

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AND THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP:
WHAT CAN A TEACHER DO?

by

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A Project Submitted to the Faculty of
The Evergreen State College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master in Teaching
2007

This Project for the Master in Teaching Degree

by

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has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Professors Anita Lenges, Sonja Wiedenhaupt, and Sherry Walton in the research and writing of this paper. I also would like to acknowledge the emotional support, ideas and/or advice I received from my cohort and from my friends, Dale Young, Dr. Wilson Edward Reed, Ginny DeBartolomeo, Lu Ayub, and Connie Monaghan, and my daughter, Briana Aldrich. I also want to thank the sixth grade teachers and students at Baker Middle School for sharing a season of school days with me.

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature surrounding the gap in academic achievement between African American students and their White counterparts. The history of the gap is addressed, from the prohibition on educating slaves through reconstruction, the segregationist policies and practices in education, as well as some positive aspects of the student-teacher relationship that have been lost since the desegregation of public schools. The review places its emphasis on research findings pertaining to pedagogically-related causes of the gap. It discusses pedagogical approaches and teacher orientations that researchers contend may improve academic achievement among African American students in public schools. The work of Ladson-Billings (1994) and Howard (2001 & 2002) raise the importance of a student-teacher relationship that extends beyond school and into the community. Their studies, along with Steele's (1995 & 1997) highlight the value of teacher expectations on student achievement, although no correlational evidence is offered. Culturally congruent teaching practices, including the incorporation of identified afrocultural themes in curriculum content and learning context, are discussed and critiqued. Research regarding student perceptions of their teachers and themselves is also considered, as are the recommendations made by researchers. Classroom implications the research suggests and the implications for further research are also discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The achievement gap generally refers to the persistent disparity between the academic performance of African American, Native American, and Hispanic students and White and Asian students in the public schools of the United States. This paper will focus on the literature regarding the theorized pedagogically-related causes of the achievement gap between African American and other public school students, and discuss the pedagogical approaches and teacher orientations that researchers contend may improve academic achievement among African-American students in public schools.

Rationale

What is causing the Achievement Gap and what can the education community do to bridge it? There is no question that the achievement gap exists. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in 2000 that African American students at the ages of 9, 13, and 17 scored lower than Whites on standardized mathematics tests for three decades and similar gaps existed for reading scores. Nearly 10% more White than African American youths between the ages of 18 to 24 complete requirements for high school graduation (Sankofa, Hurley, Allen, & Boykin, 2005). In 1971, Blacks were considerably less likely than Whites to have completed high school (59 vs. 82 percent). Although modest gains recently have been claimed, the high school completion rate for African Americans was still below that of Whites in 2003 (88 vs. 94 percent) (NCES). Furthermore, although African American students are approximately 16% of the

K-12 public school population, they constitute nearly 30% of all special education students (Howard, 2002).

The achievement gap exists not just at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. It persists in the middle and upper socioeconomic classes (Steele, 1997). Data gathered from both grades and standardized test scores demonstrate that the gaps in academic performance between White and non-Asian minorities were as large if not larger in the upper and middle classes (1997). Therefore, group differences due to social class do not explain the differences in academic performance (1997).

“Public schools exist to serve public goals” (Spring, 2006, p. 9). These goals are determined by our elected officials, national, state and local. They include the belief that an educated citizenry is essential for a democracy to survive, that citizens need a common set of political values which should be taught in school, that education will decrease crime through moral instruction, that education is the great equalizer that creates equal opportunity to all citizens, rich and poor, black, white, or brown, and that education reduces poverty by fostering economic growth. Education, some argue, is the key to American competitiveness in a global economy (Spring, 2006). Various combinations and permutations of these goals have been expressed and pursued throughout the history of the United States at various times (Spring, 2005).

I decided to become a public school teacher after many years of work in the criminal justice system. As a prosecutor, I found myself emotionally torn and distressed that minority youth seemed to be overrepresented in that system.

This was not my imagination. In 2000, the number of African American men behind bars exceeded those on college campuses by 188,000 (Hocker, 2002). In 2001, the college/imprisoned rate for Black males was 2.6 to one, but for their White male counterparts, the rate was 28 to one (2002). I believed that, in fact, the promises of opportunity through education had been broken with respect to these youth. Moreover, many of the young people I encountered displayed an attitude that they did not expect any more from life than to find themselves in the system. They did express regret, though, as well as a sense of hopelessness. Becoming a public defender did not reduce my distress. Then, I reached my clients too late. But, what if I could make a difference in the lives of young African Americans to reduce overrepresented numbers in the criminal justice system?

I do not mean to suggest that poor education leads to juvenile delinquency or criminal behavior. Nor is delinquency the focus of this paper. Rather, I believe an accessible, useful, meaningful education can open doors and offer alternatives to young people that were not previously imagined. It can give them the tools to discover and succeed in what interests them. It can motivate them to be positive, active members in their communities. These, too, are successes, in addition to strictly academic success. In fact, I believe academic success is merely a way to measure whether a student has received the opportunity of an accessible, useful and meaningful education; has received an opportunity for success in life. By achievement gap, I refer to the academic underachievement of African American students in comparison to their White peers in terms of

grades, standardized test scores, high school completion, and attendance in college.

Despite the daily barrage of news stories that recount how broken our public school system is, I believe education is central to success in life, however success reasonably may be defined. The quality of classroom instruction and the relationships teachers form with their students can positively impact students' futures. I have come to believe the alienation and hopelessness I observed in poor and minority youth often has some roots in their experiences in school. As their teacher, what could I do differently? What should I do differently? What can those that have studied this problem tell me?

Minority public school students are on their way to becoming the majority of students in public schools. The U.S. Department of Commerce predicts that they will comprise 57% of students by the year 2050. Yet the teaching force is increasingly white and female (Howard, 2002). As this demographic change occurs, the lower achievement levels for African American (and Hispanic) students necessarily leads to the conclusion that soon most public school students will be performing at unacceptably low levels. If the achievement gap continues, then, the majority of students will be left behind. Is that the democratic ideal our public schools were to engender?

The debate over the achievement gap's causes and potential cures is controversial and is raised in academic, political and popular circles. For example, in the spring of 2004, comedian/actor Bill Cosby made some harsh comments about poor African-Americans at an NAACP awards ceremony,

among them, the poor academic performance of African American youth. His comments drew laughter, applause, and criticism. University of Pennsylvania Professor, Michael Eric Dyson, called Cosby's comments his "Blame the Poor Tour", arguing that Cosby's comments fail to take into account the structural features in American society as a source of the problem (Dyson, 2005).

Following Cosby's comments, at the Democratic National Convention in August, 2004, keynote speaker Barak Obama talked about the American dream and its roots in the Declaration of Independence. He suggested that dream was becoming beyond the reach of many Americans and pointed out some of the current struggles of working class Americans, many of whom faced the loss of good paying jobs or could not afford to attend college. In this context, he addressed the issue of education and suggested one theory offered for the achievement gap with the following comment (Obama, 2004):

Now, don't get me wrong. The people I meet—in small towns and big cities, in diners and office parks—they don't expect government to solve all their problems. They know they have to work hard to get ahead, and they want to. Go into the collar counties around Chicago, and people will tell you they don't want their tax money wasted, by a welfare agency or by the Pentagon. Go in—Go into any inner city neighborhood, and folks will tell you that government alone can't teach our kids to learn; they know that parents have to teach, that children can't achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white. They know those things.

As I listened, Obama's words puzzled me. What did he mean by "slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white"? "Acting white," I have come to understand through the process of researching the achievement gap, is a slanderous statement because it means the African American student is turning his back on his roots, his family, and his community, to achieve individual success through education. According to Ogbu, who researched the achievement gap in search of its causes, acting white means the student is failing to resist the oppression of the dominant culture and is submitting to its methods and goals by attempting to achieve academically (Ogbu, 2004). Presumably, Obama was referring to Ogbu's work in explaining the cause of African American students' underachievement in school. Or perhaps, as Kozol argued, the "acting white" reference has become a media cliché and devious argument that distracts from the real problem: segregated schools (Cerna, 2006).

All students need to acquire certain and sometimes state-mandated knowledge and skills to survive, succeed, and to continue to grow. But does school present them with the opportunity to do so? Or does it alienate them? Some researchers and educators argue that public schools represent white, middle-class culture because the teachers and administrators are predominantly white and middle class (Boykin, 2005; Howard, 2001; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Saddler, 2005). Some contend the historic black communities that presided over the school and within which the school functioned have weakened since legally-mandated desegregation (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). The values promoted, the

contexts used for instruction, dialogic structures and instructional content often reflects white culture rather than the students' culture. (Boykin; Kohl, 1994; Lee, 1995; Nieto, 2004). Taken together, these researchers suggest that schools need to be more culturally congruent or responsive with their student body. Will providing a culturally responsive classroom and school environment improve black student achievement and motivation? In reviewing the literature in chapter three, I will illustrate various approaches researchers have taken in addressing the achievement gap in their search for solutions.

Defining terms

I will interchangeably use the term Black and African American in this paper. Because my focus is the public education of African Americans and I rely upon the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) as a source of academic achievement statistics, I turn to it for a definition of the racial category of "Black" or "African American" as "A person having origins in any of the black racial groups in Africa. This normally excludes persons of Hispanic origin except for tabulations produced by the Census Bureau, which are noted accordingly in this volume" (NCES). But, race is subjective. It is based upon one's identification as a member of a culture and thus is left to the subjective view of the one so identifying (Spring, 2006). The studies I review generally do not address how identification is made and appear to rely on subjective identification.

The bulk of the studies I have found gathered data from students usually identified as attending public schools in urban areas. Rarely were the actual cities or schools identified. Likewise, these students usually were identified as

being low-income, which was tied to the students' eligibility for free or reduced lunch under Title 1.

Many of the studies I will review focused on themes or styles identified as afro-cultural. They have been found to be congruent with characteristics central to the cultural ethos of African American people. These are spirituality, a vitalistic approach to life rather than mechanistic one, harmony, movement expressiveness, verve or receptivity to high levels of sensate stimulation, affect or emphasis on emotion and feelings, communalism, expressive individualism, orality or preference for oral/aural communication, and social time perspective (Allen & Boykin, 1992).

Cultural congruence or relevance in education is a broad and sweeping idea that takes on many forms. According to Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant teaching "uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (1994, p. 17). It is a pedagogy that empowers students "by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 18).

Limitations

The achievement gap raises many social and economic issues. How does public school funding affect the gap? How does segregation, whether it be by school or within a school, affect it? These are both questions that deserve attention. Do assessment tools used by states to demonstrate student performance accurately measure actual performance or the acquisition of various skills and knowledge? A public school teacher can and should raise these

questions in her classroom, with her principal, her district, school board, and state legislature. While there may be a number of social and economic problems that impact the lower academic achievement of African Americans, my focus is limited to problems that can be addressed in the public schools by teachers.

Summary

The disparity between the academic performance of African American students as compared to their White and Asian peers in the public schools of the United States is well documented and is persistent. The causes for this achievement gap and potential cures are debated in the academic, political and popular spheres of American society. Some of these causes and cures implicate public school teachers and what they do in the classroom. What teachers can do to close that gap is the subject of this paper.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

The history of education involving African-Americans is one like no other group's history. Most African Americans today have ancestors who arrived as slaves. The slave status obviously resulted in horrifically different treatment, including the realm of education. But the end of the legal institution of slavery did not end the inequality. And the existence of slavery in the past, including the attendant racist ideas and beliefs, continue to haunt American life, no less so in education than in any other societal institution. The achievement gap today arguably is a result.

