him instructing in an elementary classroom. I could visualize the students' motivations just by my own captivation with his delivery.

As Mr. Myatt proved with me in every interview, active engagement in learning involves arousing the curiosity in learners, allowing them to see a purpose in the learning (J. J. Irvine & Armento, 2001). Accessing and maintaining new knowledge was then and still is authenticated through cultural connections. The beauty and rich heritage of a people is passed down from generation to generation through its stories, language, education, and traditions. This is a well-known fact for it has been practiced in every culture. As Mr. Worth so aptly stated, "Those things that you can relate to your life you can remember. Those things that have no bearing on your life, you don't. It's nothing wrong with you. Everybody does that."

The bitter truth then appears to indicate that traditional education and its over-focus on the lives accomplishments of European Americans has had contraindications for American African males. Possible impact could include the loss of a sense of self-worth, agency, efficacy, ability to envision themselves as bright, successful humans beings, etc. Even with the overwhelming preponderance of research correlating academic success with culturally relevant pedagogy, textbooks, professional development and instructional practices continue to over-rely

on European-generated thought, practices, and research such as Marzano's high-yield strategies and Cunningham's literacy instruction (Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2004). I have used these strategies and continue to use them. However, these strategies alone have been ineffective in changing the educational landscape for American African males.

The problem, according to my participants, is much deeper than what these strategies address. Instructional strategies do not touch the core of the spirit of middle-class European American entitlement and superiority (Freire, 1970, 1993). Neither can they give assurance to the marginalized. Memmi (1965) reminds us that colonial schooling was not designed to embrace the colonized and help him understand his worth—far from it. Colonial schooling instead most often renders a disconnection from self as an independent thinker and creates more of an appreciation for the values of the colonial master, "a permanent duality" (Memmi, 1965).

Granted the rights to education in a society that situated you as a second-class citizen with a culturally un-responsive curriculum—was the glass half empty or half full? How prepared were my participants to navigate the harsh terrain of a recently "equalized" American education being judged alongside a people with perennial rights to education? In the following section, my participants reflect on their challenges and successes in reading and their impact on their social and economic prosperity in America.

Reading: Successes, Challenges, and the Relationship to Social and Economic Success

Reading print is not a natural art (Lyon, 2010). It is a skill that must be taught and learned and is more difficult to grasp for some than others. Certainly, making connections with learners and their mosaics of thought (Keene & & Zimmermann, 1997) and ways of knowing is critical in instruction and the learning process. Making connections with learners' familiar is

critical in reading instruction. In this section, we will discuss the educational successes and challenges experienced by my participants and how educational success is tied to social and economic success.

Reading Success

In her seminal ethnography, Heath (1983) stressed the need for incorporating students' communal ways of knowing and communicating to better address the learning needs in instruction and assessment. We now refer to these strategies as differentiating instruction to accommodate the variabilities of student learning processes. She purported that having this knowledge better prepared teachers to meet the students in what Ferrara, following Vygotsky, referred to as their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Ferrara, Brown, & Campione, 1986), thus enabling their success in learning.

Mr. Myatt talked extensively about the importance of friendships with his success in school. Perhaps it was the friendship between Huck and Jim, the young slave on the plantation where Huck lived, that piqued his interest. Or maybe it was the fact that Huck, an orphan, and Jim shared a special relationship of honesty and struggle that overshadowed the prominence of race. Whatever the reason, the connection was that Mr. Myatt's inspiration to read a complete novel was prompted by the relevance of the material to his interests.

It was precisely because of his ability to make the reading material relevant that Mr. Jackson found ease with reading. Referring to himself as a movie buff, Mr. Jackson said he took the opportunity in high school literature classes to become characters in the stories. When students were assigned the parts to read in class, Mr. Jackson not only read the lines, but actually dramatized the parts through his voice.

So, anytime we would sit in class and we would read out of the book and you know, it would be plays set up inside of the book and the teacher would tell each one of us that you're this particular character so anytime that character came up, you had to read that particular character's line. So, I was always anxious for my character to come up and I would speak loud and try to speak in the voice, the dialect of what I thought his character would speak like. I don't want to say it was easy. But, it was always fun for me to read.

One of the tools of comprehension is characterization or to be in tune with the emotions and feelings of the characters in story. Other skills include having the ability to visualize setting and understand plot or what the problem is in story. It was this kind of interactive learning and participatory education that engaged Mr. Jackson and made learning come alive for him. Unfortunately, as Mr. Jackson recalled, that it was not until high school that he remembered engaging in this type of learning.

Mr. Worth explained that he was in the EIP (Early Intervention Program) reading class in elementary school. Although most of his teachers were White, Mr. Worth remembered them being helpful, offering him tutorial help after school *if* he needed it. He said that he rarely requested the help because he felt that he had the deficit and he didn't feel it was fair to have them to keep helping him and he couldn't get it. He said what really motivated him to do better was the desire to read like the other students.

Really what motivated me to want to learn and do better is that I knew something was wrong. I wasn't reading like everybody else and I wanted to be like everybody else, at least to fit in. Not be like everybody else, but at least be able to fit in.

As the men expressed themselves and elaborated on their reading successes, I noticed that they frequently intertwined family, friends, and communal bonds with their success in education.

They spoke of the importance of learning in context with family expectations, support of friends, and healthy competition for excellence. For instance, Mr. Myatt attributes not only his success in school with friendships, but the success of some of his friends who were struggling.

> In elementary school, I was really a high achiever. Yeah, I'd make honor roll. There was a competitiveness between us, but it was good competition. So, we would be competing about making honor roll and getting good grades and stuff like that. But, we were real good friends…. And even then, the kids in our class that were lesser achievers, we were still really good friends with them….

Mr. Myatt recalled how he and three good friends regularly worked together on their homework on the telephone, and they also helped classmates who struggled.

> But, then what we found out is that even some of the guys that—because there's all different ranges of intelligence and how you learn—well we were finding that even the guys that didn't get it as quickly or as fast as we did, well we were good friends with them too. So, it was "hey man," he would come and ask one of us or one of the ones that understood what was going on, "How'd you get that? What'd you do with that?" So it kinda elevated the entire class. I'll guarantee you this and I have no statistics, no proof or anything, when I graduated from high school, I will bet you that we were reading and comprehending on the grade level that we should have been reading and comprehending on as opposed to today. But, it was community.

Summarized by Mr. Myatt, "It was community." It was a healthy combination of self-determination, family and community support that the men attributed to their educational success. This idea substantiates Hilliard (1997) when he purports that African education is a socialization process. "Serious efforts were taken to establish the social bonds necessary to

create a cohort of learners who not only were students, but who would be lifelong brothers and sisters in the most profound sense of those words" (p. 10).

The village concept that sustained American African communities during the centuries of oppression in America lost much of its impact with integration and civil rights. Along with the right to move into once before segregated neighborhoods, there often came the dread of ostracism, effectively annihilating the village concept. In Heath's (1983) study on the Black community of Trackton, she found that community was very important in a child's development. "Any baby born into Trackton is born not to a family, but to the community…Integration of the infant as a social member of the community is taken over by all…" (p. 146).

In a recent conversation with one of the counselors at my school, she expressed a feeling of helplessness for some of the children because our hands are tied. Where we once accepted and treated all of the children like our own, times have changed and our children seem to suffer most from the change. She lamented, "It used to be we could go to the homes and talk with the parents about the problems and maybe come to some solution. But, now, you better not think about going to somebody's house!"

Reading Challenges

Heath's (1983) study proposed that because reading and comprehension are so inextricably tied to language structures and communication patterns, to ignore these communal relationships in education is to set children up for failure.

Reading was a challenge for more than one of my participants. Mr. Worth struggled to describe his difficulties learning to read:

… to me that was the hardest thing to do in school—to sit down and have to read and have to spell. To me that was one of the hardest subjects in school. Everything else I could do and get past, but I recognized that…I needed that to do other things also, especially when I got to middle school, cause in middle school it came science, social studies. …But, to me that was the hardest subject.

As I watched Mr. Worth explain to me how hard it was for him to grasp the concept of reading, I was moved by his reflective countenance. He seemed to be trying so hard to understand why it was so difficult for him then and he even acknowledged that he still struggles today. He picked up the Bible from the table and told me that sometimes he would have to read a passage over and over and over again before he could understand what it was saying. Finding it still hard to explain why reading was difficult, it obviously continued to disturb him even today.

Mr. Myatt recognized exactly why reading was difficult for him; reading in school lacked relevance.

I could read sentences and all of that but actually to understand how the writer was trying to get you to understand the book or what he was saying, I don't think I grasped that until I was probably in the seventh or eighth grade. And I'm talking about just simply in terms of literature, because when it came to reading a sentence and answering a question, I was always fine with that. But, just in terms of reading literature and comprehending what I was reading… they had you reading Shakespeare and all of this kind of crap, well, that wasn't relevant to me.

But, the lights came on for him when he finally read a story that had relevance. His face lit up when he talked about the first book that caught his attention, *Huckleberry Finn.* He said

Huckleberry Finn was the first book that he read in its entirety and that was in junior high school. Mr. Myatt believes he was captivated by this book because it was the first time he had read a book with an American African character that really got his attention. "Here you are you have this southern White kid and this brother and they're good friends and they're rafting down the river. Well, there was some relevance there to me."

Aware of the importance of the incorporation of culturally relevant material, they questioned whether they were being educated to compete economically and socially in society or whether they were being acculturated to European norms, i.e. European superiority. My friend, Scott, adds, "And a tracking system that serves to sort folks more than educate!" Yes, they all believed that the ability to read was vital for success. Yet, they questioned the relevance of educational practices, such as learning about the lives and behavior of presidents.

> But, what is me learning about Abraham Lincoln gonna teach me in life, when I go out here in life and get a real job? So, that's what I'm saying, you know, school really doesn't teach you to excel with the stuff that they're teaching you in school (Jackson).

Mr. Worth believed that it is a waste of time in many respects because it does not prepare you for survival in the world. Acknowledging that everyone is not interested in college, he believed that schools should educate students with survival skills mentally and physically. "I think they need more involvement on how to actually go out and get a job when you come out of school and what you need to do on a job. And some financial classes on how to—cause if we really get realistic, we kind of get thrown out there." He went on to relate a project he had in high school which he credits with stimulating the entrepreneurial spirit in him.

… we did something where we had to create a whole product and actually sell that product, we had to design the product, do a marketing and sales. So I did get that, which that kind of helped me out and showed me certain things as far as that also. We had to go out and actually talk to some people on how to put it on the shelf, like get it to the store (Worth).

In some cases, however, school preparation proved insufficient. Educated during the turbulent 60s and 70s, Mr. Gooden received honors for his academic work in elementary and high school, but noted that things were different when he got to college.

…when I got to college I met different people who were on different levels who were also that, but they came from a different educational background. They were exposed to more than what I was exposed to. They had better equipment, better books. So even though they were scholastic achievers, their scale was higher than my scale. I wasn't trying to compete against anybody else, but I couldn't keep up on the college level. It was a struggle for me. One of the biggest struggles was philosophy. I could not grasp philosophy, no matter how I tried. My views didn't agree with the professor's views so we struggled and I thought philosophy was supposed to be *my view* [emphasis], but my views didn't line up with their views, so I didn't know what was the problem or what was going on…That's why even today reading is not one of my favorite subjects, but I find myself reading more and the more I read, through my travels, I can't stop reading. (Gooden)

Mr. Gooden's analysis of the problem he encountered in philosophy was analogous to a broader problem—the power of perceptions. He found that there were dominant (significant) perceptions and marginalized (insignificant) perceptions. In the classroom as well as in the

broader society, his views as an American African male carried little weight in relationship to the dominant view of European males. It was not until his encounter with this situation in college that he began to question educational difference. Was there really White education and Black education? Had his classmates received a different education than he? His experience seemed to emphasize Watkins (2001) theory, "A program of minimalism backed the rhetoric of liberty, equality, and self-actualization for the Negro. The Negro must be semieducated for semicitizenship" (p, 175). Despite the laws put in place and the integration of Blacks into White schools, the money seemed to follow the White schools which were equipped with better facilities, up-to-date books, technical equipment, and technology programs.

Mr. Gooden, however, said that he was determined to get a good education and "…nobody was going to stop me!" He found himself in the familiar situation of most American African males where he had to motivate himself in spite of the obvious "strong arm" tactics to invalidate his perspectives. He had to be his own Superman, Batman, and Avenger. He had to be his own Superhero. In other words, the American African male has to walk into the classroom with the understanding that he has to believe in himself, motivate himself, and support himself in order to learn about the importance of others.

The fact that instructional materials seldom included Black persons of importance and that my participants felt essentially unattached to the subject matter, (although they may not have recognized this dynamic at the time) would be an understandable reason for AAM disciplinary problems. How did my participants maintain discipline in an environment of possible boredom, irrelevance, and non-acknowledgement? What are their beliefs about the implementation of discipline procedures today? In the next section, my participants discuss their ideas about

improvement of our schools disciplinary policies and their impact on the behavior of American African males.

Discipline and the Education of American African Males

The question of discipline was not an intended part of my interview process. However, my participants shared strong viewpoints about the relationship between discipline and achievement. As a result, the discussion of discipline became a dominant theme in my study. Their observation and recommendations about the importance of discipline were strongly tied to their contentions on academic achievement. While they all expressed strong admiration for the men in their lives who loved them, they believed that these men influenced their lives primarily because they held them accountable for their actions. Some of these men were relatives, fathers, teachers, mentors, and coaches. In Mr. Gentry's case, it was a mentor. He explained that he was a very angry child, and school was basically insignificant, stating, "I didn't care." But just when it seemed that he was ready to shut down completely, he shared, "Then came along this young man as a mentor and he stepped in and he basically showed me hey you need to straighten your ways."

Experiences

His mentor was a surrogate father to him and informed all of his teachers to contact him if there were any problems at school whatsoever. Mr. Gentry expressed that he didn't think he was serious at first, but then he began to notice that he was at all of his football games and parent-teacher conferences, too.

He was old school. He was a Kappa [Black Fraternity]. He had that little red wood, that

paddle [chuckle]. I remember he'd come up to the school and he met every last one of

my teachers, instead of my mom coming. He came and he sat in on the conferences.

And he was like 'Look if you have any problems, you call me here.'

Mr. Gentry said that his mentor earned his respect because he lived the life he talked

about. "He didn't have to threaten me or paddle me because he instilled in me the desire to do

the right thing." Again, he gave a parable.

If you raise a lion around chimpanzees, he's not going to survive long. Because every

creature that God creates adapt to their surroundings. A lion is meant to hunt. He's a

predator. But if he's running, because he's adapted to the surroundings being raised by

chimpanzees, and they run when the predator comes around. He won't understand that

he's a predator himself. He's gonna run like the monkeys. He will eventually because

he's in an environment that is not suited for him, we'll lose him. But, if you put that same

lion cub around lions where he's supposed to be, he's gonna understand why because now

he has examples in front of him and he's watching what they do, now he'll learn how to

survive. And he becomes the rightful king that he should be.

Mr. Gentry correlated this analogy to American African males and the necessity of

having a male disciplinarian around. He believes that it's the male figure that gives boys focus

and direction.

If you look at the majority of young AA males that are struggling academically, one

major reason is fathers is not there. That strong disciplinarian is not there. He doesn't

necessarily have to be an educated man himself, but he understands I didn't get it but

you're going to get it—someone to keep that focus and that drive. There are households where mom and sons are there and mom understands that I'm not the man but I'm gonna be the disciplinarian and you're gonna do what I tell you to do. That plays a major role in that child's success.

So, according to Mr. Gentry, AA adult males are very important in giving focus to AA boys. Mr. Myatt agreed, stating that his father and uncles were strong forces in his life and their reach extended from the home into his outer circle. He laughed and said, "There was always somebody checking me!"

Mr. Jackson and Mr. Weeden shared the same sentiments, that AAMs need a strong AA man for direction and purpose. Mr. Weeden shared that his father was not as present in his life during his teenage years, he believed that what he instilled in him in his early years grounded him in purpose and he knew his "responsibilities as a man."

Discipline Processes and American African Male Teachers

I think that one of the most important professions that an AA man can be is a teacher, because number one, a lot of our kids don't have that father figure, that role model. And they need that. And they need that discipline because if you don't have somebody putting you in check, you'll go wild. You know, you'll just go wild!

Mr. Myatt was chuckling while he said this, but, the seriousness of his statement was unmistakable. He reflected that he did not have *any* male teachers until eighth grade, but strongly believed that male teachers and coaches, particularly American African males, set the tone for him and other male students in terms of behavior in school.

I didn't have any male teachers until I was in the sixth grade. And in the sixth grade, he was White. But then in the seventh and eighth grade, I had one—well, then we had an African American Assistant Principal, Mr. Bishop, and you DID NOT CROSS MR. BISHOP. You didn't play with Mr. Bishop and then you didn't play with Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Myatt only had one American African male instructor in high school, but he had five in middle school. He emphasized how their presence commanded respect as opposed to how European American males shied away from demanding their respect.

Aw, it made a big difference! Just in terms of—you know in middle school, you kinda wanna show out. You starting to feel yourself, getting some muscles, bass in your voice. And I think that probably starts probably sixth, seventh, eighth, you know. Then the girls really start becoming important. Focused on what you're wearing. But, yea, I had five AA male teachers that played major roles I think in number one my achievement, how much I learned and then because I still had—I'm just gonna call it the way it is.

Each of my participants expressed the necessity of males in all capacities as fathers, brothers, pastors, neighbors, mentors—and they emphasized American African males—as important in the disciplinarian process.

You can have a female teacher all day long but the minute you put a male teacher in front of a classrooms full of boys, first of all they now see someone who looks like them, they are amazed at the fact that he is educated and he's a teacher, and he looks like me. He's successful...ok maybe I can do this. All of a sudden, it's just something about the tone, the octaves in our voices, the bass, when we speak, things happen. It's intimidating. (Gentry)

During the late 1980s, Garibaldi (1992) was elicited by the New Orleans school system to study the constant disproportionate representation of American African males in academic failure. Despite the bleak findings, he strongly suggested that the current trend of failure could be reversed by specific initiatives. In accordance with the recommendations of my participants, Garibaldi included the following suggestion.

> More African American male elementary teachers and social workers should be hired and, where possible, assigned as counselors to elementary schools. A short-term strategy which might be utilized is the hiring and/or recruiting of African American males as teacher aides or volunteer aides in the lower grades. Peer counselors from junior and senior highs can benefit both younger as well as older African American male students (Garibaldi, 1992).

In elementary school, male teachers are a rarity. It is usually when students get into middle and high school that they find the majority of male instructors. Apparently, though, it's too little too late. Losen and Skiba (2010) found in their study on suspension rates that "28.3 percent of black males, on average, were suspended at least once during a school year, nearly three times the 10 percent rate for white males (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

The Necessity of Discipline Procedures and Early Implementation

Despite data that suggest that American African males are most subjected to punitive reprimands, highest rates of suspensions and expulsions in schools (Noguera, 2003), my participants believed that discipline is crucial in the education of American African males. According to my participants, the difference in their philosophy of discipline and the current

enactment of discipline in the school system lies in methodology. As Mr. Gentry stated, "It's the *way* that we're trying to discipline them."

The problem as explained by the participants is that in the majority of cases there are no discipline procedures intact—only *zero tolerance* policies (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002; Rocque, 2010). The zero tolerance idea implies that discipline in the form of corporal punishment will not be applied. Instead, students will be suspended and in some cases expelled from school. What essentially happens is that one's actions will be met with not only a denial of all educational opportunities, but a priceless opportunity to teach valuable lessons on character is forfeited. Disproportionately, American African males are meted out these zero tolerance sentences. Mr. Gentry is convinced that this is intentional.

> …the school systems are failing particularly our boys. I'm convinced that it is on purpose. You're not going to tell me that you can't implement certain programs. You're not going to tell me that you can't hold these boys accountable for when they come to class and act like a bunch of nuts. You're not going to tell me that you cannot correct disciplinary issues in the school.

Critics argue that the policies are inherently unfair and "always exclusionary, which is to claim that the victims of the zero-tolerance practice are denied basic equality of being…" (Robbins, 2005). Acts of perceived violence are accorded the same consequence regardless of intent or outcome. In other words, a student guilty of fighting to defend himself is meted the same consequences as a student who brought a bat and deliberately hit another student in the head. The "zero tolerance" policy applies because both were engaged in a fight. "The law… has become a cure-all, fix-all solution that absolves parents, teachers, and school leaders from an obligation to meet the educational needs of all students" (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002). This

position substantiates Mr. Gentry's claim of willful intent. Were behaviors observed that warranted attention before the crisis?

Balfanz (2003) conducted a study of over 400 individuals incarcerated during middle school in one major northeastern city. What he found was not only did they struggle "profoundly" in school, but that they were clearly identifiable by middle school. The typical ninth grader who went to prison had had a high absentee rate (58%), had failed at least one quarter of their classes, and read at a sixth grade level. Most had been suspended at least once at the beginning of ninth grade. In his sample, 80% were black, and 85% came from neighborhood non-selective schools.

According to these data, these behaviors were observed as early as elementary school. What corrective actions were taken at this young age? What do these data suggest? Were students allowed to continuously act out without consequences? Were counselors involved to make determinations as to what were the causes behind the behavior?

"With Black males, you check it at the gate" expressed Mr. Worth. This means that the expectation for good behavior is expressed and expected at the outset on the first day of school. This good behavior includes respect for authority, elders, and rules. In a society where the "democratic" way is to allow the students to establish the rules and everybody is "equal," having pre-established rules appears to violate so-called democracy and suggest more of a dictatorship—which is exactly what Mr. Gentry suggests.

> If you get discipline, you will get the focus. Our young men need focus. They need direction. They need someone standing right there next to them or have a system in place where they know that every move you make, we're on you. Once you get them focused,

a lot of the low test scores, the substandard achievements, of our young men, you're

going to begin to see that wash away, because now not only do we have them focused,

now we're giving them a standard. We've set a standard and now we're giving them a

goal.

In other words, once communal behavior is situated and established, students have a

model to follow, as opposed to them coming and establishing the order which may be disorder.

After all, as my mother always says, "God gave children parents for a reason." If children knew

everything to do, there would be no need for adults.