Slavery and Education

African-Americans first arrived in the U.S. in large numbers as slaves in the late 1700's (Zinn, H. 2003). By 1800, between 10 and 15 million slaves from Africa had been transported to the Americas (2003). The varied language groups of the slaves made it difficult for them to communicate with each other, let alone European Americans. Also, most of the slaves came from an oral language tradition; their languages were not written.

In the United States, by 1835, nearly every state in the South had made it illegal to educate slaves. "Literacy was a punishable crime for enslaved Africans in the South" (Spring, 2006, p. 114). To learn to read and write was to empower the slave, something slaveholders feared and prevented at all costs. Of course, some enslaved people did learn to read and write, but they were the extreme exception.

Reconstruction to *Brown*

During Reconstruction, some southern Republicans and northern philanthropic societies were eager to establish black schools in the South. These efforts, however, did not receive much support from former slave-owners and other southern whites (Woodson, 1938). Authorities were surprised to find that almost 500 small schools for blacks already existed, having been built, funded and maintained in secret by slaves. Thus, by 1865, 10 percent of slaves secretly had learned to read and 5 percent had learned to write. Immediately after the civil war, newly freed African Americans took the initiative to further establish schools for themselves and their children. The teachers and administrators of these schools were African American (Spring, 2005). In addition to these self-initiated schools, the Freedmen's Bureau, established by Congress in 1865, was assigned to oversee the establishment of education for newly freed African Americans. Teachers in these schools were white and black and supported by the American Missionary Association. By the late 1860s, public schools were established in the South. With the exception of South Carolina and Louisiana, these schools were either all-black or all-white because many southerners rejected integrated schools.

Southern states took over the operation of these segregated school systems in 1870, when the Freedmen's Bureau closed, and it appears education for African Americans quickly began a decline. As a new era of white supremacy was launched in the South at the end of Reconstruction, obtaining an education became more difficult for African Americans. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan

terrorized African Americans by burning schools, randomly murdering teachers and students, and intimidating students from attending. Economic factors came into play to create further limitations on the type of schooling available for African Americans. Southern planters opposed the expansion of educational opportunities because they depended upon the labor African American children could provide (Spring, 2005). Despite this, the establishment of the first system of universal public education for children in the South during Reconstruction took hold. From 1863 to 1953, the literacy rate of African Americans had risen to 90% (Spring, 2006).

Despite this monumental growth in literacy in the South permanently established during reconstruction, the education system for African Americans was not comparable to public education provided Whites. Furthermore, public schooling in the South was *de jure* segregated. And it also would be a mistake to believe that the public education of African Americans in the Northern or Western states was comparable to that provided White students. In the North, both before and after the civil war, segregated schools were a fact of life; even if not mandated by law, they were by custom and through the redlining of school districts to maintain *de facto* segregation in public schools

There was a conflict of interests over the form of education African American children would receive. White southerners promoted education that taught good work habits. Students would be trained to serve as a source of cheap labor as the South entered into the era of industrialization (Spring, 2005).

These students would not be taught to think, but to behave. They would not be taught to lead, but to submit.

This conflict divided the African American community. On one hand, leaders such as Booker T. Washington accepted segregation, and under that condition, pled for support of education for Blacks from the perspective that such education would aid society at large. Washington “believed that once the economic value of blacks had been established, social acceptance would follow” (Spring, 2005, p. 194). Washington promoted industrial education for African Americans, as reflected in his Tuskegee Institute. He felt traditional education was useless to poor blacks and created in them unrealistic expectations about life and their place in society. W.E.B. DuBois represented the other side of the issue, calling for education that would serve African Americans to lead their own communities rather than to become cogs in the wheel of industry. He opposed segregated schools, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization DuBois was instrumental in founding, would lead the fight against segregated schools during the twentieth century.

Although the era of Reconstruction showed great advances in public education for African Americans, by 1900, government financial support for African American education was not equal to its support of the White only schools in the South (Spring, 2005). In Alabama, “per capita expenditure for whites was four to five times higher than that for blacks” (p. 196). In the twentieth century, white southern planters continued to oppose financial support for black public schools as well as compulsory attendance laws, as their interests called

for the availability of these children to labor in their fields. "In 1900, 49.3 percent of African American boys between the ages of ten and fifteen were working, while 30.6 percent of the girls in the same age category were employed" (p. 197). The lack of support for public education of black children did not change as the century moved forward. For example, in Clarendon County, North Carolina, for the 1949-1950 school year, there were "sixty-one Negro schools, more than half of them ramshackle or plain falling-down shanties that accommodated one or two teachers and their charges, and twelve schools for white" (Kluger, 1975, p. 8). The value of Negro schools, which 6,531 pupils attended "was officially listed as \$194,575. The value of the white schools, attended by 2,375 youngsters, was put at \$673,850" (p.8).

Within this context of unequal financial support, African American teachers often have been historically represented as victims of an oppressive environment, inadequately trained and underpaid as compared to White teachers. Siddie Walker (2001) challenged this simplistic view with teacher certification records. With respect to training, she found that by the 1940s, African American teachers' professional preparation began to noticeably increase so that by 1949-50, it exceeded that of White teachers in the South and this trend continued into the 1960s. She found a connection between the increased teacher training and teachers' perceptions of themselves as professionals seeking to improve their abilities and increase their knowledge. This, she argued, affected their beliefs about teaching, as described in oral history accounts of African American teachers who had taught in the segregated South.

These oral histories referenced were conducted immediately after desegregation in the state of Georgia.

Synthesizing these accounts of the teachers' professional experiences and beliefs, Siddle Walker identified five principles that offer insight to the instructional practices of Black teachers in segregated schools. One, teachers must develop relationships with the community in which they teach. This includes the development of an understanding of the community expectations and beliefs and values. Two, teachers should be committed to the task of teaching and professionalism. This dedication would be reflected in the long hours devoted to the job. Three, teachers should care about and hold high expectations for their students. This included, when necessary, providing extra resources. Four, teachers should relate the curriculum to their students' needs, interests, and purposes. This could include adding content about both race and African Americans' presence in the history of the nation. Five, teachers received support from the community, including a respect for schooling that was instilled in children at home. Professional organizations promoted many of these same principles to its membership. The researcher concluded that the teacher behaviors described in the oral histories are consistent with current attitudes about professionalism in teaching.

From Segregation to Desegregation

The separate but equal doctrine provided the legal basis for approval of the de jure segregated school system in the southern and western states for the first half of the twentieth century. The doctrine was reflected in the Supreme

Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which was not about education at all, but involved a challenge by Homer Plessy, a man of one-eighth African American heritage and seven-eighths White, to a Louisiana law that required separate railway cars for Blacks and Whites. The Court acknowledged that the 14th Amendment required equality between races before the law. However, as Justice Brown wrote for the majority:

[B]ut in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either (p. 544).

Interestingly, Justice Brown went on to justify this position, in part, by referencing a school decision by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, *Roberts v. City of Boston* (5 Cush. 198), which held that “the general school committee of Boston had power to make provision for the instruction of colored children in separate schools” established exclusively for them, and to prohibit their attendance upon the other schools. One Justice dissented from Brown’s majority opinion; Justice John Marshall Harlan. Predicting the immediate and long term consequences of the Court’s decision, Harlan wrote:

The present decision, it may well be apprehended, will not only stimulate aggressions, more or less brutal and irritating, upon the admitted rights of colored citizens, but will encourage the belief that it is possible, by means of state enactment, to defeat the beneficent purposes which the people of the United States had in view when they adopted the recent amendments

of the Constitution . . . Sixty millions of whites are in no danger from the presence here of eight millions of blacks. The destinies of the two races, in this country, are indissolubly linked together, and the interests of both require that the common government of all shall not permit the seeds of race hate to be planted under the sanction of law (Kluger, p. 82).

Plessy had many progeny that worked to justify different treatment under the law in the South as well as the West, where Hispanic, Asian and Native Americans experienced distinct treatment under state laws (Spring, 2005). While segregated education had been challenged, when it was struck down it was because of the failure to prove the “equal” part of the equation and the courts did not have to reach the constitutional issue. And these instances all involved higher and professional education (*Missouri ex rel Gaines v. Canada*, *Sipuel v. Board of Regents*, *Sweatt v. Painter*). Segregated school systems generally remained lawful until *Brown v. Board of Education of the City of Topeka*. It took nearly sixty years to put to rest the separate but equal doctrine and declare that it violated the 14th Amendment (Kelley, A.H. 1964). Thurgood Marshall and Spottswood Robinson, later Supreme Court and Court of Appeals Judges, respectively, argued for the NAACP that “the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment had intended to ban segregation ‘as a last vestige of slavery’” (p. 266). But the justices actually “put aside the historical evidence and based their decision upon ‘sociological’ grounds” (p. 265).

The Supreme Court did not order immediate desegregation in what is referred to as *Brown I*. In a follow up opinion in 1955, the Court ordered that its

decision be carried out under the direction of local federal courts “with all deliberate speed” (Kelley, p.267). Desegregation did not occur smoothly or quickly. Norman Rockwell depicted the difficulty of the effort in his painting of a young African American girl being escorted to school by federal marshals. Of course, there exist more violent depictions. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided an enforcement mechanism for desegregation. It required that federal funds be withheld from all educational institutions that discriminated on the basis of race (Spring, 2006). This sped up the desegregation process and, in 1965, additional federal funding for schools motivated southern districts to comply with the federal Office of Education’s school desegregation plan. In northern states, where segregation was a fact of life if not law, practices that kept schools segregated were challenged in the courts and found to be illegal, leading to imposed desegregation plans there (Spring, 2006).

Was it worth it?

An argument that the Brown decision has been harmful to Black public school students at first seems outrageous; ridiculous. But that reaction fails to consider a few arguable realities of the post-Brown era. One, the desegregation of public schools resulted in African American students’ loss of African American teachers as well as their community-centered schools. According to Saddler (2005), desegregation of public schools was accomplished mainly by closing the African American schools and bussing those students to formerly White-only schools. Thirty-eight thousand African American teachers and administrators in seventeen states lost their positions between 1954 and 1965. By the 1995-96

school year, only 7.3 percent of the public school teaching force was African American (Saddler). Two, schools are not in fact desegregated. But since the law requires they must be, many assume they are. Three, African American students are segregated within desegregated schools through classroom placements. Four, African American students are no longer taught by African American teachers. All of these realities paint an unexpected picture of Brown's legacy (Spring, 2006).

An increase in the segregation of public schools was reported by Orfield (Spring, 2006). In his report, entitled "Resegregation in American Schools, Orfield demonstrated that the segregation of schools in the South had actually "increased from 1988 to 1997 with the number of black students attending majority white schools declining from 43.5 percent to 34.7 percent" (p. 81). Furthermore, "white students attend schools that are 81 percent white" (p. 82). At a joint conference held in the summer of 2002 by Harvard's University's Civil Rights Project and the University of North Carolina's Center for Civil Rights, experts identified three reasons for the increase in segregated schools. One, recent court decisions have outlawed the use of race as a main factor in student school assignments; two, there has been an increase in residential segregation; and three, there has been an increase in the role of private schools, which contributes to segregation (Spring).

Segregation of black students within schools is the result of tracking, ability grouping and the misplacement of black students into special education classrooms (Spring, 2006). Spring refers to this as "second generation

segregation” and states that it can occur in schools with “balanced racial populations” (p. 82). Second generation segregation also occurs when African American students face discriminatory discipline that results in their suspension from school. It also occurs when white students maintain control of extracurricular student activities after their school has been integrated. Social boundaries based upon race also remain in the schools, reflecting society at large.

History is always a matter of interpretation. It is the construction and placement of facts into a narrative. To discuss the history of the problem of the achievement gap for the purposes of this paper, it is useful to consider the voices of those who lived through that history or have keenly studied it. I tend to believe one of the most profound effects of desegregation on the education of African American students is in their loss of African American teachers. Siddie Walker presented the experience of African American teachers in segregated schools. In a qualitative study, Milner and Howard (2004) sought to explicate the impact of *Brown* for African American teachers, students and communities. It found that the impacts on teachers, students and communities were interwoven and could not be considered separately. What happened to Black teachers affected Black students and the Black community. Black teachers reported a loss of voice, demotion in their jobs, and that their own skin complexions were part of decision-making about their hiring and placement in the teaching profession after *Brown*.

To gather the data, Milner and Howard invited six educational research experts to participate in interviews. Three accepted. Two were professors at

research institutions of higher education and had been in the education field for over 20 years. The third had been in the education field for seven years. They all had written articles and other pieces that addressed *Brown*. All of these experts had studied Brown to some degree in their own research. Milner and Howard noted that the experts at times offered speculative arguments about the impact of Brown beyond their area of study and they noted this in their analysis of the information gathered. Milner and his research assistant interviewed the participants by telephone for approximately one hour and conducted follow-up to clarify and ensure accuracy when necessary. They asked the following questions

- What happened to Black teachers after the Brown decision?
- What impact might Brown have had on Black teachers leaving the profession?
- How may Brown have influenced Black students' education?
- Why is it important to have Black teachers for Black students?
- How might they think about increasing the number of Black teachers?
- What should researchers, teachers, and policy makers do to reverse the underachievement of Black students?

The experts were invited to offer additional comments. Their responses were then analyzed for emerging themes.

Feeling the continuation of racist notions about the value of light skin, the experts articulated that Black teachers with lighter complexion were deemed worthy of placement in all White schools. They were considered less threatening

and less different than teachers with darker complexions. Additionally, impacting students, the most skilled Black teachers were forced to move to integrated or White schools outside the Black communities. If they held administrative positions in the Black schools they had left, they were often demoted to classroom teacher or placed into assistant principal positions and put in charge of discipline for Black kids at integrated schools. This impacted Black male students especially. They were now forced to see their “Black leaders as disciplinarians whom they feared as opposed to Black leaders in whom they could admire and look to for mentorship” (Milner & Howard, 2004, p. 6).

The loss of voice teachers reported included the loss of a respected opinion, the loss of a sense of power and integrity (Milner & Howard, 2004). Before desegregation, Black teachers were held in high regard in their communities. When schools were integrated, these teachers’ authority was challenged by White parents and White students.

Desegregation, the study reported, resulted in an imbalance in African American communities (Milner & Howard, 2004). Prior to desegregation, Black teachers had been community members, too. After desegregation, there was a decreased chance that children’s teachers would also be members of children’s communities. “There was an imbalance in the routines and norms that often framed Black teachers’ and Black students’ experiences both inside and outside of school” (p. 7).

Black students lost Black teachers through desegregation. These teachers had a better understanding of their students’ culture; it was theirs, too.

They were often replaced with White teachers holding lesser credentials (Milner & Howard, 2004). And these White teachers did not live in the students' communities, as the Black teachers had. They did not attend the students' churches. Black teachers' did not justify student failure by blaming society for their students' performance as was White teachers' tendency. Instead, they held high expectations for Black children, while simultaneously accepting and helping them do their best to achieve.

All of the experts believed that the number of Black teachers needed to be increased and that they should be recruited. They felt Black students needed to see Black teachers. Black teachers, one commented, can expose the hidden curriculum to students and explain what it means to be Black in America (Milner & Howard, 2004). They were advantaged in understanding their students by being a part of their Black students' culture.

The notion that getting what Whites got through the desegregation of public schools, even if that meant the same education, may not have given African American children what they needed. Receiving the same curriculum as White students, taught in the same manner as it is taught to White students, may have deprived Black students of a meaningful, accessible educational experience and played a large part in the achievement gap today.

The legal dismantling of the segregated school system, which progressed slowly from the late 1950s through the 1970s, corresponded with the civil rights movement. Not surprisingly, Black civil rights organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party took

interest, participated in and made pedagogical choices about the education of African American youth. These choices shifted, over time and within organizations, from embracing a progressive pedagogy reflecting the ideals of John Dewey to the indoctrination of political ideology through direct instruction. Their programs offered alternatives to the public school system. Tracing these shifting emphases, Perlstein (2002) contended that the organizational support for progressive pedagogy for African American youth was shaped by their analysis of the nature of race relations in the country. For example, he argued that the evolving ideals of SNCC and the Black Panthers in their struggle for freedom moved from integrationism to nationalism in the 1960s and that there were pedagogical implications in that evolution.

In its early years, SNCC opened freedom schools, progressive in nature, that suggested a belief in the ideal of integration and the possibility of justice in American society. For example, rather than reject the idea of standards imposed by White society, it sought to bring the schools of African American youth up to national standards. These schools were committed to the ideals of democracy and the belief that by constructing meaning from their experiences, African American students could reshape their world. The freedom school teachers were both White and Black. SNCC's political analysis and ideals were epitomized by a lesson Stokely Carmichael gave. The lesson consisted entirely of asking questions and trusting the students to form and articulate their own understandings. He deepened students' analyses by addressing them where they were and letting them progress through such questioning (Perlstein).

Faith in American democracy and the goals of integration gave way to distrust with observations that white power structures, racism and racial oppression remained in place. A more didactic approach to education accompanied the “Black Power” movement that grew in the second half of the 1960s and into the 1970s and was shaped and promoted by the Black Panther Party. The construction of meaning and development of one’s own voice that students experienced in the freedom schools was replaced by the delivery of critiques about American racism. Student exploration and inquiry gave way to the transmission of correct information and ideology (Perlstein). Direct instruction was used to counter the impact of public schools and American society.

Interestingly, the didactic approach was abandoned with the rise of women’s roles in the Black Panther Party. The Party’s grassroots community organizing became a context for student experiential learning, and basic reading, writing and math skills were taught in context. But change was constant, and by the end of the 1970s, the Panthers’ Oakland Community School operated an education program that supplanted progressive education with rote education in basic skills. It no longer gave strict attention to issues of race, taught literature through Black authors or emphasized the African American experience. Rather, it emphasized Standard English in recognition of the way language barriers can be used to oppress Black and poor people (Perlstein). It seems that Black pride and a more ethnocentric education earlier promoted by the Black Panther Party had given way to conventionalism.

There have been more recent efforts to establish alternatives to the White, middle class tenor of public schools due to concern over African American students' apparent resistance to education (Spring, 2006). Known as Afrocentric schools, these are segregated schools that are designed to build self esteem and strengthen African American students' identification with school. The curriculum is meant to enhance the students' knowledge of their culture and history, rid school of its Eurocentric view by replacing it with a African American frame of reference, and thereby promote racial pride.

Summary

Upon their arrival in the United States, African Americans were denied education. The education of slaves in the South was prohibited by law. In the North, African Americans initially experienced de jure school segregation. When no law prohibited integrated schooling in the North, tradition and geography did. After slavery ended, economic and social forces continued to limit the availability of even primary education for African Americans in the South. When schooling was available to Blacks in the South and West, it was segregated and unequally funded. The same generally held true for Blacks in the North. However, the segregated schools were controlled by Black teachers, principals, and communities, creating a culturally congruent school experience for many students. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* outlawed the legal segregation of public schools, but its impact has not resulted in the promise of equal opportunity through education. Instead, Black students have not fared well. Desegregation resulted in the loss of Black teachers connected to the

community school in which they taught. Black students were often bussed out of their communities to attend formerly all-white schools. There public school education has been framed by White culture, and an achievement gap persists between Black students and their White and Asian peers. Why and what can be done to close it?

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

There are numerous theories that attempt to identify the cause of the problem of low academic achievement of African-American public school students. To elaborate on the idea suggested by Senator Obama that young African Americans reject education as “acting white”, Ogbu proposed the oppositional identity model (2004). He contended that African-Americans’ low academic achievement stems from the involuntary minority status of African Americans. Ogbu identified involuntary minorities as those who were originally brought to the United States against their will through slavery, conquest, colonization or forced labor. Voluntary minorities, on the other hand, freely immigrated to the United States. While the latter face primary cultural differences in their educational experiences, they voluntarily seek to overcome these differences, adjust socially, and learn and perform academically. Involuntary minorities face secondary cultural differences, which are differences that evolved as coping mechanisms under oppressive conditions. Involuntary minorities in general have no incentive to give up these differences as long as they feel they are still oppressed. Instead, the secondary differences become markers of involuntary minorities’ collective identity. One secondary difference is resistance to the values of mainstream culture, including the value of becoming educated. The oppositional identity model does not offer obvious solutions that can be carried out through teacher classroom practices. Therefore, I describe it here

and later address it only as it is raised in or suggested by the research literature that seeks to establish teacher-based solutions.

Some who have examined the problem believe culturally congruent pedagogy can improve African American children's academic achievement, and this is a large focus of my paper. Such pedagogy takes on many forms. Ladson-Billings and others have looked for commonalities among successful teachers of African American students. Boykin and others sought to establish certain cultural themes present to varying degrees in African American culture and then performed studies to determine whether the inclusion of these themes in both content and learning context influenced the cognitive performance of African-American children in public schools. These studies will be examined at length in this paper. Some researchers have focused on student perception of both teachers and of themselves. How do these perceptions impact the achievement gap and how can they be positively influenced?

Descriptions of Successful Teacher Practices

What are the things successful teachers of African American students do and how do they perceive their roles? Analyzing successful teaching strategies is one useful way to increase our understanding and to reverse school failure. It has been the focus of education scholars and researchers in recent years (Howard, 2001). Ladson-Billings (1994) offered the insight of eight successful teachers of African American children. These practices are often referred to as culturally congruent, culturally relevant or culturally responsive. Others have followed up on her work, further delineating the successful teaching practices

(Howard, 2001 & 2002); (Love & Kruger, 2005). Their studies, along with Ladson-Billings', will be described and critiqued in this section.

Ladson-Billings' ethnographic study of eight effective teachers of African American students involved three teachers that were white and five that were African American (1994). Key to all of these teachers' success was their ability to use culturally relevant teaching practices with their students. From this study, the researcher identified significant attributes of such practices. The teachers involved in Ladson-Billings study were selected through a nomination process. The nominations came from parents who were asked to recommend teachers from the local elementary school district who were effective in teaching their children; they were also asked to explain why. These parents offered that "effectiveness" in teaching went beyond good grades, standardized test scores, high school graduation and college attendance. It included teachers that helped students maintain a positive cultural identity. Effective teachers were also those that actively and sincerely involved parents in the educative process, demanded academic excellence from their students and challenged them, and did not demean or abuse students in order to discipline them. The parents also noted that the teachers they chose were ones whose classes their children did not want to miss. The district was located in a community in Northern California. It is a primarily low-income, African American and Mexican American community of 25,000 people. Parents identified seventeen teachers out of 200 that worked in the district. These nominations were cross-checked through consultation with school principals and colleagues, who were asked to identify teachers they

thought were most effective with African American students and to identify the criteria they used. Two criteria noted were the same reasons parents cited: one, the teachers were able to manage the class and, two, the teachers improved student attendance. The principals, colleagues, and parents all named nine particular teachers. One of those chose not to participate in the study.