Rather than expulsions and extended suspensions, students should be encouraged,

counseled, and offered interventions in school as they are with academics. Mr. Worth linked

discipline, behavior, and self-control to learning proficiency. He believed that the youth today

learn more about how to conduct themselves from T.V. and other media than they do from

respect for a positive role model at home or at school. He felt that discipline and learning have a

direct relationship. Because they are trying so hard to do what they want, they misuse the time to

learn. "If you're not disciplined, you're not going to put the time in to try to learn." If schools

set the standard and hold students to high expectations in the beginning, he believed that the

discipline problems of American African males would be substantially reduced.

Because discipline statistics for middle school are linked with those for elementary, it is

difficult to disaggregate the data (Losen & Skiba, 2010) to distinguish the percentage of

discipline infractions reported on elementary level as opposed to middle school. However, the

data unequivocally shows that American Africans and specifically American African males have

a higher discipline rate, nevertheless.

Mr. Gentry explained how as a people, American Africans are strong-willed and aggressive (which he emphasized does not always mean dangerous) and the American African dominance in contact sports such as football, basketball, and boxing attest to this fact. So the strong willed mentality does not stop at the school house door. It is part of his makeup. However, if the expectation of a high standard of behavior greets them at the door as well as the assurance of their capability of rising to those high expectations, he believes that they will strive to meet those expectations. On the other hand, if they are met at the door with the expectation of failure—ignored and left alone to self-governing, inevitably human beings meet the level of expectations. Mr. Gentry explained,

> We've all seen the movie, Lion King, and the circle of life. I'm gonna put a negative spin on it. The cycle in our culture, circle of life has jagged edges, potholes.… It has dark spots, and pitfalls. There are obstacles set up for you to fall. It's a circle never-ending and they want you to stay in that circle. At every phase of life they want you to continue to fall and fail. If you want a man to fail, start out bad. Don't give him what he needs. Let him think that he can come in and be disrespectful and rebellious to authority. Let him grow thinking that it is ok to say what he wants to an adult, a figure of authority and get away with it and not be chastised or have to suffer the consequences for what he has done or said. They need someone standing right there next to them or have a system in place where they know that every move you make, we're on you.

Culturally Responsive Discipline Procedures

Because of the racial history in this country, many Whites approach discipline with skepticism and many Blacks receive discipline with skepticism. Hence, a hands-off policy has

ensued. The consequence has been devastating, particularly for American African males. Mr.

Myatt recalls his experiences at the recently integrated high school he attended in Indiana.

> I had White male teachers too. Now, there's one White male teacher that you didn't play
>
> with either, but the other ones, you shooting spit balls at them. Then I think after—
>
> actually, they were more afraid of us—than anything. Yeah, they didn't want to check
>
> you. They didn't!
>
> This fear factor mentioned by Mr. Myatt was referenced by my brother when he talked

about his first year at the integrated high school he attended in Birmingham. He said the

principal stayed in his office all day and pretty much ignored them. "He acted like he was scared

of us." This factor may suggest that reactions of fear could be responsible for zero-tolerance

measures or relegating a large population of American African males to special education

classes. That phenomenon offers implications for additional study.

Within this historical perspective and contrasting the suggestion of fear, Mr. Gooden

explained that American African males are sensitive individuals, but must be handled in a way

that respects their manhood. This respect involves insisting on them living up to their potential

as African kings and being examples to others. Oliver (1989) refers to this process as

Afrocentric Socialization.

> Afrocentric socialization refers to an interactive process by which Black parents and
>
> adults structure their behavior and primary institutions to promote among Black youth the
>
> internalization of values that emphasize love of self, awareness of their traditional
>
> African cultural heritage, and personal commitment to the economic political
>
> development of African Americans and other people of African descent (p. 26).

Of course, it is not expected that this approach would be utilized in a school system where the lives of American African people and children are and have been of little consequence in the first place. As stated before, educational norms are set by those in power to make such decisions (Monroe, 2005; Oliver, 1989). Historical positioning of American Africans according to Mr. Gentry justifies suspicions of injustice and as Les Brown says, "No one rises to low expectations."

Each participant expressed a particular perspective about the importance of discipline, but they unanimously agreed that the schools must hold parents to a greater degree of accountability in their child's behavior. Simultaneously, they all believed that the schools would ultimately be responsible for establishing the standards of behavior in the learning environment. They also felt that the school had a greater responsibility to "teach" students the value of character and to implement school consequences to actions *before* expulsions. It was clear that violations and behavior infractions should not receive mere threats, but should be addressed early and approached with a plan for modification involving teachers, students, counselors, and parents. The goal is to *help* the student acquire and appreciate people skills and not to penalize him for not having them. Mr. Gentry summarized it this way.

> … the fact that they can alter our code of discipline, it's a sign that they don't want to deal with it. As I said, you can't run a school with young men...now there are young men that have a strong foundation, but there are plenty more that don't. If we want to see the level of academia in our schools raised to a new standard, instill discipline, don't give room for failure, you breathe wrong, we deal with you. Discipline must be instilled in our schools for our AA men to excel and succeed just in life period. Discipline is the key.

This kind of firm approach is unanimously supported by the men in my study. They are American African men who are very familiar with American African males, their thinking and motivations. They did not exempt themselves. On the contrary, they included and recognized themselves and their teachers and mentors in the process.

In America, struggle is synonymous with American African males. It didn't begin with academic failure. It began with the erasure of their past and the coloring of their future by other than themselves. An ethos of struggle for a short term can often serve as a tool of motivation developing determination and perseverance. For the long term, however, it has the capacity to break one's spirit, faith, and internalize failure subjectively. The zero tolerance in school is reflective of the zero tolerance in the broader society, where American African males do not get the benefit of the doubt.

Given the historically situated status of AAMs, it seems plausible that American African males would be better equipped to guide young American African males to navigate the dangerous paths of limitations, degradations, and discrimination toward self-appreciation and confidence. Implementation of this idea would entail drastically increasing the retention rate and improving the achievement scores of AAMs in elementary, middle, and high schools. Additionally, enrollment of AAMs in teacher education programs on all levels would also need a major overhaul. There is no doubt that changes must be made to thwart the ever-increasing incidence of disciplinary referrals of AAMs, and readjusting views is an essential first step.

In the fourth and final section of this chapter, my participants tell us about the men in their lives who played critical roles in the men they have become. They also share their experiences of mentorship in the lives of other American African males.

The Role of Fathers and/or Male Mentors

How often have we seen images of Black boys and men being pushed down into a police patrol car being arrested for robbery, burglary, murder, drug dealing? How often do we observe Black boys and men walking the streets during the middle of the day, out of work and out of school—wandering? These images are all too familiar. But, how many of us have ever considered that a story was being told? And based on these stories, it would be easy to infer that Black males can be or indeed are primarily responsible for the chaos in their lives.

On the other hand, how often have we seen images of successful Black businessmen, teachers, politicians, high achieving students, administrators, news anchors, news reporters, etc.? What a different story. Unfortunately, these stories are seldom told. And, therefore, too many people infer that there are more Black males in trouble than those who are successful.

One of the most powerful devices for perpetuating systems of beliefs is storytelling. Indeed, America has told its story for four centuries and what may be farthest from the truth is and has been accepted as truth—normalized and accepted in society. It is only through challenging stories or *counterstories* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) that we benefit from perspectives of the "other." The overt narrative suggests that there are few to no positive American African adult male role models. My participants told a counterstory.

Having a strong father as a guide and role model, Mr. Myatt was intensely aware of the power of a positive male role model in a young boy's life. He credited his daddy with his own tenacity of spirit and fearlessness of a dare. He laughed when he recalled his daddy's words, "If there's not a challenge to doing something, then why do it? …cause anybody could do it." So, because of his daddy's guidance, he said he never ran from challenges, but cautioned, "It's not that you aren't going to fall short, because you are gonna fall short. But, after you fall short, you

learn from the mistake you made and you go on again." He said that it was this attitude that helped him to survive many unforeseen obstacles that he would encounter, including integrating the high school that he and his sister attended.

Being one of the first groups of American Africans to integrate the prestigious and high-ranked high school, he said he found himself in an environment where he was not welcomed either by the students or the teachers. At the same time, he dreaded the idea of being there himself. Accordingly, he made the decision to turn around on the first day and walk back home. To this decision, his father immediately responded, "Oh no. Get in the car and you're going back—to stay!" Four years later, he graduated.

Mr. Myatt recognized the significance and power of his father's teachings on his outcome in life. But, he recalled situations where American African males, their familial circumstances, and their educational opportunities were severely compromised because of, in his opinion, the absence of a father or positive male role model to hold them accountable for their decisions. He recounted the story of a young man whom he had known since the young man was four or five years old.

> He grew up tough, the whole drug thang, dope boys at the house and all this kinda stuff. But, the kid was brilliant. This kid was really smart. He used to come over and work with me. And I could tell how quick he was catching on to what I was teaching and he *wanted* to learn.

By the time this young man was ten or eleven years old, the streets had become his role model. Serendipitously, Mr. Myatt saw him selling drugs on a street corner one day during school hours. Mr. Myatt pulled up to the corner and the young man inquisitively rushed over to

ascertain the "customer's" identity in order to consummate the sale. Mr. Myatt proceeded to question the young man as to why he was not it school.

"I got in trouble. I got kicked out of school." This kid's twelve years old! I'm like, "Man you're just twelve years old!" He's still in middle school. But, in the middle of the day, he's working the corner already.… So, it's like "I'm gon get mines while I can."

Mr. Myatt knew this young man's circumstances. He knew his mother well, and noted that although she used drugs and alcohol routinely, "If you really sat down and talked to her, she was still trying to find a job over here. It wasn't like she *wanted* to be a crackhead." But, the pressures of raising a young Black male alone took their toll and the streets proved to be the winner in the cases of both the mother and son.

Fortunately, Mr. Myatt was a mentor to this young man. He gave him a job with his construction company and soon discovered that although he couldn't read, he desperately wanted to and had a winning personality and competitive spirit. Mr. Myatt helped him learn to read and he became one of the best contractors in the city. The young man went on to finish school and now has his own company.

Of my six participants, only two are fathers of my students. The other four are faithful and caring mentors. All six of them, however, acknowledged that the male role model is crucial in the full development of a male child.

Mr. Jackson seemed to contemplate when I asked him about the importance of having his father in his life. He seemed to credit his father with building his independence and confidence in himself. He described his mom as being "hands-on" and his dad being the "direct opposite." At age 16, he moved in with his dad in another state and realized that while his dad's presence kept him "in check" as far as his behavior and doing the right thing, he was on his own in terms

of completing his school work. On the other hand, he believes that it was his dad who ultimately

helped him become the self-confident and independent man that he is. He talked about how he

and his dad were traveling back to Tennessee and when his dad got sleepy outside of Alabama.

His dad pulled the four-speed car over off of the interstate and told him to take them on in.

Although he could drive, he had only driven a stick-shift once—the week before when his dad

had bought the car. His dad got in the passenger seat and went to sleep and he drove the car on

in to Tennessee. What a powerful lesson in trust and confidence!

Mr. Gooden credits the male teachers in his life with the guidance he needed at a critical

time in his life. Describing the Black male teachers in his life as strong and prepared to

"paddle," Mr. Gooden acknowledged that "they would tell us the truth and I appreciated that."

The men teachers that I had were very encouraging to me. They wouldn't let me falter.

They wouldn't let me get into trouble. They would give me good positive advice—who

to be around, who not to be around. They were all good. They knew what they were

doing. Even the P.E. teacher—he was a big man, bigger than me! But, he was a great

teacher—"Get in that car and drive!" "I haven't drove before Mr. Earhardt. This is my

first day." "Get in that car and drive." And that was it. They pushed me. And

everywhere I went there was always a male in my life that gave me fatherly advice.

Especially when they saw a Black man that wanted to make something out of himself.

They weren't going to let you fall. And they tell it like it is whether you like it or not.

Straightforward—cause when I wanted to quit 'cause my mother was sick. You know

what he said? Your mother would want you to get your education. Whew! (tears

welling in his eyes). Couldn't quit then. I just had to deal with life.   And she was there

when I marched.

Mr. Gentry explained that there were a couple of men that made a serious impact in his life, his uncle and his mentor who came into his life during his high school years. He talked about his uncle standing up to a White man who chastised his sons for playing with him. They were traveling and had stopped at a rest area and when his uncle walked around and saw the man shouting at them, the courage that his uncle demonstrated had a monumental impact on him.

> I wanted to be just like my uncle. He wasn't afraid of anybody. He was like, look you can say whatever you want to say to me but don't you dare say anything to my son. He said I will meet my maker today if you say anything else to my son. So, I guess his courage—he wasn't afraid of anything. Very intelligent man and he taught me that you don't let anyone push you around. He also taught that the way that that man felt was ignorant 'cause I questioned why couldn't I play with those boys. He was like a hero to me early. It hurt when we lost him, I was five, but my aunt would use him to keep us focused and motivated and tell us stories about how he worked hard and how he worked in an industry that wasn't too kindly to our people but he made a successful living in that industry at that time.

Many years after the death of his uncle, during his high school years, he describes it as a blessing for the man who became his longtime mentor to come into his life, during a pretty tumultuous time. He stepped in as a big brother or father figure during his ninth grade year, met with the teachers, and coached him on being a man throughout his adult life. He contrasted talking to his mentor as opposed to confiding in his aunt.

> ...it's almost like it's a divine appointment. It needs to happen. At a certain age, mom does well, grandmother may do well too. But, at a certain age, a young man needs that man to reach out to 'cause mom doesn't understand everything that we go through.

Mr. Weeden gave his mother credit for ensuring that he actually completed his schoolwork, but made it obvious that his father was a strong and powerful influence on his motivation.

> My daddy worked at General Motors and retired from General Motors. He actually worked at night. He kept in touch with my teachers. My father always stayed on top of my grades. My father had a strong impact on my desire to learn. Extracurricular school type things, like projects, attending events like science fairs, I had his support.

These stories illuminate the power of relationships and the profound influence of sincere caring on a young man's life and perspective. They take us from moments of discouragement, anger, and distrust to the restoration of confidence, peace, and security. Yes, they could have been represented as failing students based on the statistical academic data. However, in the proper environment and conducive socialization process, they could represent superb models of manhood.

I kept thinking that these stories were so powerful and so familiar. How often I saw it in my neighborhood growing up. I thought about my students. These are their big brothers or fathers! Looking beyond the students sitting at their desks to those who shape their lives and those whom they follow as models, the complexity of instruction is recognized. We can understand the importance of relevance.

Reading is so much about making connections. These kinds of stories are not told in textbooks and understandably so. But, these are the kinds of stories that I find capture the students' interests because they are familiar. Mr. Gentry told me a story of how his uncle became a hero in his eyes at the age of four. At the same time, he learned an ugly truth about society.

I wanted to be just like my uncle. He wasn't afraid of anybody. We were travelling to Pensacola FL, I was four and I can remember this like it's today. We got out of the RV and we stopped in the RV park and there were two little White boys playing and my brother, I was four and my brother was two. I got out and walked over. I am a child. I wanted to play with them. The little White boys began to play with me. I remember their father came over and he was yelling at the boys, his boys, and told them to come on. And I remember my uncle walked out of the RV and he basically confronted the man. He was like, 'Look you can say whatever you want to say to me but don't you dare say anything to my son.' He said, 'I will meet my maker today if you say anything else to my son.' So, I guess his courage, he wasn't afraid of anything. Very intelligent man and he taught me that you don't let anyone push you around. He also taught me that the way that that man felt was ignorant 'cause I questioned why couldn't I play with those boys. He was like a hero to me early.

 Mr. Gentry idolized his uncle, but he would learn in school that men like his uncle were not in the books that he was required to read. He would learn that if other American African boys didn't have someone around like his uncle, their chances of seeing them in school books were slim to none. When questions like: Which word goes with these words: 1) seaweed, 2) beach ball, and 3) sand castle, enjoined to read about *Cindy* whose greatest challenge for the day is to decide which color ribbon will best match her green eyes, or *Little Danny* who wants his dad to build a tree house in the backyard, or whether the sunscreen was packed in the picnic basket, it's little wonder why they exhibit disinterest. These dilemmas are so far away from their paradigms and so not-a-crisis as compared to everyday situations that many of them face. Even students who may not be confronted with extreme situations such as those mentioned, rarely

observe stories of the common everyday circumstances of their lives. Stories of students particularly here in the South are seldom told in textbooks. We find so often that we must give background information on high-rise apartments, beaches, roof-top parties, and other scenes and storylines indicative to regions other than the South. And when the South is represented in stories, it's usually from the perspective of a visitor. Yet, the achievement scores of students in the South are on the bottom of the scale.

The voices and stories of my participants deserve to be heard. They deserve to be publicized and they deserve to be incorporated in the positioning of American African males for success. The research has been done and the recommendations have been made—time and time and time again. It's like the old axiom, "the more things change the more they remain the same." Our perceptions are shaped in a profound way by experiences, encounters, and the people who cross our paths. Silenced, these perceptions and experiences are untouched, unengaged, and untapped. Voiced, they become real, acknowledged, and accessible.

See Chart of Findings on the following pages.

Chart of Findings
Counterstories of Experiences

		Findings
I.	**Cultural Exclusion of American Africans in Textbooks and Curriculum**	• Participants had no memory of educational experiences that depicted successful Blacks for them to emulate. • With the exception of enslaved Africans as scientists or Dr. King as a civil rights activist, images of successful Black men, specifically in the areas of business and education were minimal to none. • Traditional education and its over-focus on the lives accomplishments of European Americans had contraindications for American African males. • They believed that the curriculum was contrived to ensure European hegemony.

II.	**Reading: Successes, Challenges, and the Relationship to Social and Economic Success**	**Academic Successes**
		  • Interest and motivation for reading was linked to cultural and individual relevance.
		  • Reading success attributed more to self-motivation, family and community support as opposed to instruction, the curriculum, or the school system.
		  • School was connected to their home life.
		  • Success came with responsiveness to interest.
		  • Positive men in the community were role models and motivators
		Academic Challenges
		  • Hardest subject
		  • Disinterest due to lack of validation of self
		  • Could not make connections
		  • **Children are motivated by environmental forces. If they see struggle all around them, they can often lose hope or they can become activists. It all depends on the child.**
		Economic Success
		  • **They believed that education was important, but would not ensure their economic security.**

		• Schools should offer practical education that benefit students and teach them economic survival skills
III.	**Discipline and the Education of American African Males**	**Experiences** • Participants credit American African males with giving them focus, direction, and motivating them toward achievement. • Strong and respectable American African males were role models. • AAM teachers were a rarity in elementary school. • There were more in middle and high school, but few comparatively. **Discipline Processes and American African Male Teacherss** • Need more AAM teachers and more social workers. • AAMs help keep AAMs focused and give directions • Disciplinary problems identified in elementary school, however, not addressed in a significant manner • Problems escalates by middle school • Suspension rate for AAMs is three times the rate for White males **The Necessity of Discipline Procedures and Early Implementation** • Discipline procedures should be an attempt to reconcile the problems and not simply punitive. • The difference between discipline procedures and zero tolerance is that disciplinary actions are efforts to reconcile the behavior. • The zero tolerance in school is reflective of the zero tolerance in the broader society, where American African males do not get the benefit of the doubt. • Disciplinary problems should be addressed in the schools • Rather than expulsions and extended suspensions, students should be encouraged, counseled, and offered interventions in school as they are with academics. • High expectations must be communicated and AAMs offered a plan to accomplish good behavioral outcomes. • Discipline + Direction = Focus **Culturally Responsive Discipline Procedures** • AAMs are often strong willed and aggressive, but this should not be interpreted as dangerous.

		- There is skepticism on the parts of Whites and Blacks in terms of discipline because of a basic historical distrust of each other. - AAM teachers and counselors had a huge impact on their lives. - Too few American African males as instructors in elementary schools. - Schools should elicit input from AAMs in the community suring SSIP (School Improvement Planning). - Salaries must attract good people - Parents must be held accountable for the conduct of students.
IV.	**The Role of Fathers and/or Male Mentors**	**Experiences** - Black male role models and mentors were essential in shaping who Black boys believe they are and who they can be. - Fathers were providers and maintainers, while mothers had primary responsibility of education and communication with school. - Fathers and mentors were responsible for building independence and confidence in them as young boys. - Men were straightforward and exhibited strength and fearlessness. - AAMs cared for their sons' [children] education and welfare. - Black fathers wanted their sons to achieve academically and economically more than they.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES AND THE

ACHIEVEMENT OF AMERICAN AFRICAN MALES

Black male students can achieve high outcomes—states, districts, and communities can create the conditions in which all students have an opportunity to learn—the tragedy is, even against the historic backdrop of the U.S. having a Black male president, most states and districts in the U.S. choose not to do so (Holzman, 2011).

Mr. Holzman would get a resounding high five from my participants with respect to the abilities of American African males. They, too, believed that not only could American African males achieve, but that they could perform far beyond the basic requirements. But, as Mr. Gentry noted, "… if something as simple and as humane as civil rights is not guaranteed, why would they assure that education for our people is top quality, guaranteed success. They're not going to do that." These views clearly indicate a belief that educational discrimination against American African males still persists in this country because in spite of the labels often bestowed on my students of being underachievers or remedial, however, the men referred to my students as very or extremely intelligent. As a matter of fact, they had the utmost confidence that most Black males could do whatever they wanted to do and do it well. So, the question is, "Why are so many American African males registered in my class for struggling readers and remedial classes throughout this country —year after year after year?" Why are they represented as the most underachieving group in America?

In this chapter, I will share my participants' perspectives on the learning environments, support systems, and behaviors of my students—their sons, and mentees. One theme that ran throughout the interviews was the connection to spiritual concerns, particularly with my eldest participants. The participants frequently used terms like soul, heart, and prayer. They made biblical quotes and made statements like, "We will be held accountable …" I reference this theme in this section in order to give access to their voices and how they believe spirit mattered in the achievement, the educational landscape of American African males. In the first section, they will share their thoughts on the educational landscape of the school and the district, commenting on instructional objectives, content, and resources. They elaborate on how effectively they believe the school is equipped to address the students' learning variabilities (Roller, 1996). They discuss environmental influences on educational perspectives of young Black men. And as a part of the educational landscape, they also weigh in extensively on parental support. In the next section, the participants discuss the academic strengths that they observe in my students. Then they talk about the students' struggles and what factors they believe impact their learning behaviors. The final section is a discussion of the implications of the participants' insights.