Each of the eight teachers participated in an interview that involved a discussion about several questions the researcher had prepared. They involved the teachers' professional background, their teaching philosophy, knowledge of African American students' culture, what things they did in the classroom to facilitate these students' academic success, recommendations about teaching those students, discipline methods, the role of parents, how the teachers' handle mismatches between their own teaching philosophies and beliefs and those of the administration, and how the teachers believe their students' schooling experience differs from the experience of middle-class white students. The interviews were taped and transcribed, and each teacher received a copy of all of the transcriptions. The transcriptions were coded using a computer program that found key words and phrases. Through this, the researcher created an "inductive model of culturally relevant teaching characteristics" (p. 150).

The researcher conducted scheduled and unscheduled classroom observations from September 1989 to June 1991. Over this period, each classroom was observed at least 30 times. The observations lasted from 90 minutes to two hours. Both audiotapes and field notes were taken. Some

observations were videotaped, too. Post-observation conferences were conducted immediately afterwards on-site or by telephone that evening.

The researcher and teachers collectively interpreted and analyzed the data in order to create the model of culturally relevant teaching characteristics. Additionally, the researcher administered a five-point Likert scale in which the teachers rated positive statements about both culturally relevant and assimilationist teaching practices. According to the researcher, “[t]his more quantitative measure served as a confirmation of the qualitative analysis” (p. 153). By assimilationist, the researcher referred to those practices that invalidate students’ cultures “by operating without regard to the students’ particular cultural characteristics” (p. 22). In fact, the first step for the white teachers of black students, Ladson-Billings argued, was to see color. If they fail to do this, they limit their ability to meet their students’ educational needs.

In creating the model, the researcher considered the apparent opposite teacher characteristics and practices. Ultimately, she created a dichotomy of culturally relevant versus assimilationist teaching practices. She then offered a view of the differences at work between the two by looking at the practices in the context of the various subject matters taught in the classroom. One aspect of this dichotomy was the teachers’ conception of their selves and of others, as elaborated in the Table 1 taken from the study (p.34).

Culturally Relevant	Assimilationist
Teacher sees herself as an artist, teaching as an art	Teacher sees herself as technician, teaching as a technical task
Teacher sees herself as part of the community and teaching as giving something back to the community, encourages students to do the same.	Teacher sees herself as an individual who may or may not be part of the community; she encourages Achievement as a means to escape community.
Teacher believes all students can succeed.	Teacher believes failure is inevitable for some.
Teacher helps students make connections between their community,	Teacher homogenizes students into one “American” identity.
Teacher sees teaching as “pulling knowledge out” – like “mining.”	Teacher sees teaching as “putting knowledge into” – like “banking.”

Table 1 supports the position that culturally relevant teaching is learner-centered and teaches the whole child. The teacher perceives her role as helping the student develop her potential, not to mold or shape the student.

Another aspect of this dichotomy is the way in which teachers structure social relations in their classrooms and extend those into the community. Table 2 describes the differences in social relations and is taken from the study (p. 55).

Culturally Relevant	Assimilationist
Teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community.	Teacher-student relationship is fixed, tends to be hierarchical and limited to formal classroom roles.
Teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students.	Teacher demonstrates connections with individual students.
Teacher encourages a “community” learners.”	Teacher encourages competitive achievement.
Teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other.	Teacher encourages students to learn individually, in isolation.

Table 2 suggests that culturally relevant teaching promotes the value of community over that of individualism.

Finally, the researcher considered the dichotomy as it relates to a teacher's conception of what knowledge is, and thus, how this may inform her students' views. Table 3 is taken from the study (p. 81).

Culturally Relevant	Assimilationist
Knowledge is continuously recreated recycled and shared by teachers and students. it is not static or unchanging.	Knowledge is static and is passed in one direction, from teacher to student
Knowledge is viewed critically.	Knowledge is viewed as infallible.
Teacher is passionate about content.	Teacher is detached, neutral about content.
Teacher helps students develop necessary skills.	Teacher expects students to demonstrate prerequisite skills.
Teacher sees excellence as a complex standard that may involve some postulates but takes student diversity and individual differences into account.	Teacher sees excellence as a postulates that exists independently from student diversity or individual differences.

Table 3 emphasizes that a teacher is a learner who challenges the status quo and models critical thinking for her students.

In the process of developing her model, the researcher had the opportunity to discover some essential qualities present in the classroom of teachers using culturally relevant teaching practices. These were as follows:

- students are treated as competent
- teachers provide instructional scaffolding
- the classroom's focus is instructional.
- students' thinking and abilities are extended after the teacher establishes what the student already knows, allowing the student to first make necessary connections
- the teacher has an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and the students.

The value of the Ladson-Billings study is its deep look at the participants' stated beliefs, which were also corroborated by their actual practices over a considerable amount of time. It identifies common attributes of successful teachers of African American children rather than identify some miracle teachers who are exceptions to the rule. Acknowledging a point made by Kozol that such miracle teachers are the exception and deflect from the need for systemic change in public education, the researcher did not deny that there are structural problems in our society such as racism, discrimination, unequal facilities and educational funding, and continual segregation of African American students, and that these play a large role in the achievement gap. But she noted that a common attribute of these successful teachers was that they questioned and were critical of these structural problems, too, and let their critical voices be heard through their critical pedagogy. They taught their students to question, too. The researcher also offered suggestions for teacher preparation expressed by study participants so that more teachers practice culturally congruent

pedagogy. Among these is the suggestion that teacher candidates be provided with opportunities to critique the education system and encouraged them to be agents of change rather than defenders of the status quo. Ladson-Billings' defense of her study resembles Delpit's argument for the explicit teaching of the codes of power (Delpit, 1995 p. 40). Without knowledge of the code, Delpit contended, her students would be in no position to change the inequalities in the system. Arguably, there is no reason to limit the value of those successful teacher attributes to any group of children in particular. The successful teaching strategies and teacher dispositions she induced are similar to the types held by those who hold a constructivist view of learning.

Parents that identified effective teachers for Ladson-Billings study expressed that it was important their children's education helped them maintain a positive cultural identity. As one parent stated, "I just want him to hold his own in the classroom without forgetting his own in the community" (p.147). Perhaps this expressed hope lends support to Ogbu's theory of oppositional identity. Successful teachers create an atmosphere that does not attribute learning to acting white, and school is not oppressive when African American students can maintain their cultural identity while excelling in school.

Ladson-Billings study has weaknesses. The first relates to the specificity of the context; a somewhat unstable and extremely poor district that may not be relevant to those who teach in different contexts. Additionally, her sample is small and was created mainly by parents in the district. Their choices were subjective and the decision to choose certain teachers was based upon what

parents reported. Whether these were the actual reasons for their choices was not, and probably could not be, objectively verified. Although the researcher had teachers rate their beliefs about their teaching practices on a Likert scale in order to quantitatively cross check the qualitative model that had been created, the teachers' answers nonetheless remain subjective.

Probably most problematic about the Ladson-Billings study is that there is not clear accountability with respect to the teacher selection criteria. The parents, she said, went beyond the conventional notions of what shows that a teacher is effective. She identifies such conventional notions as good grades, good scores on standardized tests, graduation from high school, going to college and securing employment. Many of these conventional notions are the same used by those who bring our attention to the achievement gap such as the NCES. These are quantifiable measurements. It does not appear that Ladson-Billings has investigated how the students of the subject teachers have performed on such measurements. Nor does the study include any comparison between success on such measurements and attendance in the subject teachers' classrooms as opposed to some other teacher in the district. That is, did the subject teachers produce the most successful students, as measured by grades, standardized test scores, high school graduation, or acceptance and success in college? Furthermore, did the students of the teachers selected maintain their cultural identity?

Two studies that attempted to correlate teachers' beliefs regarding culturally relevant classroom practices with African American students'

achievement were conducted by Love & Kruger (2005). Through these studies, which were built on previous ones conducted by other researchers, they sought to achieve three goals: “(a) create survey items that measure teachers’ culturally relevant beliefs from Ladson-Billings (1994); (b) sample beliefs of those who teach primarily African American children in urban public schools, and (c) ascertain which teachers beliefs correlate with higher student achievement” (p. 88).

In the first study (Study 1), the participants were 244 teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, principals, instructional specialists, and media specialists, with teaching experience that ranged from 0 to 37 years. The mean was 12 years and the median was 9 years. Education levels ranged from no degree to a doctorate. These participants’ self-reported ethnicities were 48% African American, 42% Caucasian, 3% Latino/Hispanic, Indian, Asian, Biracial, and 7% not reported. They were selected from six schools that primarily served African American children. Five of those schools were located in a southeastern United States metropolitan area. The sixth school was in another city in the same part of the nation. All of the schools served free and reduced lunches. At four of the schools, 95% of the students qualified for these. The large sample slightly exceeded five participants per survey question necessary for statistical analysis. Collected data was collapsed across schools and grade levels.

The survey used was adapted from Ladson-Billings (1994). It contained 48 statements, 25 of which reflected the culturally relevant teacher beliefs that emerged in the Ladson-Billings’ study. The remaining 23 followed what Ladson-

Billings had identified as “assimilationist”. The statements were organized into six dimensions of beliefs. These were how knowledge was perceived, recognition of students’ race, ethnicity and culture, social relations in and beyond the classroom, teaching as a profession, teaching practice, and students’ needs and strengths. To reduce response bias, the statements were placed in a random order. The survey was distributed at the end of the 1998-1999 school-year. The statements were set up on a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4) (2005). The findings for the six dimensions of belief follow.

With respect to participants’ beliefs about knowledge, participants endorsed (agreed or strongly agreed) with three of the five statements. Two of those were culturally relevant and one was considered assimilationist. With respect to the two remaining statements, the participants’ responses “were bimodal” (p. 93). These described teachers’ expectations of the students’ content knowledge. Interestingly, the participant demographic showed that 60% of the kindergarten teachers agreed that students start school knowing very little, “whereas 71% of the second- through fifth-grade teachers expected students to begin with a particular set of prerequisite skills” (p. 93).

With respect to recognition of students’ race, ethnicity and culture in teaching, the participants endorsed three culturally relevant statements and rejected an assimilationist one. However, two assimilationist statements gained endorsement; 62% and 73% of the participants, respectively, said they just saw children in the classroom, not their particular race or culture.

For the social relations in and beyond the classroom category, two statements relating to the participants' ability to connect with the students showed "bimodal distributions" (p. 93). A look at the participants' demographic showed that at least half of those that expected to be able to connect with all of their students had attended historically black colleges and had more than 20 years' experience. Three statements related to peer learning strategies produced supportive responses. Responses on three of the four statements regarding students' responsibility for one another's success "produced bimodal distributions" (p. 93). A large percentage of participants were undecided on two statements. These findings reflected mixed feelings about holding students responsible for peers' success. Demographic variables failed to account for this. There was a bimodal response to statements about parental involvement in the education process, though one statement resulted in a strong response.