As we listen to these valuable emic (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) perspectives of American African men, it is imperative to recognize that these men once sat in the students' seats. Their words, their thoughts, their stories represent what could prove to be ever so valuable resources toward the successful and relevant redesign of curricula, textbooks, instruction, and assessments that can signal positive academic outcomes for American African males.

Learning Landscapes of Students

An overview of participants' perspectives of the influences on student achievement revealed strong concerns in two arenas: school agenda as far as goal planning and objectives for student achievement goals and parental influence and participation. They were asked to share their views and ideas on school reading objectives in terms of methods, materials, and outcomes. Although their views on parental involvement were unsolicited, my participants spoke very passionately and very candidly about the influence of parental perspectives on student achievement. Since they believed very strongly that home environment was a powerful motivator or de-motivator in terms of educational relevance, I include a section on parental involvement.

Spiritual Connections

The subject is taboo in public schools today, but spirituality had a strong significance in the conversations of my eldest participants. Mr. Gooden along with Mr. Gentry and Mr. Weeden expressed the need for "old fashion values" that worked for American Africans in the past, like devotion first thing in the morning, that children belonged to the community and had respect for adults, and how schools were an extension of the home. Mr. Gooden reflected, "We used to could say, 'Let's pray' to the children—can't say that no more."

These participants, Mr. Gooden, Mr. Gentry, Mr. Myatt, and Mr. Weeden, referred to the spirit or the soul of the children in some form or other. Mr. Myatt talked about "seeing the child's heart" when he worked as a football coach. He said that the other coach that worked with him would scream and shout at the children, "He couldn't see the child's heart! He [the child] *wanted* [italics for emphasis] to do well." Mr. Gentry cautioned teachers and parents alike.

Understand that one day we will be held completely and totally accountable and responsible for the negligence and the lack of whatever it is with our children—PERIOD! So, knowing that, it should drive us to operate with diligence in everything we do. The old saying, "I got mine, you gotta get yours" is true to a certain degree, but at the same time if we completely adopt that mentality, we've missed the whole thing, because your success IS my success. God told Abraham that he judges how good of a man he is based on his children.

In American African communities, many children come from homes that have a spiritual foundation. At home, they are called upon to be accountable for their actions and are guided toward the uplift of their community, society, and humanity. There is usually a link between home and place or worship, but the spiritual connection between home and school is strained. And although they spend more than eight hours—the greater part of the day—in school, spiritual essence is downplayed and difficult to navigate primarily because in America, there is a separation of church and state. Again, another shift in paradigm which constitutes a major disconnect. Hilliard asserts, "…African pedagogy not only includes the soul, but is sets education for the soul at the pinnacle of the educational process" (Hilliard, 1997).

Public schools, however, rather than capitalizing on this cultural staple in the lives of many American African children, removed any semblance of this truth (*Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962), from their lives and replaced it with their truth of irrelevance. The replacement, *A Moment of Silence*, which our school observes each morning has little to no relevance as a devotional time of meditation or reflection, except through the directions of individual teachers who may encourage them to focus and center themselves on having a good day at that time.

After the "moment" passes with children reading, whispering, or completing morning work, its standards instruction as usual.

In the spirit of Sankofa, as we look back on the pre-American days of Africa, many of the foundational qualities that grounded American Africans as a people were belief systems and spirituality (Asante, 1990; Asante, 2005; Harris, 2001; King & Wilson, 1994). There were Rites of Passage ceremonies to celebrate boys' entrance into manhood and (Goggins, 1998) orientation into the role and responsibilities of men. In America, they were disintegrated, reshaped, or discarded altogether. My elder participants believe that re-instilling these values will not only serve to refocus American African males and instill a sense of self-value, but can help to significantly curb discipline referrals. The younger participants, however, made no mention of these values as necessary for academic achievement.

The difference could be as a result of nurture versus nature in that the further American Africans got from the stronghold of slavery and oppression, the more assimilated they became. African values were erased and replaced by a faux sense of American freedom or at least a goal of material acquisition. Capitalistic values begin to slowly erode or assimilate the spiritual values that had undergirded the faith and resilience of a people. As a result, the younger generations make fewer connections to value of the soul and spirit in terms of academic success. At least, the younger of my participants made no connections of spiritual values to academic success.

Early Intervention Program: An Arm Around the Shoulder or a Crutch?

I asked my participants to speak candidly about their opinions of the EIP, which is designed to offer reading mediation to students who show early signs of struggle and to address some of the issues discussed previously. The goal of EIP is to offer additional support to

struggling students and the classroom teacher in the process through smaller settings and more direct instruction. The program intention is that these children receive reading instruction from the EIP teacher and the classroom teacher becomes the support, offering opportunities for students to demonstrate the strategies and skills acquired in reading instruction. EIP also assists in preparing the students to pass the standardized test.

It should be noted that over the past four years, my school district has increased minimum class size of the EIP class from nine to fifteen and the maximum class size from 11-18. Additionally, over the past two years, paraprofessionals or teacher assistants are no longer funded for the EIP classroom. These changes essentially nullify the original intent of the EIP program—smaller instructional settings and direct instruction for the struggling students. It is all but impossible for one teacher to attend to 18 students individually who are functioning one, two, or three grade levels behind. In addition, the EIP teacher is responsible for documenting paperwork required of classroom teachers as well.

While most of the participants lauded the program, some participants questioned the intent of the system. Mr. Gooden chided with respect to his mentee, Kendrick, "I don't think the school has done enough. They're just being repetitious. From year to year they're moving him on but…we have not seen any growth with the current tools that they're using… Kendrick needs to be identified. Time is going on." Perplexed and disenchanted, he voiced a teacher's quandary.

"Oh well, he's here every day. He's trying. So therefore, a 70 is passing, so I'm going to give him a 70 and move him on to the next grade." Then the other teacher gets him, gets the problem and she or he struggles trying to work with what was never worked with before. So the circle repeats itself over and over again. And then once again "Oh,

they tell me I can't, out of at least 20 something students, I can't have no more than four

to fail." And he's right at number 5.

I have been the reading specialist at my school for seven years and my classes have

always had a majority of American African male students. Invariably, upper grade student are

ridiculed from time to time for being in my class, but the majority of them love coming to class.

They have told me that they have fun and "we always do something different." As a matter of

fact, many students who have exited the EIP program want to come back to my class.

However, some parents have voluntarily taken their students out of the EIP program,

claiming that it is a handicap. They have expressed concern that their child not be labeled as

learning deficient and that they didn't want their child to become dependent on a remedial

program. They committed to giving their child the extra support at home or in tutorials and

many of the students have indeed excelled in the regular classroom without the intervention. Mr.

Jackson had nothing but praise for the program, but he emphasized the need to communicate

with the child and explain what the program was designed to do.

You might lack the strength in this, reading, but you might have the strength to do

something else that another classmate might lack and that they'll have to pull him away

to do—to work on that, whereas you get to stay in class because you're strong in that

particular field.

Mr. Gentry explained that he felt that my class was an exception, a pullout class that was

effective. At the same time, he substantiated the position of those parents who took their

children out. He believed that the school's system of remediation was a crutch, a setup and

extension of the American hierarchy to perpetuate a system of inadequacy of Black people.

…because the overall goal is not for them to come out and be the best individual that

impacts society positively. That's not the overall goal. The school system, the economic

system, government, military, all of it has its role. It's all a part of a machine and that

machine has an overall objective and education in this country is simply a part of that

machine. It's doing its part to fulfill the overall agenda. And no one wants to talk about

it because there are people in this country that really do believe that there is no way in the

world that America would do our youth like that.

These poignant accusations are powerful food for thought. Reflecting on the persistent

projections of academic failure for American African males, especially in light of the

voluminous research heralding reversal strategies and techniques, one must question the school's

lackadaisical effort of implementation. For the sake of clarification, I wanted to get Mr. Gentry's

view on what he believed made my class an exception.

…you're different, Ms. Jai. If we had every resource teacher like you—see you don't

provide a crutch. You come here and I've seen you in action. First of all, you're making

that young man understand who he is. You're making that young man understand and

believe that he can, that "you have the ability. We just need to make you tap into your

potential." So, you're not offering a crutch. You're simply walking with him, allowing

him to put his arm across your shoulder for a little while.

Honored by those words of veneration, I expressed that I believed most if not all teachers

did the same. But, I really wanted to understand more of what he meant by the term "crutch."

So, I encouraged him to please elaborate on his idea of EIP being a crutch. I clarified the

difference between EIP being a program of intervention BEFORE a child has been identified as

having a disability and IEP (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), which is an individualized

educational plan of the special education program put in place AFTER a child has been

identified as having a disability. He acknowledged the difference between EIP and IEP, but he

focused on their commonality.

> The problem is when we send a child into a remedial situation, it slows things down.
> When you slow things down, there is no big drive, there is no concern, there is no
> urgency to learn, because you're comfortable now. When you put a child into a situation
> where they *have* to learn and they *must* learn, it's either this or nothing at all, you'll be
> amazed how much our children will step to the plate and rise to the level that they have
> been so commissioned to rise to. But when we continue to offer that crutch and walk on a
> crutch...think about it, you know if you can sit down in that wheelchair and wheel around
> in the school all day long, what do you think people will do when you really have the
> ability to walk? I really believe that unless a child has suffered some type of mental
> disability or has suffered some type of brain injury, remediation should not be an option.

Apparently, Mr. Gentry's idea of remediation being a crutch was based in a large part on

his observance of students' response to deficit labels as opposed to the intent of providing a

remedy for deficit situations. Whereas interventions imply *early diagnosis and support*

(kindergarten through second grade), by the time students are in fourth and fifth grades, the

intervention could more aptly be defined as *remediation.* He offered more clarification on the

system's crutch.

> As a structure it's a crutch because the overall goal is not for them [American African
> male students] to come out and be the best individual that impacts society positively.
> That's not the overall goal. The school system, the economic system, government,
> military, all of it has its role. It's all a part of a machine and that machine has an overall

objective and education in this country is simply a part of that machine. It's doing its part

to fulfill the overall agenda. And no one wants to talk about that because there are people

in this country that really do believe that there is no way in the world that America would

do our youth like that. It's politics. It's still a country that is so much ran by an Anglo-

Saxon influence and the ultimate goal has always been for them to rule and stay on top

and to have slaves.

Overpopulated with American African males, EIP exemplifies the ineffectiveness of

classroom structure and/or instructional practices to ensure the upward reading mobility of

American African males. The positive impact of the program is that many American African

males who are assessed "early" in their struggle do acquire the skills that they need and are

ultimately able to keep the reading pace of the mainstream classroom. The negative impact is

that those who fail to benefit from the early intervention or are identified "late" as opposed to

"early" often miss far too many skill sets to be serviced effectively enough to advance two or

more grade levels. This inadequacy often leads to lowered self-esteem, negative peer pressure,

labeling, stagnation, and lack of motivation to reach higher (Tatum, 2005; Teale, Paciga, &

Hoffman, 2007-2008). Mr. Gentry had a parable for this cycle.

Think about a baby elephant. They take a baby elephant and put a shackle around his

ankle and he always wants to run and they literally draw a circle and he don't go outside

the circle. He tries but he feels something slowing him down. That's this system. It's

that crutch. They keep you inside of a circle.

Remediation is designed to remedy a problem. It is put in place in all levels of society.

Doctors provide remedies for medical problems. Psychoanalysts offer remedies for mental

dilemmas. Credit counselors give solutions for money crisis and so on and so on. The goal of

the remediation is to enable one to gain strength in the areas of weakness to be able to stand on their own two feet. Such is the purported goal of the early intervention program, to remedy students' academic challenges in the early formative years of school and help them to become better readers and thinkers. When students find themselves in the program year after year after year, it is time to remediate the remediation.

Societal Influences

Consciously, subconsciously or both, we are all influenced by our social environment. For instance, as teachers, we are forever seeking new ideas and building on current strategies that will make us better educators, and we learn many of these from our social environment. If a teacher in our school is using a strategy in her classroom that works, we all want to try it, extend it, and improve it if possible. We ask to observe teachers, question their strategies, and request their help and input when we can. When we attend a great conference or professional development inservice propagating innovative methods, we want to share it with our colleagues so that they can benefit from our new knowledge. Because we are interested in becoming better educators, we observe good teachers and incorporate popular instructional practices that will aid us in becoming the best. Our interests drive our inclinations for exposure. Students are no different. They are influenced one way or another by their environment and what is popular— from the style of dress, haircut or hairstyle, to a way of walking and talking. Schools have addressed the concerns of peer influence and the desire to be current through mandating uniforms, hairstyles, and even shoe styles. In this section, my participants discuss various influences from the home and community to societal environments that influence student learning.

Teachers may have negative perceptions of speech styles.

Styles of speech and talking have been more difficult to govern, yet have a profound influence on reading, speaking, and writing. Mr. Jackson attributes some of Chris's inability to grasp the concept of reading to dialect and the popularity of what he considers "improper speech."

I think he's just caught up in this whole stage where speaking improper is cool. You know what I mean. Like it's a lot of that going around, where speaking improper is cool. And it's cool sometimes and in certain elements, but you have to know how to turn it off and turn it on. And he hasn't figured out the turn-on turn-off part yet.

The turn-on turn-off part that Mr. Jackson refers to is called "code-switching" (Bakhtin, 1986; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Wheeler & Swords, 2006), knowing the appropriate times to speak standard English and/or home dialect. Mr. Jackson has touched on the controversial issue of *Black English Vernacular* (BEV) (Billings, 2005; Smitherman, 2001) or the dialectical conversion of the English language by Black speakers. Chris may very well know the "turn-on turn-off part," but consciously chooses BEV instead of standard American English (SAE). I recall a conversation with my son years ago. We were discussing "talking White" and the motivation behind the charge. He told me, "Ma, I'd choose real over right any day!" In other words, he contended that he would rather give and get clarity in conversation as opposed to saying something in the way that society has deemed *right*. It made a lot of sense to me. Koch and Gross (1997) found that American African children actually preferred BEV or SAE.

During the 1980s-1990s many American African educators and researchers as well as others responded to the overwhelming assessments of speakers of Black English Vernacular

(BEV) as learning disabled, illiterate, or impaired (Speicher & McMahon, 1992). Of course, there are various cultures that speak dialectical English. In fact, practically any and all immigrants to a foreign country incorporate and absorb their native speech into the new language (Hollie, 2001). With the large influx of Spanish-speaking peoples in America, acknowledgement of their dialectical English is commonplace and instructional appropriations are rampant. On the other hand, a disproportionate number of American African children have been channeled into special education classes as a result of the failure of teachers to understand and/or accept the dialect (Speicher & McMahon, 1992). Researchers, American Africans and others, felt the need to help school systems and teachers understand Black speech patterns and consequently teach them how to teach students who speak BEV (Baugh, 1983; Smitherman, 1981).

However, this literature on linguistic difference rarely included parental beliefs. According to Mr. Jackson, this use of so-called improper speech affects Chris' writing and his pronunciation of words, which lowers his reading rate and hence, affects comprehension. He believes this is more or less a youth culture and this speech appropriation should be pointed out in school. He believes that teachers should be aware of children's norm and practices. In that way, teachers can clarify in the classroom, addressing a sub-culture that strongly influences learning.

> …he's developed the habit of saying words just to get it through to people who are listening to him, and who are not really focused on whether he's pronouncing the words right or not. Not saying that he can't do it, but he's so used to not doing it. So, you have to like retrain him to do it again. That just goes back to school, where maybe some of the teachers need to—every time he says something—that's what I find myself doing to him

a lot. Every time he says something that doesn't come off like he's supposed to say it,

then I'm correcting him.

Obviously, Chris receives Mr. Jackson's admonishments positively, which indicates the

problem is not whether or not to guide students in language acquisition. The question for many

researchers is in fact not whether the teacher *is* correcting him as Mr. Jackson suggests, but *how*

he is being corrected. Indeed, many may interpret, "Don't correct the Black child's speech!" to

mean to withhold access to various ways of speaking. The omnipresence of racism undergirds

the emphasis on the *practice* of correction. Ever since I can remember, my parents, teachers,

aunts, and uncles have always corrected our speech as I corrected my own children. When we

would say, "I be…" as in "I be running to catch the bus, or I be trying my best to…" my mother

would question, "I be?" signaling us to say "I was…" It never occurred to us that we were being

degraded or negatively judged—just guided to speak according to what standard English

recognizes as "correct."

But, as someone said, "It's different when a parent corrects a child than when a teacher

does." To correct or not to correct—is that really the question? As a result of the racial

instability of America, children are unfortunately receiving the impact of indecision, doubt, and

in some cases apathy on the part of teachers about what to do and what not to do in terms of

American African students. Standardized strategies and approaches based on the dominant

culture obviously have been counterproductive for American African males. What, in my

formative years, was unquestionable positive instruction and accepted as guidance from our

authority figures is today deemed restrictive, unprofessional, undemocratic—just plain improper.

I never questioned my children's teachers when they corrected them. As a matter of fact, I

thanked them. What I did challenge was negative references to who they were as human beings

and the suggestion that their difference to the norm implied deficiency in any way. Many do argue that a parent correcting a child is very different from a teacher correcting a child's oral speech. That may very well depend on the relationship established between the child and the teacher and the parent and the teacher. Ultimately, everything goes back to an establishment of trust.

Hearing can impact speech sounds.

According to Kunjufu (1990). Chris' mispronunciation of words may not just be based on habit or home vernacular at all, but more on how he's hearing sounds. Based on a study by McGuinness (1987), Kunjufu suggests that reading difficulties could be directly linked with auditory variances and inadequacies. McGuinness (1987) found that males and females have profound differences in sensitivity to decibel levels. While females respond greater to higher levels of sounds, males' responses are lower.

> These results help us to understand part of the females' advantage in the development of
> language, because high-frequency sensitivity is particularly important in the accurate
> perception of certain speech sounds, especially the consonants c, s, t, x, and
> (McGuinness, 1987).

This information is extremely relevant to teaching children from cultural backgrounds that may be different from that of the teacher, however, none of this information was introduced to me during my graduate studies. As a matter of fact I can only recall one American African scholar/researcher used as required reading in my education classes. Yet, the majority of students in public school classrooms are children of color and for certain, the majority of those enrolled in special education classes and remedial classes are American African males (Kunjufu, 1989; Kunjufu, 2005b; Kunjufu, 2005a). In order to effective reverse the current projection of

failure, teachers, teacher-education programs, and school systems have a responsibility to access "best practices" on teaching all students and incorporating voices of other-than-European-authorities. Having this knowledge of hearing variances between boys and girls could have a profound impact on instruction and learning.

Students may rebel against suggestions of inferior speech patterns.

As indicated before, the problem with correcting children's dialectical ways of speaking is when teachers and others place value judgments on the speaker. The importance of teacher familiarization and incorporation of students' language culture into the classroom cannot be overemphasized. Mr. Jackson strongly encouraged teachers to become knowledgeable of the communicative habits, influences, and practices of students, especially boys. Without this acquaintance, connection and ultimately effective instruction are beyond the grasp of the teacher. What a teacher may understand as incompetence may very well be a form of resistance.

Because some boys see school as a site of effeminacy and school language (WEV) [White English Vernacular] as a discourse for girls, white and black boys resist some forms of language instruction, which, in turn, causes them to fail literacy classes. But the difference between black boys and white boys, however, is that black boys not only feel coerced to give up their masculinity if they do well in school, but they also feel forced to abandon their race-the ultimate impossibility (Young, 2004).

Acknowledgement, acceptance, and appreciation of differences including a linguistic one must necessarily be the initial step in education. Only after this paradigm shift, can there be successful implementation of pedagogy.

Integrating students' cultural interests into school curriculum could positively affect student outcomes. Mr. Worth observed the strong influence of rap culture. He had no doubt in his mind that his son, Deonte' could learn anything he wants. He noted Deonte's and his classmates' interest in music and his ability to learn any rap song and sing every word right along with the artist. Recalling the fifth grade awards ceremony where a youth minister was the guest speaker, Mr. Worth was excited about how the entire class rapped along with the speaker.

> …they was on point, on top [snaps his fingers]—all of them—I'm talkin' about you'd think they were singing the song—didn't miss a beat. It's amazing that all of them were saying it at the same time! There were at least 100+ kids. He [the speaker] said, if they can do that—you've got to apply yourself to do what you need to do.

> All of the students were involved. They were all rapping in together. The unifying factor was interest. It was group interest. He said if they can learn to rap a song like that, they can learn what they need to learn in school. They were proficient in rapping the song because it was a common interest. It was "cool" to rap, but school on the other hand was not cool.

> Mr. Worth's observation corroborates other parents' and teachers' theories as well. Delpit's (1995) study indicated that Black teachers believed that Black children did not have a big problem with fluency. As a matter of fact, they believed Black children were very fluent.

> These people keep pushing this fluency thing. What do they think? Our children have no fluency? If they think that, they ought to read some of the rap songs my students write all the time. They might not be writing their school assignments but they sure are writing. Our kids *are* fluent. What they need are the skills that will get them into college (p. 16).

Mr. Worth was suggesting that instructional pedagogy should build on students' interests and strengths and we would see more success outcomes. Delpit's (1995)teacher-friend expressed frustration over Black students being seen as writing deficient, when it appeared that the teachers were the real deficient ones because they couldn't see that the students *were* proficient. Mr. Jackson expressed the same feelings—that schools should allow student interests to help teachers to scaffold learning. Recognizing Chris' love for cars, he used that interest to motivate him to read. "So, I bring him over something [a book] that has to do with cars. And we'll discuss that and read that and I find that he does much better, because he's interested the whole time that he's reading."