The views regarding teaching as a profession indicated that teaching in an urban setting was a way of giving something back to the community. Participants rejected three assimilationist statements, and the fourth statement "produced a bimodal distribution" (p. 94). Participants were largely undecided about two of the statements. The researchers posited that this suggested many teachers were approaching burnout in the urban setting.

Most of the participants endorsed the four culturally related statements regarding teaching practices and most rejected assimilationist statements, though two of those produced bimodal responses with a substantial percentage undecided. These statements included the use of drill, repetition and practice.

Five culturally relevant statements were endorsed regarding students' needs and strengths. A noticeable percentage of teachers were undecided, however, particularly on one statement, but that could be explained by the statements' lack of clarity.

Study 2 participants were drawn from two of the six schools that participated in Study 1 (2005). Both of these schools participated in a coalition involving school change efforts, qualified as predominantly low income and mainly served children of African descent. Also, these schools performed in the lower 20% of the state based upon the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) assessment. There were 50 participants and represented kindergarten through fifth grade teachers. Their self reported ethnicity broke down as follows: 70% African American, 38% Caucasian, 2% Indian. The mean age was 38 years; median, 36 years, and the range was 25 to 55 years. Experience teaching ranged from 1 to 30 years, with a mean of 11 and median of 9 years. "The percentage of teachers with master's degrees or higher was 34.8% in one school and 30.6% in the other: (p. 92).

The data assembly involved correlating the survey items in Study 1 with the standardized achievement scores of 1,432 students taught by the participating 50 teachers. The unit of analysis in the study (2005) was the classroom. The examined relationships were between teacher beliefs and student achievement, averaged per class. Student achievement was measured by using "standardized scale scores from the advanced-skill components for

mathematics, reading, and language arts tests of the ITBS” (p. 92). Only reading scores were available for kindergartners and reading and math for first-graders.

The correlational analysis showed that nine of the 48 statements on the survey correlated with some measure of student achievement and came from the six dimensions as follows: one from the knowledge dimension, one from teaching as a profession, two from teaching practice, four from social relations, and one from students’ needs and strengths. None of the statements from the culture, race, and ethnicity dimension was correlated with achievement.

Breaking the correlation down further, the endorsement of an assimilationist statement regarding the role of the teacher as disseminator of knowledge correlated positively (.37) with achievement in language arts and reading (2005). Two culturally relevant statements related to communalism correlated positively (both .35) with achievement in reading. The three statements identified “predicted higher achievement and were either bimodal or had a relatively large percentage of undecided participants” (p. 94). Regarding social relations in the classroom and beyond, two assimilationist statements had significant negative correlations with aggregated mathematics (-.40) and reading (-.31) achievement scores.

With respect to the correlation between achievement and teaching as a profession, those teachers that endorsed the statement that their purpose of teaching was to give something back to the community had students with high aggregate standardized reading achievement scores (correlation of .41)(2005). A statement regarding the exchange of roles with students, considered a

culturally relevant statement, correlated with mathematics achievement (.36), and an assimilationist statement regarding drill, repetition, and practice correlated in a positive direction (.36) with reading achievement. Finally, a culturally relevant belief about the students' needs and strengths related positively (.29) to students' mathematics achievement.

The Love and Kruger study (2005) presents additional insight to those teaching practices and dispositions identified by earlier qualitative studies as culturally relevant or assimilationist, and ties those practices to achievement. With respect to knowledge, the assimilationist belief about the role of teacher as disseminator of knowledge significantly related to students' success in reading and language arts. The researchers asserted that this finding actually was congruent with the finding from the teaching practice dimension that showed a positive correlation between the use of drill, repetition and practice with reading achievement. They noted that repetition and practice represent direct instructional strategies that are used when needed, and while considered more traditional pedagogy, may reflect the teachers' response to students' lack of content knowledge and skill. This also ties directly to Howard's (2001), study of successful teachers discussed below, all of whom agreed that teaching and building skills was their greatest priority for student academic success, and they employed various strategies to do this.

Unlike the teachers from Ladson-Billings (1994) study, over half of those in this study expected students to come to their classrooms with particular content knowledge. However, this does not mean this study's teachers did not

concern themselves with students' prior knowledge and experience or make efforts to build upon those when they taught new concepts.

The teachers in this study (Love & Kruger, 2005) endorsed statements that they did not distinguish students' color or culture and these statements were positively correlated with student achievement. The researchers suggest that the color-blind ideology may be more socially acceptable and that this influenced participants' responses, rather than their actual practices in the classroom. Seeing color was an essential first step toward culturally congruent teaching for Ladson-Billings, who quoted Foster (1986) that "attempts at color-blindness mask a 'dysconscious racism,' an 'uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given.'"(1994, p. 31-2). Ladson-Billings suggested that failure to see color deprives the student of who she is. "[B]y claiming not to notice, the teacher is saying that she is dismissing one of the most salient features of the child's identity and that she does not account for it in her curricular planning and instruction" (p. 33). Not seeing color is inherently assimilationist.

There was ambivalence shown by most of the teachers regarding social relations in the areas of expectations that students be responsible for one another and with teachers' ability to connect with all students. With respect to the former, however, there was a connection found in Study 2 between teachers who carried these expectations and their students' higher performance on standardized reading tests. Ambivalence about the latter belief, the researchers pointed out, may have to do with some teachers' relative lack of experience.

This ability to connect was a belief largely held by teachers that had attended historically black colleges, suggesting that this ability may be related to teaching programs at such colleges.

The findings regarding parental involvement showed that students with higher math and reading achievement had teachers that responded positively to parental involvement and reported witnessing parents involved in the classroom. If these same teachers made parents feel welcome in the classroom, which is a reasonable assumption, this finding is supported by Ladson-Billings (1994) study, which found that “teachers who focus on social relations in and beyond the classroom into students’ family and community life also create effective learning environments” (p. 96). This study’s findings strongly correlate teachers’ beliefs that every child is successful at something and achievement on the standardized mathematics test (2005).

In this study (Love & Kruger, 2005) nine significant correlations were found between identified culturally congruent beliefs and achievement. However, “unmeasured variables could have influenced the results” (p. 97). Participants were not given any opportunity to explain their choices on the Likert scale. Additionally, several of the participating schools were involved in organized change efforts, and this may have created bias in a particular direction. Given the nature of the measurement of teacher beliefs, a survey of beliefs uncorroborated by objective evidence, the responses must be accepted with extreme caution. Additionally, statements within the survey may have been

misconstrued by participants. Finally, the measurement of student achievement, ITBS scores, is only one way to represent student achievement.

In a qualitative study conducted by Howard (2001), the researcher sought to explicate the practices of successful teachers of African American students. Three major pedagogical themes emerged from the data he gathered. Successful teachers of African American students used holistic instructional strategies, had culturally consistent communication competencies, and used skill-building strategies to promote students' academic success. A discussion of these follows after a description of the study participants and the research design Howard employed.

Howard's study involved four African American elementary teachers that taught African American students in urban settings in the Pacific Northwest. Similar to Ladson-Billings selection process, the teachers selected were nominated by parents, principals, community members and peers as being teachers that made a difference in the academic performance of African American students. Initially 12 teachers were nominated. A conceptual framework was developed in order to reduce the number to four. That framework incorporated many pedagogical practices other researchers have described as culturally relevant for African American students. Howard observed all 12 teachers in their classrooms to identify those who used or allowed students to use a minimum of 15 of the 20 identified practices in the framework. The final four were then identified through this observation.

Each teacher was interviewed at least three times and was observed in her classroom over a four-month period. Other information was gathered through informal interviews during the observations, which took place in the 1997-98 school year. Using standard qualitative research methods, transcriptions of the interviews and field notes were coded and analyzed. Grounded theory methodology was employed to do this. Given the existing research and theory on the pedagogical practices of effective teachers of African American students, this made it possible for the researcher to relate his findings to the existing theories, add contextual accounts to them, and provide additional descriptions.

As stated above, three themes emerged. First, teachers did not limit their role to meeting a child's academic needs. They employed holistic instructional strategies, which are strategies that seek to teach the whole child. The teachers addressed not only their students' cognitive development, but also their moral and social development. They stressed character building and social norms such as honesty, responsibility, respectability, cooperation and sympathy toward others. Their goal was to educate students to be intellectually capable, socially adaptable, and morally sound through a comprehensive, integrative approach. One teacher's holistic strategy involved increasing her students' awareness of socially and economically marginalized groups through community service and citizenship activities. She took her class on frequent trips to visit the elderly and read to them at their convalescent homes and to feed the homeless at soup kitchens. As a part of these experiences, this teacher taught her students the

importance of social etiquette and public behavior, using the trips as context. She wanted them to learn that there is a particular way to behave in public and to understand that these may differ from how they behave at home. She taught her students to “know how to listen, follow directions, all that stuff” (p. 188). She taught them to “speak clearly, stand straight, don’t act silly, and have some pride about them” (p. 188). All four teachers felt that they needed to explicitly teach values to their students, and this included teaching respect for authority. One teacher reflected that her job was to raise citizens of the world, and that respect for authority is part of the reality of such citizenship. The teachers also believed they had to teach their students to take responsibility for their actions.

The teachers studied also had and used what the researcher called culturally consistent communicative competencies. They all placed significant importance on their students’ language strengths and structured their teaching to take advantage of these. They allowed their student opportunities to use their verbal skills. One teacher noted that there is often a discrepancy between students’ written problem solving versus their ability to problem solve verbally. She believed there was a propensity to rely excessively on written tasks to assess student understanding, and that this is a factor that hinders African American students’ academic success. She therefore gave them more verbal opportunities to show their understanding. One way she did this was to give them a learning experience orally first, and then move them into writing about it.

All of these teachers incorporated African American discourse patterns in order to connect students’ out of school experience with the content of their

studies in school. This connection between students' home life and school allowed students to draw from their background knowledge to understand new information and experiences. For example, one teacher taught Greek myths by analogizing the stories to circumstances in the students' home and school lives. She changed mythic characters' names to those of her students in the classroom and described their tribulations like those the students may face in daily life.

Three of the four teachers in the study recognized the use of Black English Vernacular (BEV), or Ebonics, as a valid form of communication and respected its use in their classrooms. They did not belittle its use and on occasion, would use it themselves. Simultaneously, through explicit instruction, they made certain their students understood that while there are appropriate circumstances in which BEV may be used, the students must also know how to use standard English because its use will open social, educational and financial opportunities to students that the use of BEV may deny them.

The teachers agreed that teaching and building skills was their greatest priority for student academic success, and they employed various strategies to do this. While it was important to develop affectionate bonds with students, preparing their students for the academic and social skills needed in the next grade was more important. One teacher described the priority of teaching skills over giving love or affection as follows: "You have to know and be aware and willing to accept hate before you can ever get a child to love you. . . That's why I don't like to let them leave my class [without the skills] because there's too much

of this bleeding heart liberal, 'let me love you, let you love me' stuff going on out there. These kids continue to fail while their teachers 'love them'" (p. 197).

These teachers adopted no-nonsense policies in their classrooms. Although they felt cultural awareness was important in their pedagogy, a rigorous learning environment and skill building were just as essential in creating in their students the self-perception and belief that they were capable and could succeed academically. One of the teachers used a "skills versus smarts analogy" to bring this message home with her students. Smartness, she explained to them, is something that everyone has. Skills, however, are acquired through effort and practice. Rejecting an entity theory of intelligence (Henderson & Dweck, 1990), she urged her students to do as well, telling them that skills are attainable and it is up to them to put forth the effort to attain skills.