The subject of cars does not generally carry a cultural connotation, but in the lives of my students "ridin' on dubs" (20-inch rims), Hummers, or a stretch limo get their attention. They talk about family members' cars and SUVs. When we go to the Media Center, I often let them thumb through the magazines before check-out and invariably, I have to tell them to put the magazines away because they are completely engrossed in the "rides." They are captivated by the cars of stars and celebrities. Whenever I use pictures or scenarios that students see in their everyday lives—or topics that they hear discussed at home or in the communities, their interest is automatically piqued. Cars definitely got Chris' attention, engaging him and Mr. Jackson was smart to take advantage of his interest.

Dress is another point of interest with American African male. Mr. Gooden has no doubt that Kendrick's values are placed on "looking good" more than having book sense. Speaking on how he had seen some of the young men coming to school with their pants sagging, Mr. Weeden noted that they are influenced by the media more than they are by the parents and definitely the school. He thought that the school had the least influence on students because the school is

"pushing a program that does not take the children and their values in consideration." He felt

that schools more or less degraded styles in the Black community, such as rapping, the walk, the

talk, and the dress—the very things that the students value. He emphasized that it mattered little

whether what they were doing was "right or wrong," you lose them when "you belittle something

that they think is important." He said he believed it was best to engage them in conversation,

ascertain their thinking, and then encourage them to be vigilant about the pros and cons of any

given situation.

As he spoke, I thought about the book, *Honey, I Love* (Greenfield, 2002). My students on

all levels love the book because she writes in rhythm about situations that appeal to my students'

familiar. In addition, when I read it aloud, we snap our fingers to the beat. Eventually, they

pride themselves on rapping (reading) it correctly with the beat. In one of the verses, she talks

about how she loves the special way her cousin talks.

My cousin comes to visit and you know he's from the South

'Cause every word he says, just kind of slides out of his mouth.

I like the way he whistles and I like the way he walks.

But, honey, let me tell that I love the way he talks.

After I read the book, we engage in lively conversation about special people in our lives

who we like to hear talk, fun things that we do with our families, and people in our families who

are special to us. Invariably, students talk about brothers, cousins, uncles, friends who can

"flow" or rap. They emulate, demonstrate, and show off their own skills and they *are* skilled.

Yes, the social environment does impact our motivation and our learning greatly.

Mr. Myatt credits his wife and her constant reading to their son in and out of the womb

for creating an early interest in reading. "He was born in a book," he says laughing. He's very

proud of the fact that Ike is in kindergarten, "all-boy," and reads everything he gets his hands on. In addition, two older sons, who are now in college, were always studying and Ike was exposed to a print-rich involvement from birth. In contrast, Mr. Gooden said that Kendrick often boasts about his latest toys like the PS3, computer, and four-wheeler. And while Kendrick takes a lot of pride in being good at these games, he demonstrates little interest in school. "It's amazing to me how kids can do great on those things—on the computer, but when it come to the actual work on paper, they struggle. And they struggle because they can't read."

Mr. Gooden is not alone in his quandary. Too often, I have heard teachers say, "If you can learn to play all these video games or learn the words to these rap songs, you can read or you can do math!" And I agree. What must be taken into account is the appeal factor. What is it about video games and rap songs that entice students, particularly American African males to want to learn? In her study of the learning preferences of American African fifth grade students' and others students, Johnson (2006) found that

1) 73% of students across three geographic areas perceived group learning as the way that they liked to learn best

2) The top favorite learning activity was educational games

As Mr. Jackson said, "interest" is the common denominator. The implications of this study are far reaching. They suggest that preservice teacher education programs must better prepare new teachers to successfully educate students in diverse classrooms through their prior knowledge and interests and that teacher-student relationships are a-priori and essential for student progress. Most importantly, this study challenges teachers to design instruction to reach these students who have given an explanation on how they learn best.

Teachers face the challenge of not only designing ways to motivate students to learn while accommodating the learning preferences of diverse students, but also, determining how to make the subject matter more exciting so that it actively engages students and improves educational outcomes in the classroom.

Obviously, the problem is not in the lack of research data. It is abundant. The greatest challenge has been implementation in the public school system and university systems of teacher education.

Omission of students' social environment ensures failure.

Undoubtedly, we are all influenced by our social environments. Taking into account that students' family and peer social worlds both outside and inside school influence them greatly, the question is, "How can educators value the influences that shape American African males and use them as teaching and learning tools?" Valuing in the classroom what students value in their lives is a powerful instrument in creating an atmosphere of excellence. Sociologists have found that schools are second only to family in the socialization of children (Hallinan, 2001). Therefore, the devaluing of students' environment in the classroom has an even stronger impact—that of alienation and de-motivation. This devaluing speaks loud and clear through absence and invisibility of students' environment. Be they positive or negative, our surroundings shape who we are. It is essential that American African students, those they love, and the things they do be represented in the classroom, texts, materials, and instruction—without judgment as is the ordinary occurrence for European children on a daily basis.

Ogbu (1998) has argued that the failure of schools to incorporate the cultural values of American African students, along with the inability to observe positive returns for educational accomplishments account for their resistance to European education. And Hilliard (1992) alerted

the educational world about the pedagogical consequences of not understanding cultural and behavioral styles of learning. Taking these variables into account, Mr. Gooden acknowledges that his mentee could be responding to social pressures from his home and/or community environment in his lackadaisical attitude about his education. But he unequivocally challenges parents, mentors and educators to address the negatives as well as the positives and continue to motivate students.

It's his environment. It's who he's around when he's outside of these four walls and he sees particular people, I don't know who he hangs around, whether its family or friends and if they lack interest in education, then he's not going to make it a priority in his life unless there is something in him or someone around him to pull him to the side and say, "LOOK BOY, YOU AIN'T GOING DOWN THE SAME PATH."

Mr. Gooden refused to accept the problem as a singular, individualistic problem of Kendrick's. He challenged the teachers and all of us who touch the child to elevate his thinking and hold him to high expectations. While Ogbu's (1998) theory focuses on the internalization process of American African students to the racialized oppressionist culture of American public education, he essentially defocuses on the responsibilities of schools, school systems, and teachers to the perpetuations of the status quo. Other theorists (Hale, 1982; Irvine & York, 1995; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995b) put the powerful social inequities front and center, contending that "racist white attitudes and prejudices weaken the self-esteem of blacks and reduce their opportunities to advance educationally and economically" (Hallinan, 2001).

The indisputable issue with this entire discussion is that we must *have* the discussion. After volumes of studies and lectures certifying racism and inequity in the educational system

with regard to American African students, the inequities still remain. The problem is the educational system is representative of the broader societal system. The school system, therefore, cannot be corrected outside of the restructuring of America. Segregating educational problems from the societal problems of racism in America is an impossibility. Accordingly, omission of the social values and circumstances of our students from institutions of learning is an assurance of failure. It has resulted in failure and will continue to result in failure.

Parental Support

I remember growing up in Birmingham, Alabama during the 50s and it seems like my mother was president of the PTA every single year I was in elementary school. I was proud of that. She knew all of my teachers through the years and they knew her. But, she was a stay-at-home mom, which is not possible for many families. The circumstances, however, remain the same. Parental support continues to be a critical factor in student growth and achievement.

As I stated before, only two of my six participants are parents of my students. The other four participants are mentors of my students who work with them on their academic skills. Their input, consequently, is limited in terms of time and influence based on the nature of their relationship. In this section, we will hear from parents as well as student mentors on the impact of parental support.

Mr. Myatt is one of the two parents in my study. He continuously interjected the importance of their parental roles in their son's education. He often referred to his father and his active role in keeping him focused and his mother's primary role in assisting him with homework and projects. He credits them both with his finishing high school and making the good grades that he made. He learned their examples in working with his three sons and daughter.

Mr. Myatt's son is not in my class. His son is actually a high achiever in the first grade. I approached Mr. Myatt after one of my participants was always unavailable. He had come to check on his son after school one day and I asked him to participate in my study and he agreed. He said that he checked in with his son's teacher at least once a week. He laughed when he told me that she always said to him, "You're the one I *don't* need to see! Can you talk to those who I *do* need to see?" And he said excitedly, "And I intend to keep it that way!"

Mr. Worth is the other parent in my study. He patterns the educational emphasis in his home after that of his parents. Growing up, education was top priority in his household. And because his daddy worked, he was always able to get his supplies, go on field trips, and participate all around. But, although he would love to do that, living on one income is very difficult today. He chuckles, "…can't do that. You know you need two incomes at least to even have a decent living." But, he stays involved. He said he had not missed more than two or three parent-teacher conferences since Deonte started school and he tries hard to make all of the PTA meetings.

Looking deep into my eyes as if for validation, Mr. Worth shared that his son is a very sensitive child, quiet natured, and sometimes introverted. Violating the protocol of objectivity in interviewing, I acknowledged to him that I noticed that in Deonte. He caringly revealed that he realized that this sensitivity could interfere with his learning.

> I keep telling Deonte, "You've got to step up and say what you mean. Don't hold it
> inside. Have a conversation with your momma. Have a conversation with me. Have a
> conversation with your teacher and let them know that you just ain't got it or you just
> don't know or just don't understand. Just be honest with yourself. Don't hold it inside."
> Deonte *will* be passive.

Accessing this knowledge from parents, having this "essential conversation" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) is vital for teachers in order to effectively connect with children and bond with parents. Realizing this strong personality trait and potential handicap of Deonte, Mr. Worth willingly accepts his responsibility as a parent and encourages Deonte to accept responsibility himself to achieve academic success. When I asked him what more did he think we can do as a school, he responded

> I think by us as parents knowing his status on where he's at, I think it's going to be more so something that we're going to have to put in motion as far as maybe getting him a tutor or sending him to a tutoring place as opposed to the school. I think the school is probably offering as much as they probably can do. Again, I would go to the point as that, realistically its back on the child. A child gotta want to do it and want to apply themselves to do it.

American African males who have the benefit of a loving father in the home are very fortunate. Deonte is shy, but very respectful and he tries really hard. I saw these characteristics in his father as well. In their study of the impact of parental support on student achievement Okpala (2001) found that children, regardless of background, who are "exposed to an emotionally supportive home environment in which academic success is affirmed, their academic achievement scores improve tremendously" p. 115. Deonte has what he needs from home to succeed.

I have worked with parents for many years and I have learned that the great majority of parents want their children to be successful in school. I also believe that the great majority of parents think that the school knows what's best for their children and are willing to put their child's academic welfare in the hands of the school. This is particularly true of parents who have

limited educational background themselves, which often correlates to limited income and economic power.   Mr. Gooden believes that children from a higher SES automatically have a greater opportunity for academic success, because their parents are able to afford extra help and most also recognize the power of education.

> I think the child in Luckhead [high SES suburb of Atlanta] is getting more because of the daily parental involvement because they are going to make sure their child is successful by all means.   So they are going to have a voice. That voice comes through their PTA, working with the school board, making suggestions, hands-on at the school on a regular basis to ensure that child who is suffering or lacking gets what they need to be successful—because basically in their minds they don't want their child to fail because other cultures are catching up…

Mr. Worth concurs and worries that because of that economic base, the odds of schools in a lower tax base catching up to them is slim to none. The businesses in the area support the schools and he says, "We [the community] just don't have that kind of income base that can support stuff like that." In addition, he pointed out that the family structure in Luckhead resembles the kind that he grew up with, whereas the father is the main breadwinner and the mother is more active in the child's education. He noted that there are single parent homes in Luckhead as well, but in the Black communities, there are disproportionately more. Consequently, American African children suffer more.

But, what about families that have a caring father in the home who believes that sports is the ticket to success rather than academics? As we discussed earlier, for American African males, the field of entertainment is projected as holding the greatest promise for success, with multi-million dollar contracts in sports attracting the most contenders. Mr. Gentry, however,

believes that this is pushing the young men in the wrong direction. He told the story of two

brothers that he mentored a few years back. The mother had kept them in tutorials, science

camps, and the best schools. They were, as he said, "at the top of their game," very intellectual.

When they reached third grade, they were spending more time with their father and he didn't

push education. He, instead, was grooming the boys for a career in sports.

> What he pushes is [portraying a father talking to his son] "Son if you go outside and pitch
>
> the ball 50 more times" or "Son, if you go out and go 50 more pushups." What's priority
>
> to him is athletics. They're boys, so naturally they lean more towards their father. So
>
> he's pushing athletics, while mom is steadily on the other end of the rope trying to pull
>
> them back, understanding that education is the key to everything. They'd rather sit back
>
> and watch ESPN with their dad and it's unfortunate.

He said that he had the opportunity to speak with the father on several occasions and the

father explained that he had been the runt in his family, the one who was always overlooked

when his brothers were building a team. And he always had a dream of being a football player.

His sons, on the other hand, were big and muscular like his brothers and he wanted to make sure

that they never experienced the insecurities that he felt growing up. Drawing from his

experience with many young men in the school system, Mr. Gentry strongly differed with the

father on this opinion.

> Now to me that's a problem because we, as parents and adults must understand that yes,
>
> they are our children, but they have their own paths to travel. And universally, academics
>
> will prepare them for whatever path there is. That child's path may not be athletics, but if
>
> you're pushing that, all you're doing is setting that child up for failure, because it's almost
>
> like you're trying to make a hammer tighten the bolt.

The father's emphasis on success in the sports arena was apparently consistent with statistical data and American African males' involvement in sports, specifically basketball and football. In their 2002 study, Eitle & Eitle (2002) found

> Controlling for the other factors, the odds that a black male will participate in interscholastic football or basketball are 2.54 times greater and 5.68 times greater, respectively, than the odds of participation for a white male (p. 135).

American African males dominate these sports in high school, college, and professionally. The bottom line is that many American African fathers and father figures believe that their sons have a greater opportunity for success both socially and economically in sports than in academics. In their study, Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) found that Whites and higher SES students got a greater return on their cultural and educational capital than that received by American Africans and lower SES students.

As stated before the media, social, and cultural landscapes paint a picture of disproportionate entertainment success for American Africans (physical acuity), while overwhelmingly projecting European intellectual superiority. Maybe the father was responding to the pictures painted, the subliminal messages throughout American society, seeing a greater chance at success on all levels through sports than education. Maybe he was seeking a greater return on their "academic" investment.

Mr. Jackson took a controversial posture on parenting. He believes that many Black parents have forfeited their responsibility as parents. "It's the whole parenting thing that I think is the most laziest part about Black America right now. It's just laziness in the parenting." He feels passionate about parents' responsibility to teach children that there are consequences for

their actions and that they should support the school to ensure a holistic education of children, both academically and behaviorally.

> But, you know school doesn't mean anything at all unless the school has the parents' full cooperation. It's not gonna mean anything to a child if that child doesn't think that his parent cares about him going to school or if that child thinks that his parent is looking for a reason to come up there and go off on teachers and principals alike. Schools not gonna stand a chance. You can't whip these kids. You can't really even discipline these kids now-a-days in school!

He says that too many parents "spoil" their children today by catering to their every complaint about how they can't do this or can't do that, rather than teaching them to have "thick skin" and find a way to get around whatever obstacle they might encounter.

> They can't—everytime the kid comes home crying, that momma this and this happened and this happened. [And momma says] "I know, baby, cause they wanna see you do this and they wanna see…[sympathetically]." Naw, you wanna hear parents say, "I know but hey, get out there and get it! Don't come crying to me!" What the baby gonna do, if you doing all the crying? You know what I mean. Like stop crying and get out here and get it! Like we literally seriously have to—it's obvious that America wants to see Black people in a certain position. But, it's not that bad to where we can't get pass it, Man! You know.

All of my participants agreed with Mr. Jackson—that parental guidance and support was essential in moving American African males forward. As a father, Mr. Worth demonstrated a compassionate tone when dealing with Deonte's passive nature, while Mr. Jackson's perspective

took more of a forceful stance for parents in dealing with impediments to success. Mr. Gooden in essence encapsuled their positions with a quote from his mother.

"Take your mind out of the environment that you're in. Yes, we live in the projects, but take your mind out of here. Think beyond these projects. Don't deny it. Yes, we live here. This is where we live. But, mentally you don't have to be here." So, we did that.

Dr. Julia Hare, author, psychologist, and Executive Director of The Black Think Tank said, "Not only does your discipline start at home, but your child's education also begins at home. You are the first teacher that this baby will have ever seen. You are the primary teachers" (Hare, 2010). Wynn (2006) substantiates my participants' perspectives and identifies over 60 strategies for empowering American African males. After giving an overview of the disparaging data, he strongly encourages parents to embrace a "village" concept.

Parents must be actively involved in the academic, social, spiritual, and physical development of their sons and provide a household culture built around a set of spiritual core values and academic expectations that encourage and celebrate excellence (p. 8).

As Sankofa implies, many times it is necessary to look back before one can move forward. Usurpation in American African families was par for racism's course. Separation of children from parents was the order of the day. In fact, marriage between slaves was an illegal institution while enslaved (Jenkins 2006). Because men were sold, beaten, imprisoned, and killed for sundry reasons, women became the heads of families more often than not.   As a consequence, generations of American African families found themselves creating and discovering ways of being and existing without the protection and maintenance of a male.

Fast forward, 200 years, women claim heads of households in the majority of American African families (Jenkins 2006/Edelman). Reasonably, school participation by single parents,

whether male or female, may be limited, due to economic limitations alone. Acknowledging the crucial importance of parental involvement, but accounting for demographic family structures necessitate the restructuring of school/parental involvement policies.

Perceptions of Students' Strengths in School

This section is extremely relevant because it reveals the skills that my participants, American African adult males, believe are important to reading success. They didn't have a lot of acronyms behind their names and it didn't cost millions of dollars for the information. More importantly, however, they willingly shared the information because they have a vested interest in the outcome—to help young Black males successfully excel in reading and to redefine the image of American African males.

What I thought was interesting was how these "non-academics" targeted and honed in on skills that are not traditionally prioritized for reading achievement. Characteristics such as strong voices, willingness, and visualization were attributes that these men believed were worth building upon. When teachers observe, associate, and capitalize on these strengths in reading instruction, they may identify more students strengths as opposed to the disproportionate number of deficits now reported.

Mr. Weeden was quick to express Jamal's ability to catch on quickly and his respectful personality as his strengths. He said that he would be surprised is Jamal was in EIP more than one year. As a matter of fact, he was surprised that he was in here this year. While he did acknowledge that he's "probably gotten into that lazy mode like boys do at this age," he felt that he would "snap out of it and get himself together." He believed Jamal's kind personality would make it easy for teachers to give him the help he needs. He also believed that his mother's strong support and desire to see Jamal succeed was a great asset for Jamal.

Mr. Jackson spoke of Chris' willingness to make a gallant effort to read whatever is put in front of him. He talked about how he chuckles inwardly when he listens to Chris read because even when he doesn't say the words correctly, he says it with such force until you almost think he's reading it right…it just doesn't make sense. "He has a very distinct voice, a loud voice. So, when he talks he knows how to project his words across."

Mr. Myatt proudly reminisced on his first grade high achiever, Ike, as having several strengths. He believes his greatest strength, though, is his awesome attitude. Mr. Myatt brandished an electric smile when he thought about Ike. "The boy will talk to anybody! He don't meet no strangers…" As he talked about Ike's winning personality, I thought about Mr. Jackson in the first interview where he described his own personality as both his strength and his weakness.

> I guess it [success] kinda wraps all into one with my struggles, because my success was
> that I was a people person…like I got along with every student in class. I even got along
> with my teachers very well. But, you know that would also lead to talking in class a lot,
> probably even being the class clown, making everybody laugh. Not like they were
> laughing at me. They were laughing with me, but still you're looked at as the class
> clown, regardless.

How many teachers recognize "personality" as a resource for reading excellence? According to my participants, it is a very important part. Freedom to be a boy, to be active, to move, to talk in a learning environment is what I understand Mr. Jackson to mean. When this spirit or energy is arrested, the result can be disinterest or the label "ADD." Mr. Jackson attempted to understand it himself.

You know, they put these restraints on you at a young age and you're out there and you just wanna let loose. And I guess some of the stuff that you're learning isn't just so interesting that it can hold the child's attention for that long. So I guess that's probably where the attention deficit comes from. And I even still have it somewhat today, just in everyday life.

My former principal would constantly remind us of the importance of differentiating instruction. Sometimes, she would humor us in staff meetings explaining an announcement or request for information as "My ADHD kicking in." She would tell us stories of her personal educational experiences as she put it, "being an ADHD (attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder) child." Although her scenarios were comical, we could easily identify many of the same characteristics in ourselves as well as our students. Like my principal, Mr. Jackson really gives us a heads-up. Putting "restraints" on students, insisting that they conform to specific perceptions of intelligence and expressions of literacy may actually contribute to attention deficit.

I found it interesting that Mr. Jackson linked student personality to attention deficit. I had a first grader this year who was demonstrating so much promise. When he came, he was an emergent reader, blending and segmenting sounds for word recognition. He was so enthusiastic! After covering the short a sounds and a few sight words, he was enjoying Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss, 1954), which was great practice for rhythm, rhyme, and sight words—and it was fun too! Then, around January, I noticed that he had begun to sleep in class, a hard, disoriented, can't-wake-him-up sleep. When I took him back to class, and informed his teacher, she told me that he had to start taking his medication twice a day, morning and after lunch.

I was dumbfounded. Why was he on medication? He was an excellent student in my

class. He was helpful to other students. He was an eager learner. He was mastering the

material. His teacher told me that he *had* demonstrated tremendous growth, but that he had been

a "terror," fighting and biting in kindergarten and that's when he was put on medication. But,

she also had no problems with him in class. Were his strengths overlooked and his faults

magnified like Mr. Jackson's? Was he medicated for being a boy, being active, or for not fitting

the "good student" profile?

Kunjufu (2005) reported that 50% of the cases reported to special education were

diagnosed with ADHD. Of the Black students enrolled in special education, 80% of the

population is Black males with fewer than 10% returning to mainstream education.   One report

even charges that poor reading instruction may account for the increased number of students

diagnosed with ADHD (Mead, 2006), again another instance of American African males being

trapped in a discourse of deficits.

Visualization is Deonte's strongest point according to his father, Mr. Worth. "He can see

things and he can follow through with it." In other words, he explained that Deonte' can build a

picture in his mind while something is being read to him. He gave an example of once reading

about a boy who wanted a certain type of shoes really badly. But, his parents could not afford to

buy them for him. He said Deonte' listened intently to that story and his heart went out to the

little boy. Then once he didn't buy Deonte' the shoes he wanted and Deonte' recalled the story

he had read about the little boy. Deonte' said "One day, I'm gonna get old and buy my own

shoes." Mr. Worth said he told Deonte' that he was glad to see that he remembered the story and

actually related it to his own circumstances, but he told him, "You've got to get your education

so you'll be able to get a job so you can buy your shoes." That's a dad putting life in perspective.

Deonte' did a good job of relating text to world and text to self or what Mr. Worth calls visualization. Deonte' was good at making relationships, which is a skill that Mr. Gentry also recognizes in George.

George has excellent comprehension skills. He's one of those kids that if you read it to him, he literally consumes every word and pretty much can spit it right back out to you verbatim. He has a very good understanding of whatever is read to him.

So far, we've discovered that my participants value good listening, comprehension, social, and people skills as assets for reading achievement. It would definitely be a rarity to find these skills listed on a reading achievement checklist. But my participants have them as high priorities in terms of students' strengths in reading.

Mr. Gooden broadens the concept of student strength to that of community. He believes that children strengths and weaknesses are reflections of the community in which they live. Involving the diverse perspectives of community is a wonderful vehicle for motivation and engagement, especially for American African boys. Mr. Gooden reflects,

When you find neighborhoods where there is some fellowship, that's a good neighborhood. I live in an international neighborhood. My cul-de-sac is international and everybody speaks to everybody. And everybody's nice to everybody. Everybody wants everybody's child to be successful.

A classroom neighborhood sounds like a good format. It's a place where everyone and their lives are valued. It's safe. It's a place where whatever funds of knowledge are brought to the classroom are accepted and used to scaffold students' learning. It's a place where not only

are principals and counselors are invited, but custodians, cafeteria personnel, parents, community, and everyone who touches the lives of the children are invited. When the students do well, it's a celebration and everyone comes with well wishes.

Perceptions of Student Weaknesses in School

Participants identified students' weaknesses in terms more specific to skills and strategy based instruction. Participants believed that direct instruction was the remedy to most of the problems that the students faced and that engaging them in interesting and relevant literature would be the most effect approach to address their weaknesses.

A common difficulty in most students' abilities enrolled in EIP Reading is lack of phonetic understanding. Somewhere along the way, they failed to become proficient enough in sound recognition so that they could focus more on fluency, which is integral to comprehension. Mr. Gentry keyed in on this problem with George.

> I think the issue with George is he was not taught those core phonics fundamentals, the
>
> fundamentals of reading, understanding what each letter sounds like, sounding, blending,
>
> just the core of reading, he did not master that. If he does, he can do very well.

However, when read to, George demonstrates a high level of understanding. This indicates that he is more proficient at listening comprehension than he is at reading comprehension. Lack of fluency and practice is a likely culprit. George's heavy concentration on "sounding out" words often interferes with comprehension.

> Understanding and comprehension is not the issue. And I think with so many kids like G,
>
> they spend so much time trying to make sure they understand what the word is and
>
> pronounce the word correctly, by the time they've gotten to the end of the paragraph,
>
> they've put more energy on making sure they have pronounced the word right, they really

have focused too little attention on the content of the material, what he's actually reading about.

Chris has a different phonetic challenge. Mr. Jackson explains that Chris mispronounces words in his everyday speech, so when it comes time to read them correctly, he doesn't recognize the correct word. He gave the word "nut-in" instead of nothing or "a-ight" instead of alright. So instead of recognizing a common word that he uses all the time and reading it fluently, Chris has to sound the word out because he was accustomed to pronouncing it differently. Because those in his circle of friends or even family recognizes what he is saying and maybe even speaks the same way, Mr. Jackson says there is never a problem understanding what he's saying—except in school. "Not saying that he can't do it, but he's so used to not doing it. So, you have to like retrain him to do again."

Jamal's strength could also be his weakness according to Mr. Weeden. "He's got a quiet nature about him and you could easily overlook him and focus on another student who needs much more help." Mr. Weeden said that Jamal's mother was the same way. "She's not a forceful sister…very accommodating. She's the kind that whatever the teacher says, she goes along with that. But, she stays on J's [Jamal's] case, though." He felt that Jamal probably just didn't focus on a couple of questions on the test and failed by a tiny margin. Mr. Weeden was correct. The passing score for the reading CRCT (Criterion Referenced Competency Test) is 800. Jamal's score was 797.

While Mr. Myatt could not identify anything that Ike struggled with, he pointed out that he, on the other hand, was learning which strategies keep Ike engaged and which ones frustrated him.

So what I do is—because he's becoming impatient and ready to quit, it actually falls back on me because of my expectation of what I think he should know. And then I start pressuring him. But, then when I back off of him, because I don't want him to quit, I'll say, "Ok, let's look at this another way or let's think about it this way." Then I'll give him a little hint or I'll say or something like that and boom!—then the light comes back on.

As a parent, Mr. Myatt realized that the goal was to keep Ike involved in the learning and if it meant altering his approach, this is what he had to do. Isn't this what instruction and learning is all about? We change strategies to accomplish our learning objectives.

There are attitudes or mindsets that challenge our best practices, strategies, or skills instruction. One of these attitudes is lack of motivation. Mr. Worth believes that Deonte's struggle is self-inflicted because of his mindset. "Deonte's problem to me is that he doesn't want to take time out to just do his work. He could do it. He's smart—very smart. He just doesn't want to take time out to do it. He wants to play." Here, Mr. Worthen identifies the desire to play as Deonte's struggle in school. It seems play is more important to Deonte' than what he learns in school.

Similar to Chris, Kendrick, too, is heavily influenced by street culture according to Mr. Gooden. Ultimately, being gifted in the streets or neighborhoods is far more important than the book knowledge taught in the schools.   To believe that students are not keenly aware of their trajectories in school is to bury our heads in the sand. Students who are enrolled in my class understand that they have been labeled. As engaging as I try to make my classes, I realize that many students see themselves as failures in school. As a result, they, particularly American African males, give up on book learning and focus their attention on being street smart,

developing a *cool pose* (Majors & Billson, 1992). The term, *cool pose* describes a coping

mechanism for American African males in the face of social stress and demeaning connotations,

in this case being labeled as remedial readers. It is a posture of calm resignation, apathy, and

detachment.

> By acting calm, emotionless, fearless, aloof, and tough, the African-American male
>
> strives to offset an externally imposed "zero" image. Being cool shows both the
>
> dominant culture and the [B]lack male himself that he is strong and proud. He is
>
> somebody. He is a survivor…(p. 5)
>
> Chris, Kendrick, George, Deonte', and Jamal to some degree all seem to have made a

choice to be *cool* and socially accepted among their peers rather than attempt to meet academic

expectations of teachers and parents as well. Majors (Majors & Billson, 1992) appropriated this

term to define a posture of coping and survival for American African males in a society that

projected their inadequacies like neon lights, belittling and ridiculing their manhood.

The caveat to assuming this posture, however, according to Majors is "to stymie

enrichment and education" p. 47. Being cool or seemingly apathetic about academic shortfalls,

especially at this young age, could prove to be detrimental in the long run because these

shortfalls aggregate the longer they are unattended. The result can be students in the upper

grades struggling with many aspects of reading and negatively impacting not only their reading

performance but their ability to learn from texts in other content areas.

The fathers and mentors who offer their perspectives in this chapter were once the young

Blacks boys sitting in the seats of my students. They have "walked a mile in my shoes," adding

credence to their views because they have indeed walked many miles in the shoes that are far too

big for my students right now. But through the paths that they paved, we can form new pathways that can lead to different and more positive social and academic destinations.

Participants Recommendations for Addressing Weaknesses

Following are participants' suggestions for successful engagement of American African males in the classrooms. Taking into account that these men continue to be the subjects of negative depictions of academic failure and are fathers, uncles, brothers, and relatives of American African males who are also victims of negative discourse, their suggestions and recommendations can prove instrumental in the search for successful outcomes for American African males.

Increasing Cultural Familiarity in the Classrooms without Judgment

"Literacy instruction must have value in these young people's current time, place, and space if it is to attract and sustain their attention. It must address their issues and concerns in a way that will lead them to examine their own lives" (Tatum, 2005). During my 18 years of teaching, I have observed very little instructional material that highlights the lives of average American Africans. Whenever this information is included in instruction, it is invariably gathered from my own initiative—even during Black History Month. When students' lives are not valued in instruction, the associations that are made are based on the lives of others and limit full cognition. Mr. Gooden succinctly suggested, "So if the teachers could find a way to teach him like he's taught outside of school—in the streets—he maybe could learn in school."

Eliminating Negative Labels While Providing Necessary Intervention Strategies

When upper elementary students come into my classroom, they often sometimes show resistance, particularly when they come for the first time. They will come in reluctantly, nonchalantly, as if they really don't want to be there. I believe that they show this reaction

because of the stigma of remediation and the labeling of being "slow" or "needing lots of help"

by other students and, unfortunately, teachers as well. In addition, it's very important for former

students to show that "cool pose" that, "Hey, its no big deal. I don't really care anyway." When

we begin to play learning games or engage in creative ways, those same nonchalant students are

the first ones to demonstrate their familiarity with what we do.

Although Mr. Jackson and Mr. Worth have faith in EIP, Mr. Gentry feels that while

remediation classes may have the lofty ideal of increasing student skill levels and self-esteem, in

actuality it accomplishes just the opposite. Mr. Gentry believes that remediation classes cripple

the American African male student by giving him a crutch and inhibiting his natural motivation

to excel. He feels that the student would do better if he were challenged to accomplish rather

than pacified and pampered in his deficiencies. I was reminded of an email I recently received.

According to the email, in a high school address, Microsoft icon Bill Gates gives students 11

rules of life that they are not taught in school. According to the email, Rule #8 states,

> Your school may have done away with winners and losers, but life HAS NOT. In some
>
> schools, they have abolished failing grades. They'll give you as MANY TIMES as you
>
> want to get the right answer. This doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to ANYTHING
>
> in real life.

Mr. Gentry is not a millionaire and he most certainly cannot claim the renowned

entrepreneurial achievement of Mr. Gates. But he and Mr. Gates agree: Schools need to be

tougher in terms of having higher expectations and challenge kids when they are failing. This

means holding students, parents, and teachers accountable for achievement. Real life, according

to both Gates and Gentry, doesn't have room for multiple attempts, especially because of failure

to apply oneself.

Decreasing Lapse Time between Identifying and Addressing Problems

Mr. Goode's primary concern was that Kendrick had made it all the way to fifth grade and his learning challenges had not been effectively addressed. Schools must make it a priority to identify students who may have academic challenges quickly, diagnose the area(s) where they need help, remediate, and assess frequently for progress. In a 166 to my participants, increasing the use of culturally relevant instructional pedagogy is critical for cognition in addressing the problems. Our school's curriculum includes little that is culturally relevance in its regular or remedial materials. There are, of course, other variables that impinge on student achievement such as large class sizes, exposure to vs. mastery of instructional concepts, inclusion of parental and community resources, and community SES. What is essential is that once the problem is diagnosed, the correct approach is prescribed and administered. If I go to the doctor with a toothache, prescribing 800mg Motrin may give me temporary relief, but it does not address the root of the problem.

Incorporating Parental Perspectives and Participation

Parent participation is seen my many as fundamental in the operations of schools. For more than 100 years, the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) has served as the school's support arm for both academic and non-academic necessities. Parents are encouraged to participate and attend usually monthly meetings and volunteer in fundraising activities. But, according to the first male president of the national PTA, Chuck Sayors, "only about 10% of the formerly all-female group's members are men" (NPR News). Of that 10%, the probability of Black male participation based on historical and sociocultural circumstances could diminish that figure to less than one percent.

The U.S, Census reports that 29% of Black households are headed by females (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). That is equivalent to one in three households headed by women. In the spirit of Sankofa or looking back at the genesis of African presence in this country, these statistics are not at all surprising. Males were auctioned off and sold for their strength, agility, and reproductive possibilities. Women were left to raise not only the children of the master, but the slave children as well (Thomas, 1997). Statistically speaking, it is therefore within reason to presume that more American African homes would be led by females than males.

Fast forward a couple of centuries. Although the reasons for minimal adult male participation in school activities may differ, the negative impact has disproportionate consequences on American African children. White European males may limit their participation in their children's school activities, however, the child's cultural capital (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999) remains in-tact. With the one-third of the Black population in America having females as heads of households, a multitude of possibilities could inhibit participation in school activities including second and third job responsibilities. The child's cultural capital, on the other hand, takes an additional hit and could decline even further.

The absence of parental participation is rarely seen through these lenses—those of prescripted social outcomes for a group of people based on preset cultural norms. Parents who do not participate in their child's education through PTA or voluntary service is viewed most often as unconcern, illiteracy, or just poor parenting. Although Mr. Worthy empathizes with the various circumstances of parents, and the overwhelming responsibilities required to merely survive, he recognizes the high price of not participating.

That's what worries me in the environment that we're growing up in right now is that the parents realistically have to really [emphasis] budget their time and do what they need to do as far as the kids. And it's hard. You got a lot of parents, [and] it's not necessarily their fault. They're trying to do as much as they can. They still getting beat over the head, though. And in a situation, we got a lot of single Black moms. That's a major problem, where the dad's not playing a role in the kid's life.

The disproportionality of Black mothers is a strong concern of Mr. Worthy. He also acknowledges the challenge for Black men to participate because of financial obligations and the difficulty with finding jobs and sufficient income. Mr. Gooden and Mr. Weeden expressed these concerns as well. But, they both hold the schools accountable for garnering parental support. Mr. Weeden stated, "Seems like the schools could do more to work with the parents—like counselors used to go out to students' homes when they were out for long periods." Mr. Gentry feels that schools could definitely be more proactive in bolstering parent participation. He believes schools should be just as forceful in getting parental support for student improvement as it does for other infractions.

...the school system has proven that it can literally lock parents up. If you lock a parent up for driving their child to a school system that is out of district and all the parent wants is to make sure that child goes to a better school, but you would lock that parent up, that proves that the school has the power to do certain things to make parents do what they want them to do.

Mr. Gentry puts responsibility on the school to find strategies to involve the parents and get their support. Mr. Gooden extends that responsibility by suggesting that schools re-

incorporate what worked in the past. He says that schools should be the nucleus that pulls together community, school, and home.

Parental participation not only benefits the children in providing a foundation of support and building a sense of pride, but it keeps the schools on their toes. Mr. Gooden observes that even if schools were equipped with everything for American African male student success, these tools may not be utilized to their greatest advantage. When parents actively participate in their child's education, schools and teachers are more likely to put forth their best efforts in their education.

…we have the tools in the system for him, but are we really pushing them or are we just letting him be skipped by. He's another number. We let him get by. Too many of our Black boys, we've been letting get by.

When it comes to American African males, parents must be committed to make the educational investment in their success. This commitment may call for temporary suspensions of sports activities and additional educational time outside of the school day. American African males may need to enroll in tutorial programs, Saturday school, before and after school programs. Mr. Gentry encourages schools and PTA programs to reeducate parents on career opportunities for themselves and their children. He believes that parents need to understand that while they are intent on charting a sports career for their son, there is so much more time invested by athletes of which most are not aware. Because society and the media illuminate American African male sports figures and entertainers as success models, he cautions parents to look beyond the dazzle of the limelight.

The great ones, Michael Jordan, Jerry Rice...it's not what they did during their regular practice time. It's what they did in addition to their regular practice time that made them

great—that extra hour on the court shooting a hundred more free throws; that extra hour

on a football field catching 100 more passes. That's what made them who they are and

got them to the hall of fame. It caused them to literally revolutionize the game.

This additional time is what it will take to be better students. In other words, educational

success rests not solely in the hands of the schools, nor primarily in the hands of the parents. Mr.

Gentry believes that both schools and parents must shore up their responsibilities for student

success. He says that it is easier for school systems to put the blame on parents than to find

and/or implement solutions to improve life outcomes from American African males.

Parent participation is not supposed to be a luxury. It is recognized as a natural

occurrence for parents who are concerned for the success of their children. In schools, it is often

a measurement of parental care and concern for their children. This is erroneous. Incorporating

parental perspectives into the academic goals of the school must be high priority in the

achievement of student success. This goal and how it will be achieved must be a top priority in

the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Focusing on student achievement without this critical

component will, as it has in the past, short circuit student success. As Mr. Gooden suggested,

strong community support is important to strong student achievement.

Incorporating parental perspectives into the academic goals of the school must be high

priority in the achievement of student success. This goal and how it will be achieved must be

included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Focusing on student achievement without this

critical component will, as it has in the past, short circuit student success. As Mr. Gooden

suggested, strong community support is important to strong student achievement. Culturally

responsive schools recognize that reasons for lack of parent participation are as varied as the

learning styles of students. Culturally responsive schools take account of these variabilities (Roller, 1996) and structure and design parent programs to engage and involve all parents.

During the transcription process, I often found myself listening to my participants talk without typing a word. I was not only captivated by their words of wisdom, but I was so inspired by their humility and human compassion. As I begin to analyze their conversations and identify themes, one particular connection stood out for me. All of the participants first focused in on the personality and character of my students when describing their strengths and weaknesses in reading. Then as they continued, maybe sensing that I was looking for specifics to reading, they began to identify reading skills, abilities, and difficulties.

What this told me was that they first looked at the students as young people who wanted to succeed. They referred to them as *smart, funny, good natured, very intelligent,* and *kind-hearted*. And even when they described their weaknesses in reading, they emphasized character traits like playful, inattentive, and disinterested—not problems that teachers could not address. Their perceptions of the students guided their approach to reaching them and developing their potential. My point is that preconceptions are often good predictors of our approaches. How we view our students and ourselves dictates our thinking about how to teach our students. Take for example this quote from two leading educators.

> Poverty is not the only factor that determines if a child is at risk for reading difficulties, but is the most pervasive one. With childhood poverty on the rise, we can project that more of the children who arrive in our classroom will be at risk for academic failure (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

So is a poor child cognitively limited because of the lack of money or things? This is the second paragraph in the first chapter of required reading in one of my graduate classes.

Preservice teachers, then, *could* go into classrooms filled with poor students, many of whom are American African boys or girls, with the preconception that the children are not capable of becoming skilled and avid readers.

More pervasively, the highly controversial No Child Left Behind Act (Department of Education, 2001) specifically targeted "disadvantaged, low achieving children." The NCLB Statement of Purpose includes

> …(2) meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's *highest-poverty* [emphasis added] schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance; '(3) closing the achievement gap between high- and low performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers…

Low-achieving, highest-poverty, neglected or delinquent, low-performing, minority, disadvantaged—All of these are negative connotations taken from the prior "national" quote. As I read the quote initially, I imagined being outside of myself or another person, going into a classroom for the first time filled with beautiful Brown and Black children, and labeling each one of them based on the negative projections from this quote—their Savior. None of my participants even mentioned *poverty* or *the poor* relative to these students or what was required for their success. As a matter of fact, Mr. Gentry felt that schools with a mentality of serving the poor actually contributed to limiting parental support, insinuating that people respond to subliminal seductions and projections. Because they have been labeled as poor, some parents may withhold support that they actually can afford and capitalize on the assumption of poverty

"Ms. Jai, we can find money for everything else that we want. We can." He said schools can get parents out for field days, dances, parties, and other fun activities, but conveniently uses "poor community" when applying any kind of demands for parental support. Apparently, school systems as well as teachers are also influenced by demarcating labels and low expectations. Mr. Gentry would encourage schools to project the benefit of families investing in the future of children.

It was refreshing to hear my participants hold these young men in high regard and to look for and find the best in them in spite of their reading difficulties. It was also enlightening in that before they thought of them as struggling, remedial, or failing, they thought of them as good boys. Robinson and Biran (2006) found that one of the intrinsic hindrances to academic motivation for African American students is "the negative stereotypes of the African student" (p. 50).

Gregariousness was a commonality observed throughout the boys' strength attributes. Working together in groups or small class communities should be encouraged and facilitated. It may be wise if classrooms were set up in a true social context to acknowledge everyone's strengths and praise them accordingly as opposed to highlighting one's weaknesses or ridiculing one for their difference.

Obviously, present day school approaches have been grossly ineffective in effecting positive academic landscapes for American African males. Scientifically, when a hypothesis has been disproved and the futility of that approach assessed, it is generally not continued—at least not without changing up the variables. Yet, the educational landscape for American African males has remained the same for more than 20 years and the academic success rate statistically shows no significant improvement (Holzman, 2011). Isn't it time to give American

African males like my participants the opportunity for major input in the planning process of educational outcomes of American African males? Or would their recommendations be counterproductive to the *baby elephants circle*?

To overlook the valuable common denominators of self-esteem, racial pride, and self-definition in increasing academic achievement implicates the school system in the perpetuation of failing propaganda for American African males. Outside of mass inclusion of the voices of American Africans AND American African males in particular, the system itself substantiates Schott's (Holzman, 2011) prognosis—a system not designed for the learning styles of American African boys.

In a society of mixed cultures such as that here in America, centralizing the focus on American Africans may seem unreasonable and self-centered. However, no other group of people here in America can claim the same circumstance of their presence here in America as American Africans. As frivolous and overrated as it may seem, the impact of oppression on a group of people who, only 50 years ago, were barred from attending the university for which I write this paper, is far-reaching and reverberates generationally. To presume that the importance placed on the education of the culturally powerful is more important than those who by intent inhabit this country for servitude is not farfetched at all. Malcolm X reminded us all, "We [American Africans] didn't land on Plymouth Rock! Plymouth Rock landed on us." As Delpit (1995) so emphatically stated, "To provide schooling for everyone's children that reflects liberal, middle class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it" (p. 28).

Critical race theorizes that until race and racism stands front and center before its offspring of prejudice, poverty, illiteracy, self-deprecation, and a host of other calamities

enshrouding a group of people, the cultural lack of capital will persist. Without this discussion,

another fifty years will pass and the elusive closing of the achievement gap will warrant more

research on new subjects—for American African males will be long extinct.

See Chart of Findings on following pages.