While Howard's study (2001) reaffirms earlier findings about culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994), it really could not have done otherwise. The selection criteria Howard used, in part based upon earlier studies, created the chance that the subjects were selected not because their teaching practices resulted in successful students, but because their teaching practices were those deemed culturally relevant in earlier studies. The teacher nominators (parents, teachers, administrators and civic leaders) were not given any selection criteria. They were simply asked to identify teachers they believed made a difference in their African American students' academic performance. The researcher then pared down to four the initial choices of 12 teachers through observations that applied a framework Howard developed based upon previous research. The

teachers who most regularly used what were deemed culturally relevant practices were chosen for in-depth interviews and further classroom observation. There was no report of a check on the academic achievement of the chosen teachers' students.

Howard's findings emphasize the importance of skill building and of the explicit teaching of dominant culture language usage. His findings are consistent with an argument posed by Delpit (1995), who referred to dominant culture language and other dominant cultural competencies as "codes of power" (1995, p. 40). While such codes of power are explicitly taught by the teachers in Howard's study (2001), the findings suggest that just as important is the teacher's affirmation of students' home culture. The fact that the four teachers involved in Howard's study are African American cannot be ignored. Will non-African American teachers accept and respect the cultural styles, including language, which their African American students bring to the classroom? Can they provide culturally relevant teaching if they do not belong to the student's culture? If there are not enough African American teachers to go around, there remains the practical question whether a white teacher has the cultural competencies to meet the needs of African American students. Ladson-Billings study suggested they can, but the teachers involved in her study had many years of experience teaching African American students, essentially immersing themselves in African American culture and community, something Ladson-Billings recommended to teacher candidates who intend to teach African American students (Ladson-Billings, p. 134).

The teachers involved in Howard's study felt that non-African American teachers could employ the practices they used, but noted that such teachers would have to critically examine their own beliefs and assumptions or stereotypes about African American students. They would have to consider how these assumptions might affect their teaching and Black students' learning (p. 199). Related to this critical examination, Milner (2003) urged teacher reflection about race in cultural contexts. Like Ladson-Billings, Milner suggested that ignoring color denied students their cultural identity and inhibited teachers from challenging and changing the existing order despite its ineffectiveness. He recommended reflection about race for both White and Black teachers. Citing Dewey, he noted that "reflection 'emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity'" (p. 3). Through reflection, teachers are more conscious of their actions and intentions. Race reflection requires one to reflect upon their existence as a racial being, which helps them "better understand themselves in relation to others' racial identities" (p. 5). Milner differentiates race reflection as problem-solving that views students of color as "the problem". Rather, the problem is the social construct of race itself.

Using Cultural Themes in Creating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Some research has focused on the use of afro-cultural themes in the establishment of culturally relevant pedagogy to ameliorate the achievement gap. This research asked whether incorporating such themes into the educational content as well as the context enhanced the cognitive performance of African American students. Much of this research was supported by the Center for

Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), which is a partnership between Howard and Johns Hopkins Universities. A large number of these studies were conducted by Boykin and various associates. These studies considered the use of themes believed present in African American culture and how these may be used to develop the talent or “cultural capital” of African American students (Boykin & Bailey, 2000). Boykin identified several afro-cultural themes in an article (1992). He argued that these themes or styles “are linked to nine interrelated dimensions of the afro-cultural experience” (1992, Towards a theory of cultural integrity, ¶ 4). “These dimensions grew out of the traditional West African belief systems and display themselves in the contemporary afro-cultural experience” (¶ 4). Boykin has identified these themes or dimensions as spirituality, harmony, movement expressiveness, which includes an interweaving of movement, rhythm, dance, percussiveness, and music, verve, which he defines as the receptivity to high levels of sensate stimulation, affect, or an emphasis on emotion, communalism, a preference for oral/aural means of communication, and a social time perspective in which time is “treated as passing through a social space rather than a material one” (¶ 4).

Boykin has noted that many of these important themes in African American life contrast with life in mainstream culture America. He cautioned that African American culture is by no means homogenous, and thus, the degree to which these themes are present in African Americans’ lives will vary (1992). However, he posited that African American students of lower socio-economic status, who tend to be the most at-risk academically, are the same students in

whose lives these themes are most prominent, partially due to their limited access to mainstream cultural experiences. He questioned whether these same students tended to perform poorly in school because of these themes and styles salient in their lives are missing and even incongruent with the themes of mainstream, Euro-American culture, and that the latter are more prominent in school.

The studies presented in this section all consider the inclusion of African American cultural themes in the content of study, learning context or both. Boykin, Miller and Tyler (2005) conducted a qualitative study that sought to differentiate the cultural themes that were prevalent in classrooms attended by predominantly lower income African American students, examine how they are manifested, and see whether they are ones consistent with themes identified within a mainstream cultural ethos. The premise of this study was based upon the claim that there is a “hidden curriculum” in public schooling (p. 524). That hidden curriculum seeks the conformity of students from various cultural backgrounds with mainstream or Anglo cultural themes. Because it has been argued that the hidden curriculum creates “coordination difficulties and motivation challenges for those African American children who bring to school a psychological repertoire that incorporates specific cultural themes consistent with an Afro-cultural ethos” (p. 525), the researchers sought to determine whether there was empirical data to support this argument. If there was, this may help explain the achievement gap by demonstrating that African American students’ home culture was being dismissed at school and further, that school was a place

of cultural dissonance for these students, impairing their ability to learn. By identifying an explanation, useful solutions could be formulated.

The results of this study suggested that themes that are associated with mainstream cultural ethos are more prevalent in school than ones associated with Afro-cultural ethos. Furthermore, these mainstream themes were shown to be more likely manifested in teacher-initiated expressions than student ones. Interestingly, the students were more likely to initiate cultural expressions consistent with afro-cultural ethos than with expressions associated with mainstream world views.

To conduct this study, the researchers observed twenty-one classrooms ranging from first to sixth grade located in six elementary schools in predominantly lower income African American communities. Ninety percent of these students qualified for federal free and reduced lunch. Ninety-five percent of student body was African American. All teachers were African American. Ten cultural themes were identified for study; five consistent with mainstream (Anglo) ethos and five with afro-cultural ethos. The identified mainstream themes were individualism, competition, object orientation, priority placed on cognition over affective expression, and bureaucracy orientation. The identified afro-cultural themes were movement expressiveness, verve, affect, orality, and communalism. These identified cultural themes were considered aspects of mainstream or African fundamental culture from previous research.

The researchers observed classrooms for a total of 52 sessions lasting about 3 hours each, totaling more than 150 hours of observation. Each observer

wrote down everything he or she saw transpiring in the classroom. The protocols from these observations were then coded and analyzed. The observers and coders were six African American research assistants/graduate students with backgrounds in education and/or psychology. They received 16 hours of training to do this that included practicing the coding. A coding system was developed to analyze the observers' notes. The purpose of the coding system was to reliably and systematically categorize the classroom dynamics involving cultural themes and behaviors in the classrooms. In reaching the results, a criterion was set so that only those codable units agreed on by at least two of the three coders would be included in the findings. There were a total of 5,530 codable units. Of these, 460 (8%) were identified as cultural behaviors and/or expressions. The criterion for identifying a cultural behavior or expression was stringent, according to the lead researcher, but this criterion is not described. The coded responses were compiled and analyzed for (a) frequency of observation; (b) reactions of positive, negative or neutral by the teacher or student; (c) initiation of behaviors and/or expressions by teacher or student; and (d) the corresponding dimension of classroom life associated with each respective cultural expression.

Four of the identified cultural themes combined accounted for only 31 (7%) of the 460 observances. These were affect, orality, cognition over affect, and object orientation. Thus, because of their prominence, the remaining six cultural themes were presented in the results (movement, verve, communalism and individualism, competition, bureaucracy orientation). These accounted for 429 observances. Of this number of cultural observations, 381 (89%) were in

reference to the three identified Anglo-cultural themes and the remaining 48 (11%) were in reference to the three identified Afro-cultural themes.

The frequency of the themes was counted and noted, as were the positive and negative teacher reactions to student-initiated behaviors, positive and negative student reactions to teacher and other students' initiated and reaction-based behaviors, neutral teacher and student reactions, and cultural displays initiated by either the teachers or students.

The researchers found expressions of cultural themes as follows:

- **Movement expressiveness** was observed 27 (6%) times. 19 (70%) were initiated by student.
- **Communalism** was observed 13 (3%) times. 6 out of 13 times (46%), these occurred in instances where a student is helping another student; 5 out of 13 times (38%), the teacher is encouraging the students to help each other while doing their work.
- **Verve** was observed 8 (less than 2%) times. Of these 8 observances, 7 (87%) were initiated by the student.
- **Individualism** was the most frequently occurring cultural theme, observed 201 times (47%). 133 (66%) were displays initiated by the teacher. 56 (28%) were neutral responses by student to teacher within the context of whole-class, teacher directed instruction. Many of these displays can be accounted for in scenarios involving students engaged in individual learning activities or students responding after being called on individually, usually during whole-class instruction.

- **Competition** was observed 113 times (26%). Of these, 32 were displays of competition initiated by the teacher (28%). 69 (61%) were neutral responses by the student to teacher's instructions or teacher directed learning activities. The occurrences of competition were of two types: interpersonal and between groups.
- **Bureaucracy orientation** was observed 67 times out of the 429 observances (15%). 31% were in reference to statements the teacher made to students regarding the classroom rules, regulations and procedures.

The researchers contended that the data directly supported the argument that academic, linguistic and cultural capital introduced and sustained by public schools reflect the same values and beliefs found in the dominant society. To some extent, then, this qualitative study supports the hidden curriculum argument by demonstrating its existence in classroom instructional practices and the pedagogical tendencies of teachers serving this population. It points to an important component in the dismal academic performance of low-income African-American elementary students. It underscores the fallacy of cultural neutrality in the classroom. However, the evidence of overarching mainstream or afro-cultural orientation was a relatively small part of the total classroom phenomenology.

From this data, the authors recommended that schools understand, appreciate and fully embrace cultural perspectives to meet the needs of the diverse group of students in U.S. public schools. However, acknowledged

limitations to this study were the fact that “it was difficult to discern teachers’ or students’ reactions to initiated displays” of cultural themes because the data did not consistently specify the reaction” (p. 543). Also, the coding system did not differentiate between instances of negative reactions to displays of Afro-cultural themes and negative reactions to the absence of mainstream cultural displays. Furthermore, some behavioral expressions identified as being initiated by the student or the teacher may have been reactions to previous unknown events in the classroom. The study could not account for classroom practices that were not codable as cultural expressions. There were 5,530 units, but only 460 were identified as cultural expressions or culture-based activities. Perhaps such cultural expressions are not as prevalent as theorized, the researchers concluded. This suggests only a small impact from a mainstream orientation in the classroom. However, the researchers also questioned whether the criteria they used to observe and identify such themes may have been too stringent. It is also possible that some portion of the observed units may have been manifestations of “adaptive” culture. This refers to a cultural group’s response to its collective history and current contextual demands of a given environment. An example would be a coping strategy to ward off the effects of racism and discrimination. The existence of such adaptive “cultural expressions” lends support to Ogbu’s theory that these adaptive strategies are secondary cultural differences that have developed and persist in response to the oppression of the dominant culture. These researchers offer that future studies should examine this question. They should also consider the actual lesson content.