Chart of Findings

**Perspectives on Current Educational Practices and
the Achievement of American African Males**

		Findings

I.	**Learning Landscapes of Students**	**Spiritual Connections**
		• Eldest participants believed that spiritual connections should be included in the educational process.
		• Schools should be extension of spiritual values of the home and instill in AAMs a sense of purpose, focus, and self-value.
		Early Intervention Program (EIP): An Arm Around the Shoulder or a Crutch?
		• Most participants believed that the EIP program was important to offer students' additional instruction in reading skills—more or less providing them an *educational shoulder to lean on.*
		• One participant, however, believed that pulling students out for remediation "dumbed the instruction down" and did not encourage the student to put forth his best effort.
		• The school has increased the number of students per teacher, strongly impacting positive outcomes and reducing individual focus on students.
		• AAM academic failure year after year is evidence of a failed program—it's time to remediate the remediation.
		• Schools pass students on who may be seriously lacking in skills to comply with rules of government funding or adequate yearly progress (AYP).
		• Students, particularly AAMs respond negatively to negative labels.
		Societal Influences
		    Teachers may have negative perceptions of speech styles.
		    • The divide between the dominate culture and American African culture is pronounced when it comes to validation of speech styles.
		    • Participants believed that while some AA vernacular may be appropriate "in home culture," students should be taught in schools what is considered correct in society.
		    Hearing can impact speech sounds.

| | | • Studies have found that males and females have profound differences in sensitivity to decibel levels.
• Access to this information could reduce AAMs being referred to special education and remedial classes.
Students may rebel against suggestions of inferior speech patterns.
• AAMs may associate White English Vernacular (WEV) as a feminine trait and resist.
• AAMs may feel that speaking White English is a challenge to not only their masculinity, but to their racial pride.
Integrating students' cultural interests into school curriculum could positively affect student outcomes.
• Instructional pedagogy should build n students' interest and strengths for successful outcomes.
• Preservice teacher education programs must better prepare new teachers to successfully educate students in diverse classrooms through their prior knowledge and interests and that teacher-student-relationships are a-priori and essential for student progress.
• Access and incorporate research data beyond dominant European theories.
Omission of students' social environment ensures failure.
• American African students, those they love, and the things they do must be represented in the classroom, texts, materials, and instruction—without judgment as is the ordinary occurrence for European children on a daily basis.
• To continue to essentialize European culture over all others will continue to result in an achievement gap. |
| . | | **Parental Support**
• Establishing a relationship with parents is essential not only to help the child academically, but to get to know the child through the parent's eyes.
• Many American African fathers and father figures believe that their sons have a greater opportunity for success both socially and economically in sports than in academics
• Parental guidance and support is essential in moving American African |

males forward.

- Schools should restructure parental involvement policies to coincide with demographic family structures and households.
- Village concept should be implemented incorporating participation from neighborhood businesses, services organizations, churches, community centers, etc.

Perceptions of Students' Strengths in School

- Identified strengths that were non-traditional according to school standards—strengths that may have been overlooked.
- Catches on quickly; kind personality; a distinct, loud voice; project his words; winning personality; gregarious; visualizing;
- Putting "restraints" on students, insisting that they conform to specific perceptions of intelligence and expressions of literacy may actually contribute to attention deficit.
- My participants valued good listening, comprehension, social, and people skills as assets for reading achievement.

Perceptions of Students' Weaknesses in School

- Weaknesses were identified in terms more specific to skills and strategy based instruction.
- Lacks core phonics fundamentals.
- Slang talk or Black English Vernacular (BEV) interferes with understanding of school text.
- A quiet nature could cause a teacher to focus more on behavior challenged students and overlook a child.
- Lack of motivation.
- More influenced by street culture than book knowledge.

II.	**Participants' Recommendations for Addressing Weaknesses**	• Increase Cultural Familiarity in the Classrooms without Judgment • Eliminate Negative Labels While Providing Necessary Intervention Strategies • Decrease Lapse Time between Identifying and Addressing Problems • Incorporate Parental Perspectives and Participation • Observe Student Strengths in Personality, Character, and Academic Skills

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMERICAN AFRICAN MALES' LITERACY SUCCESS

I knew about reading. It was something that the people in the white house did from paper. They could read words on paper, but we weren't allowed to be reading. We weren't allowed to understand or read nothing. But, once I saw some funny lines on the side of a feed sack. It said: 100 lbs. I wrote them down in the dirt with a stick and Mammy gave me a smack on the back of the head that drove me into the ground. "Don't you take to that writing," she said. "I wasn't doing it. I was just copying something I saw on a feed sack." "Don't. They catch you doing that they'll think you learning to read. You learn to read and they'll whip you till your skin hangs like torn rags. Or cut your thumb off. Stay away from writing and reading." So I did. (Paulsen, 1993).

My study has been an examination of the stories of those who have been and continue to be represented in academic data as a failing population, American African males. In my review of the literature, I found that there is extensive literature on the necessity of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. Much of these data go back over 20 years, however, at my present school, at least, the basal and curriculum demonstrate little inclination toward culturally relevant materials—particularly for American Africans. There are many Latin American and Asian American stories. However, American Africans continue to be marginalized despite the perpetual academic gap.

The literature also revealed activism on the part of several cities in America to counter the decline of literacy statistics through African centered pedagogy, single sex schools for AAMs, and development of culturally relevant instructional practices. Despite the preponderance of evidence that European centered public schools fail to meet the needs of the majority population, who are children of color, there is no apparent push to change.

Critical Race Theory helps me understand how entrenched racism is within the structures of American society and how power perpetuates racism so effectively and invisibly that society is led to believe that American African males are just not so smart and that their issues have nothing to do with racialized structures. This is a study of the voices of that marginalized population and their views on why the discourse persists and the most advantageous avenues toward improving the reading and literacy achievement of American African males.

Findings Chapter 4 was an examination of the educational experiences of my participants. They shared the positives and negatives of their school experience. In Findings Chapter 5, my participants shared their views on the educational experiences of their sons and mentees. They reflected on their own experiences and compared and contrasted those of their sons.   This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section is Participants' Recommendations, which is divided into three subheadings: 1) Recommendations to the school; 2) Recommendations to American African fathers or father figures; and 3) Personal Insights as a Result of the Interview Process. The second and final section is the conclusion.

American Africans encounter a unique circumstance in America. For more than two centuries, American Africans were denied education and social advancement. Unlike Hispanics, Asians, and other immigrants to this country, American Africans did not *come* to America seeking freedom. American Africans were *brought* here as a people against their will as property

to provide free labor for the building of this nation; to serve and cater to the needs and wants of European Americans who colonized this land called America. Education either of themselves or by anyone else was not an option—at least not a planned option. As Paulsen observed in the above passage, it was a matter of life and death for American Africans to assert themselves academically—even as children. The decision was a no-brainer, if there was a such thing as choice. When given the option between death and illiteracy, the choice was obvious—they were trapped in a conundrum of illiteracy.

The residual effects of this implanted circumstance continue to create and expose pathologies that only the infected can describe. Yet, this history put aside, American Africans are held to the same goals, same success expectations, and achievement levels as their captors and judged by standards designed by their captors. Could this be a set-up for failure—an achievement trap? The diabolical nature of such a suggestion seems inconceivable. But, considering the historical reality of the African existence in America, it's not so farfetched.

Miraculously, American Africans have survived as a people and achieved academic and social excellence in many arenas, despite their genesis in this country. But, these achievements are overshadowed by negative projections of illiteracy, criminality, and a perpetual gap in achievement between the captors and the captives. American African males hold claim to both extremes: the highest number of incarcerated and the lowest numbers in academic achievement. No one rises to low expectations.

The most unfortunate situation in which we find American African males today in terms of literacy reflect one of the greatest symptoms inscribed during the horrendous time of captivity and beyond—distrust. Distrust in the message and distrust in the messenger. Mr. Gentry assessed the situation as contrived.

It's strategic failure. Anytime a letter has to assure a peoples civil rights is passed on the desk of the top leader of the land and that leader has to sign off on it to basically say, 'We'll give them another seven years,' that lets me know that we really don't have our civil rights. And the intention was never for us to have our civil rights.

Mr. Gentry expresses the beliefs of many American African males who believe that only a total restructuring of public schools and the system that maintains them can begin to reverse the perennial trend of academic failure among American African males. Following are the recommendations of my participants toward the strategic trek toward academic success and eliminating the achievement trap.

Recommendations to the School

Currently, the rate at which Black males are being pushed out of school and into the pipeline to prison far exceeds the rate at which they are graduating and reaching high levels of academic achievement. A deliberate, intense focus is needed to disrupt and redirect the current educational trajectory for Black males.

John H. Jackson, J.D., Ed. D., President and CEO (Holzman, 2011)

This "deliberate intense focus" elicited by Dr. Jackson has begun through initiatives throughout the country and resonates through the profound insight of my participants. The most important steps of gaining acknowledgement and support of the school system, curriculum design teams, teachers, and parents, and then ultimately implementation is where the rubber meets the road. In this section, my participants offer poignant advice on what they believe the school system can do to improve the educational outcomes of American African males.

Academic Success Grounded in Spiritual Connections

Hilliard (1997) reminds us, "Our educational and socialization process was always situated in a sacred space" (p. 10). African culture and spirituality seem to go hand in hand. Some say that it was the belief in a higher power that claims responsibility for African survival in America (Thomas, 1997). However, American law separates church and state and public schools disallow any connections between spirit matters and academics. According to most of my participants, a return to these matters of the spirit is necessary for the focusing of American African males.

> We need to expose students to more life skills, character skills, spirit things and so forth. When we talk about what happened in your lifetime and your growing up and my growing up, we had a village concept. We kind of lost touch, lost that reach out and touch mentality. So, that brings in incorporating the community in the schools like churches and having churches, police officers… We have to leave our environment and take them and show them what they can do.

These "spirit things," unfortunately for American Africans, are no longer incorporated in a public school structure. The negation of this *soul* connection impinges on the wholeness of educational instruction, which is considered as crucial in the education of American African students (King & Wilson, 1994; Thomas, 1997). Although he did not refer to this internal presence as spirit, Mr. Jackson believes this centering is more responsible for success than a formal education.

> …education is definitely important, but it's not essential to the well-being of a man or female for that matter. It doesn't make or break you… I guess a mindset will hold you back in life more than your education would.

Possessing inner peace was counterproductive to the system of slavery and oppression. Therefore, to allow American Africans the freedom of independent spiritual thought was disallowed. Thomas (1997) says, "The Europeans believed it was their duty to "Christianize" (p. 23), simultaneously discrediting African systems of faith.

Mr. Gentry credits divine intervention with his getting on the right track. Without directly saying American African males could benefit from spiritual guidance, he used his own experiences to indicate its importance.

> You know how some things just kind of click. It's just God showing you that hey, "I'm answering your prayers." And I sat down with him one night and I opened up to him [his mentor] about everything—the abuse I experienced, how I always wanted my dad there, why didn't he want me, things like that and he really really listened. And you know moms is one thing, grandmother is one thing, but for a male, it's almost like it's a divine appointment. It needs to happen. At a certain age, mom does well, grandmother may do well too. But, at a certain age, a young man needs that man to reach out to cause mom doesn't understand everything that we go through.

According to my participants, what seems to have the most significance in academic achievement in the lives of American African males is a pre-learning focus. It seems to be a preparation to gain academic knowledge—an education of the soul of sorts. It's what King refers to as "True human freedom," which means "BEing equitable in one's soul, especially learning to nourish well-being and differentness in self and other persons (King & Wilson, 1994).

Acknowledge Difference and Approach Learning Differently

Again, one of the tenets of CRT is that the superiority of one race over another appears natural and ordinary. Erasing any semblance of self-worth or value in heritage is an essential factor of dominance . Grounding knowledge of your roots and the power and greatness of your ancestors is a spiritual endeavor that engenders a sense of greatness in self, from which you can proceed to receive new knowledge. Conversely, lack of this information produces the opposite effect, as Dr. Woodson (Woodson, 1933) observed,

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples (p. xiii).

Mr. Gentry said he couldn't agree more. He smiles, licks his lips, and says, "Ms. Jai, let me tell you something,"

> We are sons of kings, of people who designed and orchestrated and used engineering to develop and build structures that even to this day in modern times with all the technology that we have, they still cannot duplicate. So you want to tell me that we're not intellectually and mathematically sound?

The overriding sentiment among the eldest of my participants, Mr. Gooden, Mr. Myatt, Mr. Gentry, and Mr. Weeden, is that the link between building a sense of value, high expectations and historical perspective and strengthening academic outcomes for American African males is foundational in the educational process. They all expressed the necessity of restoring and establishing a sense of self-worth and responsibility in Black males as cultural

leaders, protectors, maintainers, and providers even at an early age. Mr. Gooden suggested that parents start young males off with responsibility.

> So you're going to have to take some ownership in this process as well. You're going to have to pick up a book and start reading. And then give him projects to do. Give him a book to read and say here's a book. Give it to him on a Monday and say by Saturday, we're going to get back and we're going to sit down (you know the parents) and you're going to share with me this story.

The younger male participants, on the other hand, emphasized academic strategies such as interactive learning, relevant materials, and teacher instructional practices as critical for change in academic outcomes. Neither, Mr. Jackson or Mr. Worthy spoke of building self-value or self-perception as issues related to academic success.

This difference in perception could be indicative of the success of normalizing racism where the younger generations fail to make correlations between self-valuation, strategic failure with racial structures. Or, it could be an indication of just an age gap, where "with age comes wisdom," as mother says. Then again, maybe the younger men just took it for granted that the boys demonstrated belief in themselves, and therefore, needed no reinforcement in self-validation. Mr. Jackson was adamant in his refusal to give racism credit for holding him back, stating that one would be

> …hard-pressed to see me make a racial excuse about a lot. Although, I'm not naïve and don't think that it exists. But…I'd like to point the finger on myself instead of give anybody White the credit to think that they held me down because of *anything* [emphasis].

Mr. Jackson believes that giving credit to Whites for the oppression of Blacks empowers them. He feels moreover that opportunities are limitless in America and you and you alone hold yourself back. He encourages Black males to not focus on the "White man" because "you'll be caught up and instead of focusing on what you need to do, you'll be caught up on his misdeeds." Even in terms of how students may view remedial reading, Mr. Jackson puts an optimistic spin on having to be in the class.

> Don't think that you're the only one that's being pulled away from your class to work on a specific problem of yours. You might lack the strength in this, reading, but you might have the strength to do something else that another classmate might lack and that they'll have to pull him away to do—to work on that, whereas you get to stay in class because you're strong in that particular field.

Difference is natural—like every fingertip and every handprint. It's when one difference declares "normalcy" and subjugates others that injustice occurs. Standardization of learning, orchestrated and implemented through governmental funding initiatives, appears to be yet another tool to perpetuate the subjugation of difference in America.

In 2008, I attended a conference on promoting hope and promise for American African males in Philadelphia. Benjamin Wright, who was the Regional Superintendent for Victor Schools in Philadelphia at that time, was a presenter of one of my selected workshops. He explained that teachers of Black boys must first complete an honest self-examination and "silence" the many myths about Black boys that they may bring into the classroom. "The [B]lack boy in America is in need of teachers who are clear about who they are, self-confident in their abilities to teach socialized, young, gifted and talented [B]lack males" (Wright, 2005).

Develop Culturally Responsive & Historically Correct Curriculum

A balanced and inclusive curriculum that acknowledges African benefactions in the building of not only this country, but throughout the world was the number one concern by all of my participants, particularly Mr. Gentry and Mr. Myatt. Jenkins (2006) purports that

A progressive classroom that fully nurtures Black male development is one that is conscious of the external psychological abuse confronting Black males and directly fights against it with strong and positive educational messages and images (p. 139).

Making the connection of students with their heritage and positive accomplishments of people of color should be everyday ordinary occurrences, "not just during the 28 days of February," according to Mr. Myatt.

Well, number one, we don't know our history. We don't have any history. It's blank. You go back so far… yea, I know that my great-grandfather was mulatto. Then the White man comes into play. I know very little about my grandmother's side of the family, which was the slave side of the family. We can only go back so far, or we've only been able to go back so far.

Asante's (Asante, 1991-1992; Asante, 1998; Asante, 1991) Afrocentric idea was formulated based on these same conceptions—that African thought and culture has been misconstrued and illegitimated by European constructs. He further contends that because of marginalization, acceptance of African agency absolutely cannot occur "without fundamentally altering the character of the society" (M. K. Asante, 1998).

Mr. Myatt's sentiments fell along those same lines, espousing that there must not only be a complete paradigm shift, but an acknowledgement of perpetuated lies designed and orchestrated to facilitate American African servitude. He explained that the American African

historical perspective, which has been omitted from public school history books, is key in engaging American African students, constructing a value system, and establishing a belief in their worth in this country. He explained that American Africans are different from Europeans in many ways and that difference must be accounted for in instruction and instructional materials. He believes the way to turn this around is to situate "American African history within the curriculum from the beginning to the present," which he chuckles, "won't happen without a fight."

Mr. Gentry has little faith that the answer lies in the system at all. He believes that the system is "not in our benefit" evidenced by the negative pictures painted in the media, educational systems, and cultural perspectives about American African people. These false images have not only negatively impacted American Africans, but have also deceived Europeans, immigrants, and even American Africans themselves to believe American European innocence and African ignorance. He believes that it is a waste of energy to try to change the system. Instead, American Africans need to take the responsibility for change and teach our own.

> What we need to do is educate our own folks and we need to educate our folks to
> understand that what the system is perpetuating is NOT the truth. And because it's not
> the truth, don't buy into those stereotypes that they perpetuate upon us. And that is a
> challenge. I'm not saying that it's easy because it is a challenge.

These sentiments have been expressed for many years (DuBois, 1989; Woodson, 1933) and have apparently fallen on deaf ears in the public school arena. This belief, however, has initiated the thrust for single-sex schools across the country (Gewertz, 2007; Globe Editorial, 2008; Mrozowski, 2007; Salomone, 2003).

Standing on the shoulders of Woodson and Kunjufu (Kunjufu, 2004; Kunjufu, 2005a; Woodson, 1933), Tatum (Tatum, 2003) warned almost a decade ago that, "Many black males will have their chances for success marginalized until their teachers create environments in which curriculum orientations and instructional practices are structured to advocate for them" (p. 622). Yet, not only has the educational canvass remained consistent, but voices of American African males remain marginalized in classrooms and professional development programs, teacher preservice curriculum, and basal readers and textbook compilations. School systems buy programs such as Marzano's High Yield Strategies (Marzano et al., 2004), but fail to invest in Tatum's program for teachers on a significant scale (Tatum, 2000; Tatum, 2004; Tatum, 2005). Scott-Foresman, Harcourt-Brace and others dominate textbook franchises and demonstrate little tendency to integrate cultural values through the eyes, perceptions, and minds of American African writers and professionals—particularly American African males.

Schools, Parental Support, and Father/Mentor Focus

The two fathers who participated in my study were active fathers in the educational lives of their sons who were enrolled in my classes. Coincidently, they too had fathers in the home who they defined as excellent role models. They both were determined to be involved in the positive educational outcomes of their sons. But, aside from their own personal commitments, they also believe that schools could and should do more to elicit father participation. Mr. Gentry favors programs that *require* fathers' or mentors' participation.

All the boys in the school, we're having Father and Son lunch today. And hey, make it a part of the curriculum [and] maybe get a grade for it. Now, even though we don't tell the kids and we don't tell the parents that we're really not going to penalize the child if no one shows up, but what they don't know won't hurt them. (Giggle).

They talked about father/son luncheons, competitions, and hands-on activities. They expressed the importance of fathers being seen as partners in the schools and schools serving as a focal point for educational involvement. Mr. Gooden sees schools as a catalyst for educational support for parents and fathers who may need academic assistance themselves, although he stresses that they must make the acknowledgement before the school can do anything. He believes if fathers can open up and be receptive of assistance, it will encourage young males to recognize that it's alright to ask for help as well.

> If he sees me trying to get some help, some assistance, I think that would help him. But, I've got to tell him why I'm doing it, share. Look, your daddy has a problem comprehending my finances, my household whatever, so I'm asking for some help and the same thing for you. I want help for you so when you get to be my age, you won't be stumbling like I'm stumbling and that takes a man to do that.

Establishing and nurturing a neighborhood or village achievement culture is the winning edge for parental involvement according to my participants. Wynn (2006) calls for a diversity of stakeholders including parents, teachers, counselors and coaches, administrative leadership, school-based support personnel (such as custodians, law enforcement personnel, front office staff, and others), and faith-based institutions (p.9).

Implement Discipline-Countering Procedures through High Expectations

The subject of discipline elicited strong response from my participants. Their concerns spanned from school failure to parental inconsistencies to school disengagement. Their overall belief was that personal connections, attention to guidance, and direction would counter much of the discipline referrals statistics. In other words, "drop the stereotypes," according to Mr. Myatt

and get to know your students on a personal basis. "Who is your mother? What do you like to do? What do you want to be?" inquired Mr. Gooden.

Beginning in elementary school, order must be established and adherence to that order must be enforced. In today's school culture, words like *order* and *enforce* are taboo and indicative of a non-democratic school system. But, lack of this order or disciplinary procedures indicts the school system as setting the boys up for failure. Mr. Gentry believes that foremost, the school personnel must understand the nature and culture of the population. He called the boys "kings" and stressed the power of the word. When they are "talked up to, they began to look at themselves that way." Using the lion cub, Simba in the movie Lion King, he draws a parable.

> …you let a lion just run around and swing for tree to tree and don't sit him down and make him understand who he is he's going to act in all types of ways that is totally contradictory to who he is. It takes someone to sit down and remind him and to guide and lead.

Hilliard (1997) explained that education is a socialization process. When American African males are met at the door with high expectations and warm receptivity, the stage is set for strong engagement and respect. At the same time, skepticism, criticism, and low expectations set their stage as well.

America's schools have, from the onset, had a socializing process. Played out in subtle ways, this process has served to lift some, while degrading others. Unfortunately, American African males have for too long been on the degrading end of the process. Through verbal reprimands, condescending eye contact, or written dispositions, American African males have long endured negative misconceptions that have implicated their advancement on all levels in

American society, including educational achievement. Reversing this trend could simply lie in a change of perception and a sincere effort to nurture learning constructs (Jenkins, 2006). The tools to do so are in place. The willingness to do so—well, maybe Mr. Weeden recognized the real dilemma, "The White man knows that if the Black man ever gets his foot in the door, and his brilliance is allowed to really shine, it's [European dominance] over!"

Increase American African Male Teachers

Increasing Black male achievement will require a systemic and sustained collaboration between adults throughout the school community—the village (Wynn, 2006). Within this village are many men—more are needed in elementary schools as teachers and mentors. Navigating the acceptance criteria of colleges and universities, particularly traditional White universities is another hurdle to more American African males in the school as teachers.

My participants talked about how Black male teachers influenced their lives and how they became the men they are today based on some profound influence of a male in their lives. As Mr. Gentry shared, "I love the women in my life. But, it takes a man to teach a boy how to be a man." But, Mr. Weeden offered a caveat. "When I say man, I'm not just talking about the male species. I'm talking about a man who knows he's a man and who *wants* to be a man." In other words, he emphasized that boys need role models of what men do in terms of being husbands, fathers, protectors, and providers. Mr. Myatt believed that teaching is one of the most honored professions that a male can have not only because they can influence a child's future, but also because they can influence his self-concept.

> …because number one, a lot of our kids don't have that father figure, that role model. And they need that. And they need that discipline because if you don't have somebody putting you in check, you'll go wild. You know, you'll just go wild!

With the high numbers of disciplinary referrals of American African males, the power of the male presence in the schools is believed to counter this effect (M. Lynn, 2006). Notwithstanding, the cultural connections that can be forged based on racial commonalities, American African male teachers are a prime commodity (Johnson, & Hassan, 1999; Lynn, 2006; Lynn, 2002).

Recommendations to American African fathers or father figures

Participation is the unanimous endorsement of my participants to fathers. Mr. Jackson's words resonated with me long after our interview was done. He had already expressed how he was going to do more and take on more mentees. So when I asked him about suggestions for what fathers could do, he was excited! He leaned in and used his hands to express his point.

> First of all, as a dad, your kid idolizes you anyway, ok. I mean before any rapper or
> football player, or basketball player, your kid is gonna idolize you! Coming out of the
> womb, he idolizes you. Just take that and run with it—because everything you put in
> front of him, he's already interested in it because Dad put it in front of him. So, why not
> books?

Each one of my participants said participation or involvement immediately. Other recommendations included taking on mentees and spending time with them and volunteering more at the school. Mr. Worthen admitted that it was very hard for him to stand up and speak in front of his son's 5th grade class about owning a car dealership, but seeing the pride in his son's eyes made it all worth it. "Daddy knows what he's talking about. He's teaching the kids, teaching us, show us. It might just click in their heads that Daddy's got his. I need to get mine." Mr. Worthen went on to express, "Really, these days, with so many boys missing their fathers...it would help boys just to see dads even being around."

Another poignant recommendation, which really demonstrated the importance of accessing American African male voices is to "get along with their moms." Mr. Worthen spoke about the problems that the boys experience when they see "momma and daddy in friction."

It's kinda like they shut down toward the daddy and lean more toward the mom. So, a lot of times, they might not even want daddy around or be involved because of that scenario. Kids hold on to certain things for different reasons and look at things differently than the way we might look at things. So, I'm saying at least try to get along at that point when you are together with them so they can see that togetherness. And blended families, it's hard. That's a big problem with kids too. I mean that's a big learning deficit for kids too, 'cause they've got the emotional barriers that they're dealing with in their heads.

Their words paint a very different picture than that shaped by the media. Marginalization of the voices of American African males have resulted in not only deprivation of socialization benefits for American African males, but for society in general. America is in a better position because of their physical prowess. It's time to get into an ever better position by accessing their mental and cognitive capabilities.

Personal Insights as a Result of the Interview Process

All of the men vowed to become even more committed to their sons and mentees educational achievement. In addition, they all dedicated themselves to taking on the responsibility of playing a greater role in the lives of even more American African males. Mr. Gooden was already in the process of becoming a teacher and would be taking the certification test soon after our interview. He promised to keep up with the newest strategies and trends and pass them on to his students. Mr. Gentry said he had been inspired to start a reading boot camp. He said he was going to start with the very basics, which too many Black boys miss, and shorten

the passages with relative stories. He promised to be a stronger support to Greg by getting him books on his level and increasing the levels according to his growth.

Mr. Jackson said that the interviews had enlightened him on the gravity of the situation. He said he always knew that girls usually excelled at a faster pace than boys, but he didn't know that Black boys were actually on the bottom. He said that that fact alone was enough incentive for him to do more and encourage other "brothers" to do the same. "Yea, I'm gonna get with my boys and get them to be mentors, too! I'm sure they'll love it just like I do!"

Conclusion

I began this treatise with the searing proclamation of the Dean of Education, Dr. Thomas Pearce Bailey of the University of Mississippi, "…in educational policy let the Negro have the crumbs that fall from the White man's table; let there be such industrial education of the Negro as will best fit him to serve the White race…" As villainous as these words may be, in terms of academic excellence for American African males, they are prophetic. Although laws have been passed and billions of dollars spent on educational reforms to close the achievement gap, it remains, positioned like parallel roads that will never meet.

Cloaked in a coat of negative perceptions, American African males must recognize the necessity of building their own self-esteem, confidence, and validation—of connecting with the energy source that guides and directs them to know their own potential. For many American African males, this source has proven to be another American African male, either as a father, grandfather, mentor, or teacher. For the larger society does not have the Supermen, Batmen, Spidermen, James Bonds, Prince Charmings, and countless other superheroes to undergird their

egos long before entering kindergarten. They are expected to board the *standards* ship, navigate the waters of learning culturally alienated materials all while riding in someone else's boat, and then wait for them to tell them how inadequate they are.

Educational reformers and researchers have purported curriculum changes, textbook companies have redesigned their products, and the government has implemented standards-based initiatives for state funding. However, the very rudimentary skill of perception was probably the most profound observation of my participants. Goodness, kindness, and the desire to do well and succeed were recognized in all of the boys by all of the participants. Ironically, these same boys are often identified as having behavioral issues and lack of motivation. The intrinsic vs. extrinsic rewards debate could be defueled if more educators embraced these perceptions and illuminated these strengths in the boys and help them to see their own greatness. The students would feel intrinsic value in accomplishment if this mindset was nurtured and cultivated throughout their primary school years.

In this study, the voices of those most impacted by Dean Pearce's fulmination and the resulting thought constructs are accessed. American African males shared their views on the academic achievement gap, effectively rendering the educational and societal systems that perpetuate the negative discourse more accurately an achievement trap. My participants shared their views and perspectives as members of the marginalized population and observe that the more things change, the more they have stayed the same.

They all believed that their sons and mentees were talented, sociable, and intelligent, but that classrooms, instruction, materials, and expectations have not been designed to capitalize on their strengths, but rather serves to alienate and disconnect them from the learning—much the same as it did when they themselves were in primary school. It's analogous to having a healthy

thriving flower planted in Miracle Grow soil and then placed in a freezer.   If Baldwin (1963) is right and "the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society" (p. 679), it appears that the achievement trap is effectively doing its job to perpetuate an achievement gap between American African males and the rest of society.

Although most of them had little faith in the school system to empower their voices and implement significant changes for reform, they each committed to do more and give more to effect change in the schools, with their sons and mentees, and within themselves. The following Chart summarizes my findings in terms of the themes from the interviews and major frameworks discussed.

Frameworks and Findings Chart

Major Framework	Theory/Research	Findings
Critical Race Theory (CRT)	CRT is a movement that challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995).	• School systems, curriculum, and instructional materials and practices are by design Eurocentric. • There has been a consistent achievement gap of upwards of 26-32 points between the achievement of Europeans and American Africans.
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)	CRP refers to strategies, materials and information utilized to address the instructional strategies of teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds (J. J. Irvine & Armento, 2001).	• Texts and instructional materials continue to extol European culture, stories, and appearances. • Traditional education and its over-focus on the lives accomplishments of European Americans has had contraindications for American African males. • Schools do not value American African males, their stories, or their experiences in instructional practices. • Remedial and special education classes are disproportionately filled with American African males • Implementation of materials and strategies designed to positively change the outcomes of this population is non-progressive, • Increase the number of American African writers of textbooks and

		instructional materials.
		• Schools should utilize more instructional strategies and materials that value and promote American African life, which is familiar to AAMs.
Discipline Referrals and AAMs	• Black students are two to five times more subjected to disciplinary procedures than Whites (J. Irvine, 1990; Monroe, 2005; Oliver, 1989). • The larger the Black student population, the greater the percentages of punitive injunctions (Welch & Payne, 2010). • American African males are disproportionally represented in the numbers of cases of punitive consequences (Ferguson, 2001). • Consequences may include but are not limited to in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions (Welch & Payne, 2010). • Theorists have purported that this process of disenfranchisement is part of a broader aim: to minimalize and disempower American African males (C. D. Lee, 1994a; Lewis, 2003; Oliver, 1989). • Zero-tolerance policies are implemented in schools more and more. • Zero tolerance in its execution defines and polices the parameters of "permissible" behaviors enforced by usually by one group over another (Robbins, 2005).	Participants believed that • discipline is very important, should be encouraged and expected. • it was discipline that was responsible for their success in school. • the real problem is how discipline is communicated. • disciplinary procedures in schools do not respect the nature of American African males. • discipline is linked to a spiritual connection, which is missing in schools. • more action should be taken in the schools to involve counselors, mentors, parents, and community before expulsion or zero tolerance. • society is not designed for the success of American African males.
	• African-centered pedagogy (ACP) aligns with	• Participants believed that ACP is

Afrocentric Education	*culturally relevant pedagogy* in that it propagates the inclusion of African history in the curriculum. • Afrocentricity re-centers the primary focus on the individual as a human being, a spirit, as opposed to a statistic or piece of property. • ACP is a direct response to American racism, placing the foundation of learning on the recognition of who you are and your responsibility to society. • ACP proponents believe that the building of the human spirit of Black males situates them to realize their greatest and excel as leaders in society. • Centering Black males in their historical context is the first step in reversing the trend of failure according to ACP proponents.	essential for AAMs in elementary school in order to firmly establish their belief in themselves or for self-validation.
AAM Mentors & Role Models	• American African boys represent the highest percentage of failure on achievement test data. • American African males in their early 30s are twice as likely to have prison records (22 percent) than bachelor's degrees (12 percent) (Wynn, 2006).	• AA boys need to see AA adult males as role models, mentors, and leaders in school to counter the many negative images in the media. • More AAM teachers are needed in the classroom. • Base teaching salaries should ensure that AAMs can provide for their families. • Schools should elicit support of AAMs in families and community organizations.

What Manner of Men are We…

Who move fluidly and swiftly
along the football fields
and basketball courts of the world
Constantly pounding or being pounded
In the boxing rings
of Atlantic City and the inner city
Robbed from the bosom of
of Mother Africa
the richness of South Africa
Having journeyed from the mountain top
to the selling block
Withstanding over 300 years
of castration and degradation.
Experiencing every indignity and humiliation
Yet continuing to grow tall and strong
Creating a history rich in achievement
We discovered blood plasma
and the cotton gin
Gas masks and harpoons
baby carriages and traffic lights
Machines to plant seeds a
and machines to stretch shoes
We were the first to die
in the struggle for
this country's independence
And the first to successfully
perform open heart surgery
We are Martin and Marcus, Malcolm and Benjamin
Frederick and W.E.B. Jesse and Booker T.
We are Jesse, Jackie, and Joe
the Big E., and the Big O
We are Clyde the Glide and Earl the Pearl
We are the Watusi and the Mandingo
There are none bigger,
none better,
none taller,
none stronger,
Than we, when we have it all together
That's what manner of men we are

-Mychal Wynn (Wynn, 2006)

REFERENCES

Adeleke, T. (2001). Will the real father of afrocentricity please stand. *The Western Journal of Black Studies, 25*, 21-29.

Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2001). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read.* Washington, DC: Partnership for Reading: Bringing Scientific Evidence to Learning.

Asante, M. K. (1988). *Afrocentricity*. New Jersey: African World Press, Inc.

Asante, M. K. (1990). *Kemet, afrocentricity and knowledge*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc.

Asante, M. K. (1991). The afrocentric idea in education. *The Journal of Negro Education, 60*, 21-29.

Asante, M. K. (1991-1992). Afrocentric curriculum. *Educational Leadership, ,* 28-31.

Asante, M. K. (1998). *The afrocentric idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Asante, M. K. (1991). Afrocentricity and the african american student. *Black Collegian, 21*(4), 132-135.

Asante, M. K. (2005). *Rhetoric, race, and identity: The architecton of the soul*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Ascher, C. (1991). School programs for african-american males and females. *Phi Delta Kappan, 4*, 1-3.

Bailey, T. P. (1914). *Race orthodoxy in the south, and other aspects of the negro question*. New York: Neale Publishing Company.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). In Emerson, C. & Holquist, M. (Ed.), *Speech genres & other late essays* (Vern W. McGee Trans.). Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.

Baldwin, J. (1963). A talk to teachers. In T. Morrison (Ed.), *Baldwin-collected essays* (pp. 678-686). New York, NY: Library of Americe.

Balfanz, R. (2003). High poverty secondary schools and the juvenile justice system. *Deconstructing the School to Prison Pipeline: New Directions for Youth Development, 99*, 77-78.

Banks, J. A., & McGee, C. A. (Eds.). (1989). *Multicultural education*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bekerie, A. (1994). The four corners of a circle: Afrocentricity as a model of synthesis. *Journal of Black Studies, 25*(2), 131-149.

Bell Jr. , D. A. (1995). Racial realism. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed theThe movement* (pp. 302-312). New York: The New Press.

Betty shabazz international charter school. (2010). Retrieved 25/09/2011, 2011, from

   http://bsics.net/

Billings, A. C. (2005). Beyond the ebonics debate: Attitudes about black and standard american

   english. *Journal of Black Studies, 36*(1), 68-81.

Bond, L. (1998). Culturally responsive pedagogy and the assessment of accomplished teaching.

   The Journal of Negro Education, 67(3), 242-254.

Browne-Marshall, G. J. (2007). *Race, law, and american society: 1607 to present*. New York:

   Routledge.

Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and

   practical guide*. New York: Routledge.

Chavez, L. (1994). The myth of self-esteem. In In The Center for the New American Community

   (Ed.), *Alternatives to afrocentrism* (pp. 5-10). Washington, DC: Manhattan Institute.

Cleveland, D. (2003). Beating the odds: Raising academically successful african american males.

   Journal of Men's Studies, 12, 85-88.

Coleman, M. (1997). Families and schools: In search of common ground. *Young Children, 52*(5),

   14-21.

Cooper, R., & Jordan, W. J. (2005). Cultural issues in comprehensive school reform. In O. S.

   Fashola (Ed.), *Educating african american males: Voices from the field* (pp. 1-18).

   Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York: The New Press.

Cummings, S. (1977). *Black children in northern schools: The pedagogy and politics of failure*. University of Wales: R&E Publications.

Cummins, J. (1986). Psychological assessment of minority students: Out of context, out of focus, out of control. *Journal of Reading, Writing, & Learning Disabilities International, 2*, 9-18.

Cunningham, P. M., & Allington, R. L. (1999). *Classrooms that work: They can all read and write*. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc.

Cunningham, P. M., & Allington, R. L. (2003). *Classrooms that work* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Davis, J. E. (2003). Early schooling and academic achievement of african american males. *Urban Education, 38*, 515-537.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.

Delpit, L., & Dowdy, J. K. (Eds.). (2002). *The skin we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.

DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. (2007). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the united states: 2006.* Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Commerce: U.S. Census Bureau.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, Public Law 107-110U.S.C. 1001-1908 (2001).

Department of Justice. (2008). *Growth in prison and jail populations slowing: 16 states report declines in the number of prisoners.* Retrieved November 19, 2011, 2008, from http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/newsroom/pressreleases/2009/BJS090331.htm

Douglass, F. (1983). *Life and times of frederick douglass: His early life as a slave, his escape from bondage, and his history complete*. New York: Carol Publishing Group.

DuBois, W. E. B. (1989). *The souls of black folk*. New York: Bantam Books.

Dunbar, J.,C.D., & Villarruel, F. A. (2002). Urban school leaders and the implementation of zero-tolerance policies: An examination of its implications. *Peabody Journal of Education, 77*(1), 82-104.

Dunn, L. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded: Is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children, 23*, 5-21.

Durkheim, E. (1899). *Education and sociology*. New York: Free Press.

Eitle, T. N., & Eitle, D. J. (2002). Race, cultural capital, and the educational effects of participation in sports. *Sociology of Education, 75*(2), 123-146.

Esterberg, K. G. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative analysis: Practice and innovation*. London: Routledge.

Fashola, O. S. (Ed.). (2005). *Educating african american males*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Ferguson, A. (2001). *Bad boys*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Ferrara, R. A., Brown, A. L., & Campione, J. C. (1986). Children's learning and transfer of inductive reasoning rules: Studies of proximal development. *Child Development, 57*(5), 1087-1099.

Figlio, D. N., & Stone, J. A. (2000). *School choice and student performance: Are private schools really better?* University of Wisconsin: Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Papers.

Fine, M. (1994). Dis-stance and other stances: Negotiations of power inside feminist research. In A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and methods* (pp. 13-55). New York: Routledge.

Ford, D. Y. (1996). *Reversing underachievement among gifted black students: Promising practices and programs*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Foster, H. (1974). *Ribbin', jiving' and playing' the dozens: The unrecognized dilemma of inner city schools*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company.

Foucault, M. (1970). *The order of things*. New York: Random House.

Franklin, J. H., & Moss, A. A., Jr. (1994). *From slavery to freedom: A history of african americans* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Freire, P. (1970, 1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.

Garibaldi, A. M. (1992). Educating and motivating african american males to succeed. *Journal of Negro Education, 61*(1), 4-11.

Gates, H. L. J., Jones, R. S., Wilson, R., Austen, R. A., Wolfenstein, E. V., Baker, H. A. J., & Fleming, R. (1993-1994). Does academic correctness repress separatist of afrocentrist scholarship. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* (2), 40-45.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Gay, G., & Howard, T. C. (2001). Multicultural education for the 21st century. *The Teacher Educator, 36*(1), 1-16.

Gewertz, C. (2007). Black boys' educational plight spurs single-gender schools: New federal rules seen as chance for innovation. *Education Week, 26*(42), 24-25.

Gibbs, J. T. (1988). *Young, black, and male in america: An endangered species*. Dover, MA: Auburn House.

Gibson, J. R. (2010). *Inferiority by "design: Black inferiorization and the evolution of normalized racism (white supremacy in america)*. KITABUpublishing@gmail.com: Kitabu Publishing, LLC.

Gilliard, D. K. (1999). *Prison and jail inmates at midyear 1998.* Retrieved November 19, 2011, from http://bjsdata.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/pjim98.pdf

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glen, D. (2006). High school exit exams linked to higher dropout rates, researchers find. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 52*(45), A14-A17.

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York: Longman.

Globe Editorial. (2008, Give single-sex schools a try. *The Boston Globe,*

Goggins, L. I. (1998). *Bringing the light into a new day: African centered rites of passage*. Akron, OH: Saint Rest Publications.

Gordon, B. (2001). Knowledge construction, competing critical theories, and education. In J. A. Banks, & C. A. McGee-Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 184-199). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Grant, P. (1992). Using special education to destroy black boys. *The Negro Educational Review, 63*, 17-21.

Grantham, T. C. (2004a). Multicultural mentoring to increase black males representation in gifted programs. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 48*, 232-245.

Grantham, T. C. (2004b). Rocky jones: Case study of a high-achieving black male's motivation to participated in gifted classes. *Roeper Review, 26*, 208-215.

Greenfield, E. (2002). *Honey I love*. New York, New York: Amistad-Harper Collins Publishers.

Hale, J. E. (1982). *Black children: Their roots, culture, and learning styles*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press.

Hale, J. E. (2001). *Learning while black: Creating educational excellence for african american children*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hallinan, M. T. (2001). Sociological perspectives on black-white inequalities in american schooling. *Sociology of Education, 74*, 50-70.

Hare, J. (2010). *The black think tank: Dr. julia hare.* Retrieved 08/22, 2011, from http://www.blackthinktank.com/Drjuliahare.html

Harris, P. Y. (2001). *From the soul: Stories of great black parents and the lives they gave us*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2006). *Why are so many minority students in special education?*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harvard Law Review. (1992). Inner-city single-sex schools: Educational reform or invidious discrimination? *Harvard Law Review, 105*(7), 1741-1760.

Hawley, R. (1993). A case for boys' schools. In D. K. Hollinger, & R. Adamson (Eds.), *Single-sex schooling: Proponents speak* (pp. 11-14). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Higginbotham, A. L. (1978). *In the matter of color*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hilliard, A. (1990). Misunderstanding and testing intelligence. In J. I. Goodlad, & P. Keating (Eds.), *Access to knowledge: An agenda for our nation's schools* (pp. 145-157). New York: College Board.

Hilliard, A. G. I. (1997). *SBA: The reawakening of the african mind*. Gainesville: Makare Publishing Company.

Hilliard, A. G. I. (2002). Language, culture, and the assessment of african american children. In L. Delpit, & J. K. Dowdy (Eds.), *The skin we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom* (pp. 87-105). New York: The New Press.

Hollie, S. (2001). Acknowledging the language of african american students: Instructional strategies. *National Council of Teachers of English, 90*(4), 54-59.

Holzman, M. (2004). *Public education and black male students: A state report card.*The Schott Foundation for Public Education.

Holzman, M. (2011). *Yes we can: The schott 50 state report on public education and black males.* Cambridge, MA: The Schott Foundation.

Hopkins, R. (1997). *Educating black males: Critical lessons in schooling, community, and power*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Howard, T. C. (2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory into Practice, 42*(3)

Hrabowski, F. A., III., Maton, K. I., & Greif, G. L. (1998). *Beating the odds: Raising academically successful african american males*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hunter, A. G., & Davis, J. E. (1994). Hidden voices of black men: The meaning, structure, and complexity of manhood. *Journal of Black Studies, 25*(1), 20-40.