A number of quantitative studies have explored whether the inclusion of the Afro-cultural themes in the classroom may positively impact the academic performance of African American students. These themes are purportedly derived from a mixture of African cosmology and the experience of being black in America (Dill & Boykin, 2000). One of those themes is communalism. "African ontology is characterized by the communal notion of existence expressed in the following axiom: I am because we are and since we are therefore I am" (p. 68).

Communalism was an afro-cultural ethos expressed in Boykin's above-discussed qualitative study. Boykin, Lilja and Tyler later (2004) considered the value of communalism's presence in the learning context on the academic performance of fourth and fifth grade African American social studies students. They investigated, specifically, communal and individual learning contexts and their impact on long-term retention of actual classroom-based curriculum lessons. They found that students in a communal learning context significantly outperformed students in an individual learning context on the weekly quizzes and a final exam.

Communalism, the researchers explained, is not the same as cooperative learning. While cooperative learning relies on extrinsic rewards and the desire for individual gain, communalism connotes a value placed on the intrinsic reward of working together, sharing, and a positive sense of joint duty. "Working together is its own reward in communalism" (p. 228). The researchers hypothesized that African American students' academic performance would be improved over time in a communal as compared to an individual learning context. They also

expected that this improvement would be sustained even when testing was conducted in an individual context.

The participants in this study were 69 (37 female, 32 male) African-American students from an urban elementary school in a low-income community in the northeast United States. Forty-one percent were in grade four and fifty-nine percent were in fifth grade. These students were randomly selected from their school. Ninety-five percent were of low-income status, determined by their participation in the free or reduced lunch program.

In this study, the researchers looked at student performance in text recall (2004). They used social studies reading passages in geography to assess the impact of the learning context on reading comprehension and recall. The study included two experimental trials held one day per week for two consecutive weeks. They tested performance on a one-unit exam comprised of two nine-question quizzes taken after each weekly learning trial based upon a geography curriculum. Research assistants completed the scoring and they were aware of the conditions. Since it was a unit test, the assessments were administered two weeks after the first trial and one week after the second trial; the trial being the learning context. The lessons were taken from textbook chapters on general African geography used in the school district, with two focusing on Egyptian geography. Communal and individual learning contexts were established.

In the communal context, the groups were set up in threes: either two boys and one girl or two girls and one boy. Each of the three groups in total was given a set of materials and instructed to read the geography passages, to work

together and to help one another learn the material. They were read a prompt that encouraged them to study and operate in the manner consistent with the experiment; that is, communal conditions.

In the individual context, each of the nine students was placed at individual desks set up in rows, either six female and three male or vice versa, and given passages to read. They were told to remain seated at their individual desks and reminded to work on their own. This was stressed as important.

For each trial, there were four experimental sessions conducted. They operated simultaneously in different rooms. This occurred over two week's time. The lessons were switched, though. All of the students were told that the activity would help students learn better to allow avoidance of potential Hawthorne effects.¹

At the end of each of the learning sessions, students were given a quiz. At the end of the entire procedure, which was two weeks long, the students were given an 18-question comprehensive unit exam covering both lessons. For the quizzes and exam, the students were separated. They performed these assessments in an individual context, regardless of the context in which they learned. As previously stated, the students in the communal learning context significantly outperformed students in the individual learning context on the weekly quizzes and the final exam. In the communal learning context, mean performance was 84%, a passing grade, while in the individual context, it was

¹ A Hawthorne effect is an experimental effect in the direction expected but not for the reason expected; i.e. a significant positive effect that turns out to have no causal basis in the theoretical motivation for the intervention, but is apparently due to the effect on the participants of knowing themselves to be studied in connection with the outcomes measured. Retrieved April 9, 2006, from (<http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/hawth.html#Preface>).

46%, a failing grade. If conventional grading methods had been applied, the communal learners would have had an average of 86% on the comprehensive test and the individual learners would have had a 51%. Thus, the learning context was significant ($p < 0.0001$) (p. 237). There was also a marginally significant interaction between time and the learning context variable. In the first trial, students in the communal context had an average of 81%, a passing grade. Those in the individual context had an average of 45%, a failing grade. ($p < 0.09$, $p < 0.045$, one-tailed) (p. 237). In the second trial, the average performance in the communal context was 88%, a passing grade, and in the individual context, 47%, a failing grade. Although the performance difference between the first and second trial was significant in the communal context, it was not significant in the individual context.

The conclusion of improved performance in communal learning context is supported by this study's findings. The findings strongly support the implicit hypothesis that culture plays a facilitating role in learning activities and environments of African-American students. The findings also support the broader theoretical framework that emphasized the role of culture and linguistic transactions as facilitators of cognitive development. While the sample size is limited, Boykin and associates have been studying like students and creating similar circumstances and conditions for learning for many years. They suggested that this line of research would benefit from applied research in which the actual classroom instructor is able to tailor research efforts to fit his current

pedagogical strategies and tools. That would limit the potential for novel learning or classroom behaviors and create more dependable results and conclusions.

There are noted limitations to this study. Although the lesson content and curriculum tools used attempt to replicate classroom settings, the experimental design captured in the study does not provide a setting identical to the public school classroom settings of low-income African Americans. For example, the content the students studied was provided only once weekly for three weeks. In real classrooms, learning and practice of lesson units are often a daily occurrence, especially with students in elementary school. Also, removing students from their classrooms for this study was a change from the actual classroom context. The context and instructional nuances the students are familiar with and the instructors themselves changed in this experiment and could be variables in performance, though controls for these were applied. From observation of the students' classrooms, it was determined that individual and independent work was the norm. Students did occasional group work, but it did not meet the criteria of communal learning. Finally, this study did not examine student preference; only performance.

Despite the noted limitations of this study, the extent of the difference in performance from communal to individual contexts cannot be ignored. It adds to the strength of studies focused on the potential benefit to the cognitive performance of African-American students in public schools from culturally congruent pedagogy; specifically, the use of African-American cultural themes in learning content and context. Of course, afro-cultural theme of communalism

itself may not be the ingredient that resulted in the participants' success. It could have been the cooperative aspect of the students' work or the exchange of ideas that occurred in the group context. Such exchanges among peers arguably supports learning generally. Would White students have scored better in the communal context than the individual one? Would all students? This, the researchers did not study.

Researchers sought to replicate previous investigations of the link between Afrocultural themes and African American children's learning and to expand the generalizability of previous studies in order to include mathematical concepts (Hurley, Boykin, and Allen (2005). The researchers' predicted that the findings of earlier studies conducted using language-based tasks would generalize to mathematics learning, to indicate that students in the high-communal learning context would significantly outperformed those in the low-communal context. Their study confirmed this hypothesis.

The participants in this study were from two urban public schools in a northeastern United States city. The sample was comprised of 78 African American fifth graders; 45 boys and 33 girls. These students' academic performance and behavior were within the middle 75% for their classrooms and schools, as determined by their teachers. They were also free or reduced-lunch participants.

The study was designed to create two different conditions during the learning phase; high communal and low communal. The high communal conditions were meant to reflect the afrocultural theme of communalism. In that

context, students worked in groups of three, sat at small tables that situated them closely to one another, and shared one set of learning materials. The experimenter sat at the table with the students and read them a prompt intended to encourage communal over individualistic tendencies in them. This prompt reminded these students that they should work hard and help each other because they were a group and had a common bond of school and community. It stressed the students' identification in the group and their duty to one another. The children were asked to hold hands with his or her neighbor.

In the low communal condition, students worked alone with individualized study materials. They sat at individual desks that were separated to limit their ability to interact with one another. The experimenter stood near the students and read them a prompt intended to reinforce the expression of individualistic over communal tendencies. The prompt stressed individual effort and informed the students that they could earn a reward if they improved their scores and that it was important that students work hard on their own toward that goal. It stressed responsibility to self.

The low and high communal groups each studied with the same materials, which consisted of a study packet that contained a workbook designed to teach basic concepts. The workbook introduced and defined the concept of estimation with an example of its use. It reviewed subskills. When the students finish the workbook, they may be able to solve estimation problems on a posttest. Boys and girls were divided equally among the high and low communal conditions. Otherwise, assignment was random. Each experimental session

included one group of three participants. Before the study sessions, each participant was pre-tested. The study sessions were twenty minutes long and began with the associated learning conditions' prompt. At the end of the study sessions, all students were tested at individual desks. Instructions for this post-test included a brief reinforcement of the learning condition prompt appropriate to the session.

The pretest scores across learning conditions were similar and were actually better than expected. They were also similar across gender groups. Analysis of the post-test results showed no significant gender effects either. The post-test performance did indicate students in the high-communal learning context significantly outperformed those in the low-communal context. Those in the high-communal learning context scored an average of 67%, while those in the low-communal scored 51%. $p < .01$ (p . 5 of 7). This confirmed the researchers' prediction that the finding of earlier studies conducted using language-based tasks would generalize to mathematics learning. Learning context appears to make a difference in performance. While it remains uncertain what about the communal learning environment improved performance among these students, this study supports the argument that incorporating culturally familiar themes such as communalism into the learning environment may generally improve the academic performance of African American children. However, it is unclear whether the high communal context learners in this study sought and received more assistance from the experimenters that monitored the lessons. It also remains uncertain from this and other studies whether the high

communal context would also serve to improve the performance of non-African American students.

Movement expressiveness has been identified as a prominent feature in the lives of low income African American children (Boykin and Cunningham, 2001). It relates to the movement repertoires of these children and an identified preference for polyrhythmic syncopation (2001). Previous research has shown that using polyrhythmic, syncopated music and allowing for movement expression in learning contexts improves low-income African American students' performance on various tasks. To determine whether such findings extend to movement expressive learning contexts was the purpose of a study conducted by Boykin and Cunningham (2001). They actually considered the effects of movement and music in both the context of learning and the content of learning materials. In this study, they asked whether there were facilitative effects of movement and music on African American children's cognitive performance. The researchers hypothesized that the African American children would perform better when either the content or context afforded movement expressiveness factors.

Sixty-four African American children participated in this study. They attended a large, mid-Atlantic urban elementary school and were between the ages of seven and eight years. An equal number of males and females participated and all of the participants were from low-income backgrounds.

At the beginning of the study (Boykin & Cunningham) the researchers administered questionnaires to evaluate the student subjects' self-rated motoric

activity levels on a measurement called the Child Activity Questionnaire (CAQ), which was a seven item inventory. Each item used a Likert scale, with 1 being almost never and 5 being almost always in response to questions about the frequency in which the child liked to be active. Another questionnaire evaluated the amount of physical stimulation that was provided in the children's home environments. It was the Home Stimulation Affordance Questionnaire (HSA), and it, too, used a Likert scale, with 1 being almost never and 5 being almost always. The total score on the CAQ and HSA were determined by adding the responses. The sample results of the CAQ questionnaire yielded an internal alpha of .72. (Boykin & Cunningham) The sample results of the HSA questionnaire yielded an internal alpha of .76. The student's classroom teachers also provided an assessment of their perceptions of the student's motivation for traditional classroom activities using the Teacher Rating of Classroom Motivation (TCM) and a rating assessment of the student's overall level of academic performance on the Achievement Rating Scale (ACH). The TCM is also a Likert type scale and contains five items that seek to measure the teachers' perceptions of their students' motivation for traditional classroom activities. A one means almost never and a five means almost always on the scale. The ACH contains only one item and asks the teachers to rate the students' overall academic performance from one (poor) to five (excellent).