Hyland, N. E. (2005). Being a good teacher of black students? white teachers and unintentional racism. *Curriculum Inquiry, 35*(4), 429-459.

Irvine, J. (1990). *Black students and school failure: Policies, practices and prescriptions*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Irvine, J. J., & Armento, B. J. (2001). *Culturally responsive teaching: Lesson planning for elementary and middle grades*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Irvine, J. J., & York, E. D. (1995). Learning styles and culturally diverse students: A literature review. In J. Banks, & C. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (). New York: Macmillan.

Jackson, J. F. L. (2003). Toward administrative diversity: An analysis of the african-american males educational pipeline. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 12*, 43-60.

Jackson, J. F. L., & Moore III, J. L. (2006). African american males in education: Endangered or ignored? *Teachers College Record, 108*(2), 201-205.

Jacobson, J., Olsen, C., Rice, J. K., Sweetland, S., & Ralph, J. (2001). *Educational achievement and black-white inequality: NCES 2001-061.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Jenkins, T. S. (2006). Mr. nigger: The challenges of educating black males within american society. *Journal of Black Studies, 37*(1), 127-155.

Johnson, L. M. (2006). Elementary school students' learning preferences and the classroom learning environment: Implications for educational practice and policy. *Journal of Negro Education, 75*(3), 506-518.

Jones, H. L., & Krelis, G. S. (1984). Student achievement: Public schools versus private and parochial schools. *Spectrum, 2*(2), 11-13.

Kalmijn, M., & Kraaykamp, G. (1996). Race, cultural capital, and schooling: An analysis of trends in the united states. *Sociology of Education, 69*(January), 22-34.

Kambui, J. (2007). *The tuskegee syphilis study.* Retrieved March 13, 2008, from http://thetalkingdrum.com/tus.html

Karen, D. (2005). No child left behind? sociology ignored! *Sociology of Education, 78*(2), 165-169.

Keene, E. O., & & Zimmermann, S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Keto, C. T. (1995). *Vision, identity and time: The afrocentric paradigm and the study of the past*. Dubuque, IO: Kendal/Hunt.

King, J. E. (1991a). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *The Journal of Negro Education, 60*(2), 133-146.

King, J. E. (1991b). Unfinished business: Black student alienation and black teachers' emancipatory pedagogy. In M. Foster (Ed.), *Readings in equal education* (pp. 245-271). New York: AMS Press.

King, J. E. (1991c). Unfinished business: Black students alienation and black teachers' emancipatory pedagogy. In M. Foster (Ed.), *Qualitative investigations into schools and schooling* (pp. 245-271). New York: AMS Press.

King, J. E. (2005). A transformative vision of black education for human freedom. In J. E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century* (pp. 3-17). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

King, J. E., & Wilson, T. L. (1994). BEing the soul-freeing substance: A legacy of hope in AfroHumanity. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), *Too much schooling, too little education: A paradox of black life in white societies* (pp. 269-294). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

Koch, L., & Gross, A. (1997). Children's perceptions of black english as a variable of interracial perceptions. *Journal of Black Psychology, 23*, 215-286.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in america's schools*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.

Kunjufu, J. (1989). *Critical issues in educating african american youth*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Kunjufu, J. (1990). *Countering the conspiracy to destroy black boys: Vol. III*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Kunjufu, J. (1991). The real issue about the male academy. *Black Issues in Higher Education, ,* 63-64.

Kunjufu, J. (2002). *Black students. middle class teachers.* Sauk Village, IL: African American Images.

Kunjufu, J. (2004). *Solutions for black america*. Chicago: African American Images.

Kunjufu, J. (2005a). *Countering the conspiracy to destroy black boys*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Kunjufu, J. (2005b). *Keeping black boys out of special education*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1990). Like lightning in a bottle: Attempting to capture the pedagogical excellence of successful teachers of black students. *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 3*(4), 335-344.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of african american children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995a). But that's just good teaching! the case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice, 34*(3), 159-165.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995b). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *Amcerican Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995c). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465-491.

Lawrence III, C. R. (1987). The id, the ego, and equal protection: Reckoning with unconscious racism. *Stanford Law Review, 39*(2), August 31, 2008-317-388.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1978). *Worlds apart: Relationships between families and schools*. New York: Basic Books.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2003). *The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other*. New York, New York: Random House.

Lee, C. D. (1994). African-centered pedagogy: Complexities and possibilities. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), *Too much schooling, too little education: A paradox of black life in white societies* (pp. 295-318). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

Lee, C. D. (1998). Culturally responsive pedagogy and performance-based assesssment. *The Journal of Negro Education, 67*(3), 268-279.

Lee, J., Grigg, W., & Donahue, P. (2007). *The nation's report card: Reading 2007.* No. NCES 2007-496). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics: Institute of Education Sciences.

Lee, J. (2006). *Tracking achievement gaps and assessing the impact of NCLB on the gaps: an in-depth look into national and state reading and math outcome trends.* Retrieved from http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/nclb_naep_lee.pdf

Lewis, A. E. (2003). *Race in the schoolyard: Negotiating the color line in classrooms and coummunities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Losen, D. J., & Skiba, R. J. (2010). *Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis.* Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center.

Lynch, W. (2005). The making of a slave, 1712. *The Talking Drum,* , September 25, 2007.

Lynn, M. (2006). Education for the community: Exploring the culturally relevant practices of black male teachers. *Teachers College Record,*

Lynn, M., Johnson, C., & Hassan, K. (1999). Raising the critical consciousness of african american students in baldwin hills: A portraitof an exemplary african american male teacher. *The Journal of Negro Education, 68*(1), 42-53.

Lynn, M. (2002). Critical race theory and the perspectives of black men teachers in the los angeles public schools. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 35*(2013), 119-130.

Lyon, G. R. (2010). *Why reading is not a natural process.* Retrieved 12/09, 2010, from http://www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/teachers/teaching_reading/not_natural.asp

Madhubuti, H., & Madhubuti, S. (1994). *African-centered education: Its value, importance, and necessity in the development of black children*. Chicago, IL: Third World Press.

Madhubuti, H. R. (1994). Cultural work: Planting new trees with new seeds. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), *Too much schooling-too little education: A paradox of black life in white societies* (pp. 1-6). New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc.

Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Mael, F. A. (1998). Single-sex and coeducational schooling: Relationships to socioemotional and academic development. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(2), 101-129.

Majors, R., & Billson, J. M. (1992). *Cool pose: The dilemmas of black manhood in america*. New York, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2004). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

McDermott, R. P. (1987). The explanation of minority school failure, again. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 18*(4), 361-364.

McGuinness, D. (1987). *When children don't learn: Understanding the biology and psychology of learning disabilties*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack.* Retrieved July 31, 2008, from http://www.pcc.edu/resources/illumination/documents/white-privilege-essay-mcintosh.pdf

Memmi, A. (1965). *The colonizer and the colonized*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and anaylsis* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, J. (1997). *Search and destroy: African american males in the criminal justice system*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Monroe, C. R. (2005). Why are "bad boys" always black? causes of disproportionality in school discipline and recommendations for change. *The Clearing House, 79*, 45-50.

Moore, J. L., III, Flowers, L. A., Guion, L. A., Zhang, Y., & Staten, D. L. (2004). Investigating non-persistent african american male students' experiences in enginerring: Implications for

academic success. *National Association of Students Affairs Professionals Journal, 7*, 105-120.

Morris, J. E. (2002). A communally bonded school for african american students, families, and a community. *Phi Delta Kappan, 84*(3), 230-234.

Mrozowski, J. (2007, Single-sex schools make comeback. *The Detroit News,*

Murrell, P. C. J. (2002). *African-centered pedagogy: Developing schools of achievement for african american children*. New York: State University of New York Press, Albany.

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). (2008). *Scale scores for reading 1992-2007: Based on race and gender.* Retrieved July 29, 2008, from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nde/viewresults.asp

Niemi Jr., A. W. (1978). Occupational/educational discrimnation against black males. *Journal of Black Studies, 9*(1), 87-92.

Noguera, P. A. (2003). The trouble with black boys: The role and influence of environmental and cultural factors on the academic performance of african american males. *Urban Education, 38*, 431-459.

NPR News.*PTA welcomes first male president*

Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd ed.). New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

O'brien, S. (2008). *Black in america: The black man.* (DocumentaryCNN.

Ogbu, J. U., & Simons, H. D. (1998). Voluntary and involuntary minorities: A cultural

ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education.

Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 29(2), 155-188.

Okpala, C. O., Okpala, A. O., & Smith, F. (2001).

Parental involvement, instructional expenditures, family socioeconomic attributes, and

student achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research, 95*(2), 110-115.

Oliver, W. (1989).

Black males and social problems: Prevention through afrocentric socialization. *Journal of

Black Studies, 20*(1), 15-39.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the united states: From the 1960s to the

1990s*. New York: Routledge.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA:

Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage Publications.

Paulsen, G. (1993). *NightJohn*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers.

Perie, M., Grigg, W., & Donahue, P. (2005). *The nation's report card: Reading 2005 (NCES

2006-451).* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for

Education Statistics. doi:http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2005/2006451.pdf

Polite, V. C., & Davis, J. E. (1999). *African american males in school and society: Practices & policies for effective education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Ravitch, D. (1993-1994). Does academic correctness repress separatist or afrocentrist scholarship? *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* (2), 40-45.

Rickford, J. R., & Rickford, R. J. (2000). *Spoken soul: The story of black english*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Riesman, D. (1991). A margin of difference: The case for single-sex education. In J. R. Blau (Ed.), *Social roles and social institutions* (pp. 241-257). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Robbins, C. G. (2005). Zero tolerance and the politics of racial injustice. *The Journal of Negro Education, 74*(1), 2-17.

Robinson, J., & Biran, M. (2006). Discovering self: Relationships between african identity and academic achievement. *Journal of Black Studies, 37*(1), 46-68.

Rocque, M. (2010). Office discipline and student behavior: Does race matter? *Journal of Education, 116*(4), 557-581.

Roller, C. M. (1996). *Variability not disability: Struggling readers in a workshop classroom*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, Inc.

Roscigno, V. J., & Ainsworth-Darnell, J. W. (1999). Race, cultural capital, and educational resources: Persistent inequalities and achievement returns. *Sociology of Education, 72*(3), 158-178.

Rossman, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Rukmalie J., K., A. (2002). Social fathering in low-income, african american families with preschool children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64*, 504-516.

Salomone, R. (2002). The legality of single-sex education in the united states: Sometimes "equal" means "different". In A. Datnow, & L. Hubbard (Eds.), *Gender in public policy and practice: Perspectives on single-sex and coeducational schooling* (pp. 47-72). New York: Routledge Falmer.

Salomone, R. (2003). The case for single-sex schools. *The Christian Science Monitor,*

Sax, L. (2005). The promise and peril of single-sex public education. *Education Week, ,* 34-35, 48.

Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (Second ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Serwatka, T. S., Deering, S., & Grant, P. (1995). Disproportionate representation of african americans in emotionally handicapped classes. *Journal of Black Studies, 25*(4), 492-506.

Seuss, D. (1954). *The cat in the hat*. New York, New York: Random House.

Sewell, T., & Majors, R. (2001). Black boys and schooling; an intervention framework for understanding the dilemmas of masculinity, identity and underachievement. In R. Majors (Ed.), *Educating our black children: New directions and radical approaches* (pp. 183-202). New York, New York: Routlege/Farmer.

Shujaa, M. J. (Ed.). (1994). *Too much schooling, too little education: A paradox of black life in white societies*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc.

Simkin, J. (1997,). Spartacus educational. Message posted to http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAcivil64.htm

Singh, K., Vaught, C., & Mitchell, E. (1998). Single-sex classes and academic achievement for all children. *Journal of Negro Education, 67*(2), 101-129.

Smith, R. A. (2002). Black boys: The litmus test for 'no child left behind'. *Education Week, 22*(9), 40-43.

Smitherman, G. (2001). *Talking that talk: Language, culture, and education in african america*. London: Routledge.

Solomon, R. P., Portelli, J. P., Daniel, B. J., & Campbell, A. (2005). The discourse of denial: How white teacher candidates construct race, racism and 'white privilege'. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(2), 147-169.

Spears, A. K. (1978). Institutionalized racism and the education of blacks. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 9*(2), 127-136.

Speicher, B. L., & McMahon, S. M. (1992). Some african-american perspectives on black english vernacular. *Language in Society, 21*(3), 383-407.

Tatum, A. (1999). Reading and the african american male: Identity, equity, and power. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43*(1), 62-64.

Tatum, A. (2000). Breaking down barriers that disenfranchise african american adolescent readers in low-level tracks. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44*(1), 52-64.

Tatum, A. (2003). All "degreed" up and nowhere to go: Black males and literacy education. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46*(8), 620-623.

Tatum, A. (2004). A road map for reading specialists sntering schools without exemplary reading programs: Seven quick lessons. *The Reading Teacher, 58*(1), 28-39.

Tatum, A. (2005). *Teaching reading to black adolescent males: Closing the achievement gap*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Teale, W. H., Paciga, K. A., & Hoffman, J. L. (2007-2008). Beginning reading instruction in urban schools: The curriculum gap ensures a continuing achievement gap. *The Reading Teacher, 61*(4), 344-348.

The New York Times. (1991, Friday, August 16). U.S. judge blocks plan for all-male public schoos in detroit. *The New York Times,* pp. 10.

The Schott Foundation. (2007). *The schott 50 state report: Black male data portal.* (National Summary Cambridge, MA: The Schott Foundation for Public Education.

Thomas, V. M. (1997). *Lest we forget: The passage from africa to slavery and emancipation*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Townsend, B. L. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of african american learners: Reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children, 66*, 381-91.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2008). ***Selected population profile in the united states*** Washington, D.C.: Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey.

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *Twenty-third annual report to congress on the implementation of the individuals with disabilities education act.* Washington, DC: Department of Education.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (1993). *1990 elementary and secondary school civil rights survey: National summaries.* Washington, D.C.: DBS Corporation.

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs: Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2006). *Prison statistics.*Bureau of Justice Statistics.

U.S. Public Health Service (PHS). (2004). *Bad blood.*

Urban prep academy. (2011). Retrieved 25/09/2011, 2011, from http://www.urbanprep.org/

Van Sertima, I. (1976). *They came before columbus: The african presence in the new world*. New York: Random House.

Villegas, A. (1988). School failure and cultrual mismatch: Another view. *The Urban Review, 20*(4), 253-265.

Villegas, A. M. (1991). *Culturally responsive pedagogy*. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach*. Albany, New York: University of New York Press.

Walker, A. (2003). *In search of our mother's garden*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.

Walker, C. E. (1994). The distortions of afrocentric history. In In The Center for the New American Community (Ed.), *Alternatives to afrocentrism* (pp. 32-36). Washington, DC: Manhattan Institute.

Watkins, A. M., & Kurtz, D. (2001). Using solution-focused intervention to address african american male overrrepresentation in special education: A case study. *Children & Schools, 23*, 223-234.

Watkins, W. H. (2001). *The white architects of black education: Ideology and power in america, 1865-1954*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Watson, C., & Smitherman, G. (1996). *Educating african american males: Detroit's malcolm X academy solution*. Chicago, IL: Third World Press.

Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial threat and punitive school discipline. *Social Problems, 57*(1), 25-48.

Wheeler, R. S., & Swords, R. (2006). *Code-switching: Teaching standard english in urban classrooms*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Woodson, C. G. (1933). *The mis-education of the negro*. New Jersey: First Africa World Press, Inc.

Woodson, J. (2000). *Miracle's boys*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Wright, B. J. (2005). *A guide for working with the urban child especially black boys: Born and raised in america's inner city*. Philadelphia: Academy for Leadership and Transformation.

Wright, B. J. (2007). Urban education conference. *African American Male Success,* Philadelphia, PA.

Wynn, M. (2006). In Bascome G. (Ed.), *Empowering african-american males: Teaching, parenting, and mentoring successful black males: Workbook*. Marietta, GA: Rising Sun Publishing.

Young, V. A. (2004). Your average nigga. *College Composition and Communication, 55*(4), 693-715.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CHART

Participant	Age	Relationship	Education	Career
Mr. Gentry	38	Mentor	College Grad	Entrepreneur
Mr. Weeden	42	Mentor	Some College Military	Paraprofessional
Mr. Gooden	57	Mentor	College Grad	Corporate Exec Paraprofessional
Mr. Worth	37	Father	Junior College	Auto Dealer
Mr. Myatt	55	Father	3 years college	Self-employed Contractor
Mr. Jackson	35	Mentor	GED, In school	Truck Driver Barber

Interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants during June, July, and August 2009.

APPENDIX B

Trends in Average Reading Scale Scores by Race/Ethnicity: White-Black Gap

KEY FINDINGS

- **At all three ages**, Black students' average reading scores in 2004 were higher than in 1971.

- **Nine-year-olds.** Both White and Black students scored higher in 2004 than in any previous assessment year.

  - The White-Black gap decreased between 1971 (44 points) and 2004 (26 points).

- **Thirteen-year-olds.** The average scores of both White and Black students were significantly higher in 2004 than in 1971.

  - The White-Black gap in 2004 (22 points) was smaller than in 1971 (39 points).

- **Seventeen-year-olds.** Black students' average score was higher in 2004 than in 1971, while White students' scores in 1971 and 2004 were not statistically different.

  - The gap between White and Black students was smaller in 2004 (29 points) than in 1971 (53 points).

http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ltt/results2004/sub-reading-race.asp

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

I.   Interview 1

a.   Adult Male Personal Reflections

   i.   Tell me about your reading experiences in elementary [middle/high]

        school?

        1.   When did you learn to read?

        2.   Who taught you?

        3.   What were your successes…struggles (behaviors, attitudes,

             attention, motivation, etc)?

        4.   How did your school attend to these struggles? Do you agree?

             Please elaborate.

  ii.   Why do you believe American African males rank lower than European

        American students in reading achievement?

 iii.   Were there pictures or books about American African males when you

        were learning to read? To what extent were American African males

        represented in textbooks? How relevant was the reading material to you

        and your life? How did this affect you?

 iv.   Do you believe boys learn differently from girls? In what ways? Do you

        believe schools address this concern? Should they?

  v.   How well do you believe schools prepared you to excel socially and

        economically in the world? Do you believe that AAMs who are

successful on reading achievement tests have significantly improved life

chances in America? Why?

    vi. How strongly do you believe your education was influenced by the racial

structure in America?

        1. What role do you believe race and/or racism played in your

learning process in terms of how you were viewed as a Black boy?

        2. Compared to a White male your age, do you believe you were

afforded the same opportunity for educational advancement? Why

or why not?

II.   Interview 2

    a. Perceptions of AAM youth relations

        i. How would you describe the reading experiences of [Child's Name]?

What can he do well? What are his struggles (behaviors, attitudes,

attention, motivation, etc)? How does the school attend to these struggles?

Do you agree with the school's diagnosis and methods of addressing his

problems? Please elaborate.

        ii. Do you believe he might improve in reading if teachers took a different

approach? Do you feel that these alternatives are addressed in his school?

        iii. In terms of reading materials and teacher competence, how well do you

believe our school is preparing [Child's Name] to excel socially and

economically in the world?

          1. Do you feel the school do a better job?

          2. In what ways?

iv. How strongly do you believe [Child's name] education is influenced by the racial structure in America in terms of culturally relevant reading materials, the availability of materials, teacher excellence, appropriation of funds, other ways?

v. Compared to a White male [Child's Name] age, do you believe he is afforded the same opportunity for educational advancement? Why or why not?

III. Interview 3

a. What recommendations would you make to school systems to improve the reading achievement of young AAMs and close the gap?

b. What would you suggest to other American African males whose sons may be struggling in reading?

c. Reflectively, what will you do to ensure the reading success of [Child's Name]?

IV. Member Checking

Approximately 30-45 days after the final interview, I will provide participants with transcripts of their interviews for validation of accuracy. I will either mail, email, or hand deliver these transcripts and request a response within a week only if inaccuracies are found.

APPENDIX D

<div align="center">Lay Summary and Official Consent[11]</div>

Introduction

Your name was selected to participate in my study.

Purpose of My Study

Over the course of approximately 35 years, the achievement gap between that of European and American African students is nowhere near closing and as a matter of fact, it is widening between American African males and every other population. Is there a relationship between the history of enslavement and mistreatment of African males in America and their resistance to European education. Historically, curriculum, books, stories, pictures, and educational materials have been designed with Europeans in mind and have omitted the value of people of color. I believe that one vital way to address this educational dilemma is to elicit the voices, views, and insights of the fathers, brothers, and mentors of these Black boys to understand what they believe is the problem and to bring these voices into the closed door meetings of school transformation and that their (your) input, your voice be given preeminent opportunity at the table of school reform dialogue.

How You Were Selected

Three names were randomly selected from the willing participants on each grade level. Your name was one of those selected and you agreed to participate. Thank you very much.

Your Benefits and Risks as Participants

Benefits: As a participant in my study, your voice and views will contribute to the accessibility to success for American African males in American education.

---

[11] Adapted from Madison (Madison, 2005)

Risks: The risks that you may incur as a result of your participation could be exposure of your identity. Please know that I will take every precaution to ensure your safety, dignity, and privacy. Although there are no guarantees, I will protect your anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.

Interviews

My study will be conducted through three 90-minute interviews scheduled at your convenience. I ask that you reflect on your school experiences and share them with me. I have pre-formulated questions I would like you to answer as truthfully as possible. I will take notes as well as use a recorder. After the completion of the interviews, I will provide you with my transcription of your comments so that you can check for accuracy.

Remuneration

In honor of your time and invaluable contribution to my study, please accept a small monetary compensation of $20.00. The amount in no way compensates for your gift of knowledge, but is my humble gesture of appreciation.

CONSENT TO PARTIC IPATE

I have read and agree to the Lay Summary. My questions have been answered. I agree to participate in the interview study conducted by Sabreen Jai, entitled *Accessing the Culture of Resistance in Education (At CORE) through a different lens: Reforming education valuing the voices of American African men and their perceptions (REVAMP).* I may contact Sabreen by phone at 678-620-2326 or by email at sujai@uga.edu.

I am aware that I can choose to discontinue my participation at any time.

_____   _____

Participant   Date