After the questionnaires were completed, the students listened to a story presented in a context of High Movement Expression (HME), and in a context of Low Movement Expression (LME). These contexts were paired with both High

Movement Themes (HMT) in the story and Low Movement Themes (LMT). Each student participated in both contexts. Each student was randomly assigned to either the LMT or HMT content condition.

The students were tested immediately after each presentation by being verbally read the questions; if they couldn't write the answers someone wrote their answers for them. They were tested for encoding (identifying names, events, and actions in the story) and inference processing (identifying relationships between events, and between characters and events.) They were asked ten open-ended, fill in blank questions, distinguishing this study from one conducted by Allen and Butler (1996), that had used multiple choice questions.

The researchers found that the students performed significantly better if exposed to the HMT rather than the LMT stories, and the HME context over the LME context. Students' encoding performance was significantly better than their inferencing performance. Also, post-hoc analyses revealed that while there was a relatively small difference between performance scores with LMT under the LME context, performance was significantly higher with the HMT than the LMT story content under the HME context.

Next, the researchers assessed the relationship among the questionnaire scores and the performance scores. These analyses concluded that the more active students are, the greater they rate the amount of stimulation in their home. Also, the higher the student was rated in motivation for traditional classroom activities, the higher he or she rated in overall achievement. Finally, the greater the teacher's perception of the student's motivation for traditional classroom

activities, the lower the student rated his own activity level and the activity level in his home. The data also suggested that poorer school performance is related to a more active child and more active home. But, high ratings on the active child/active home category correlated positively with performance under the HME.

Ultimately, the results confirmed the prediction that African-American students' overall performances were significantly better under the HME than the LME context, and confirmed past studies finding the facilitative effects of incorporating movement and music on African American students' cognitive reasoning performance. Enhanced performance with the HME context appeared under both the high and low movement theme conditions (HMT & LMT). Performance clearly was best with HME and HMT.

One thing missing in this study but acknowledged by the authors was the need for inclusion of other groups besides African American students to test the limits and the generalizability of their findings. This is important. There are both political and practical implications to modifying the classroom environment, the context, and lesson content to meet the needs of African American students that prefer high movement expressiveness in a multicultural classroom or any classroom where the students are not mainly such African American students. For one thing, a high movement environment may be beneficial for some and terribly distracting for others. For another, students with physical limitations may feel alienated and excluded. Nevertheless, this study provides some support for

the argument that at least African American children benefit from greater movement in the classroom.

A study that did include both African American and White students in evaluating the affect of cultural themes in learning contexts was conducted by Allen and Butler (1996). In this quantitative study, the researchers sought to establish that context could influence performance. They found that it did under the conditions of this study. This study was premised on previous ones (Boykin & Allen, 1988; Allen & Boykin, 1991) that had found low-income African American students performed better on an association task when the learning context provided the opportunity for movement and music and White children's performance was impeded in the learning context. They hypothesized that African American students also would demonstrate better analogical reasoning when information was presented in a high-movement expressive learning context (1996). They also predicted that White children would show better analogical reasoning in a low-movement expressive learning context (1996). They sought by this study (1996) to extend the generalizability of the previous studies' findings to other types of cognitive tasks; arguably more cognitively demanding tasks. They chose to use analogical reasoning because it is closely associated with general intellectual functioning. The analogical reasoning tasks they employed required the study participants to use encoding, inferring, and mapping skills.

There were 28 study participants. Fifteen were low-income African American and thirteen were White children from middle-income families. The children attended a public school in a moderate-sized northeastern city where a

relatively high percentage of African American students attended. They used an audio cassette recording of a rhythmic tune as music played in one of the learning contexts. Two fables were read to the students. Each took seven minutes to present.

Two learning contexts were created and each child participated in both. In the high movement expressiveness (HME) context, the story was read with the accompaniment of the beat of a rhythmic tune, and the children were asked to sit or stand near the reader, or experimenter. They were also encouraged to move and clap to the beat of the tune. In the low movement expressiveness (LME) context, the experimenter read the story aloud while standing in front of the children. The students were not given the opportunity to move during the story and no music was played. The experimenter who read the stories was an African American female. Although a White female experimenter was present during all of the learning sessions, she did not give any of the presentations. Her role was to help with the assessment. In both learning contexts, students were in groups of four. There was one learning trial under each context and a one-week interval between the two sessions of the experiment. Students heard a different story under each context, and these were switched from week one to two. Measures were taken to control information sharing among the students.

Immediately after the learning experiences, the students were given a multiple choice assessment designed to reach the three processes mentioned above: encoding, inferring and mapping. The questions and response choices were read to the students while the students could read along. They were

instructed to circle the best response to each question. Two experimenters administered the assessment, each presenting the assessment to two of the four children in the group.

In the analysis of the assessments, the researchers first determined whether there were any performance differences detected due to the type of story read, the order of the learning context presentations, and the gender of the subject. These variables showed no significant effects on the students' performances. For this reason, these variables were not considered in the subsequent analysis (1996).

This study's intent was to assess the interaction between race, learning context, and the three types of analogical reasoning skills tested. Because the encoding scores had a different range due to more types of these questions asked, all scores were converted into z scores. This way, the researchers avoided the incorrect assumption that the three types of processes assessed were qualitatively equal.

The data showed that there was a two-way interaction between ethnic group and learning context (1996). ($p < .000$). An analysis of this interaction showed that the African American students' performance was significantly better under the HME learning context than the LME context. Conversely, the White students' performance was significantly better under the LME than the HME context. Furthermore, the African American and White children's overall performances did not differ significantly. Finally, the type of cognitive process did not interact with either ethnic group or learning context variables (1996).

Considering this study's findings in light of those it was premised upon (Boykin & Allen 1988) and (Allen & Boykin, 1991), the apparent facilitative effect of a high movement and music context does not seem to be limited to the specific types of tasks. When the best performances of each ethnic group were compared, both performed comparably. Interestingly, the demonstrated benefits of the different contexts to the two groups occurred despite the difference in socioeconomic status in the two groups. The study lends strong support for the theory that providing learning experiences in a context that reflects African American students' cultural experiences increases those students' performance and serves to equalize such performance with that of their White peers, even peers of a higher socioeconomic status. It is also supported by the theory regarding the role of the sociocultural context in learning (Rogoff, 1990).

The study (1996) leaves some questions. The researchers suggested that learning material used was not particularly meaningful and that similar studies should be conducted using math and reading concepts. Additionally, the assessment tool was a multiple choice test, leaving the possibility that students made correct selections based upon recognition or recall rather than analogical reasoning. Although not mentioned by the researchers, the use of an African American experimenter to lead all of the learning experiences could be a variable that was not considered.

Another cultural theme found to be present in African American culture is verve (Bailey & Boykin, 2001). However, it was rarely identified in the classroom Boykin et al observed as part of their qualitative study (2005). Yet in a study

conducted by Boykin (1982), high stimulation levels were observed in the homes of African American children. Boykin and Bailey (2000b) examined African American children's home experiences and found that those children described their home environments as being lively places with high stimulation and highly varied physical activities as well as engagement in many activities simultaneously.

Given previous findings from research on the theoretical concept of *verve*, Bailey & Boykin (2001) asked in their quantitative study whether African American students will have greater academic task performance as well as motivation to perform a task in a high versus low variability context. Furthermore, it sought to discover whether there is any correlation between those students' home stimulation level and to their preference for variability and, ultimately, whether there is a correlation between African American students' home stimulation and variability preference levels and task performance and motivation in the high variability context.

The study participants were forty-three third grade and 29 fourth grade African American children (35 males and 37 females) who attended a public school in a major northeastern city. All of these participants were of low-income status.

Correlational analyses were performed and reported separately for the third and fourth grade participants on the home stimulation perception questionnaire (2001). With respect to the third graders, no significant relations were shown, but there were for the fourth graders. It was believed that this may

have been due to developmental differences in these students. With the fourth-grade participants, a positive correlation was found between the students' reported home stimulation level and preference for task variability. This same correlation was not found among the third grade participants. Overall performance on the tasks was significantly greater when the tasks were presented in the high variability context. When the academic task-types, spelling, math, vocabulary, and picture sequencing, were considered separately, performance also was significantly better in the high variability context. Participants reported greater motivation to perform the tasks when they were offered in the high versus low variability context. Moreover, reported greater variability preference was significantly related to lower task performance in the low variability context. Home stimulation perception and variability preference were also positively related to task motivation in the high variability context for the fourth graders. This result is similar to a previous study conducted (Tuck & Boykin, 1989).

Four measurement tools were used in this study (2001). First, a measure of home stimulation level was obtained for each child through a five-item home stimulation affordance questionnaire. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to obtain self-reported information from the participants regarding the frequency of occurrence of various physical stimulus activities within the participants' home environments. An earlier version of this questionnaire obtained an internal reliability coefficient of .61 for an African American sample in an earlier sample conducted by Boykin.

Second, a “Pathway Preference Measure (PPM) was administered to the participants to determine their individual variability preference. The scoring method for this measurement produced an inter-rater reliability of .99 in prior research conducted by Boykin. The score on the PPM was used to compute two different expressions of variability preference. One determines mean variability preference across five trials and the other determines the change in variability preference across them.

Third, because they assess the kind of cognitive problem solving skills identified in actual classroom settings and on standardized achievement assessments, four academic task-types were constructed for this study: spelling, vocabulary, math and picture-sequencing tasks. The participants were asked to complete tasks in all of these four categories in two different contexts, one of high variability and one in low. The low variability context meant the tasks were presented in sequence according to task types. The high variability context meant that the students were given the tasks in a random sequence; the task types were mixed. A counterbalancing was performed in the administration of these tasks to eliminate systematic bias. Half of the children did the tasks in the low variability context first, the other half did the tasks in the high variability context first. The students’ performances on these tasks were measured in a way to maximize the effect of the task variability format manipulation.

The students’ motivation to do these tasks was evaluated through a four-point continuum questionnaire. The questionnaire asked the students two questions about their preference for performing the tasks under the high or low

variability contexts, two questions about how much effort they applied while completing the tasks, and two questions about how much they would like to complete the tasks again in each context.

Overall, greater motivation and performance were shown in the high variability settings. These results contribute to the argument that cultural contexts matter in the academically-relevant performance and motivation of low-income African American students.

The researchers' hypotheses were supported by the findings involving the fourth grade participants and overall, with respect to all of the participants. Developmental differences between these students may account for differences between the two in some of the results. This study increases the generalizability of Boykin and associates' position that the inclusion of afro-cultural themes in learning contexts will increase African American students' performance as well as motivation.

Group learning is a strategy that has been widely promoted for various reasons. It is believed to improve academic achievement, the development of social skills, and, in heterogenous groupings, to increase students' acceptance of diversity (Arends, 1997). Its value for African American students may extend beyond these purposes. While cooperative learning groups are tied to the extrinsic motivation of individual achievement, for African American students, it has been suggested that the experience of group learning itself is the intrinsic motivation and results in enhanced academic performance (Dill & Boykin, 2000). Dill and Boykin stated that communalism, a central theme in African American

culture, “connotes a sense of special connectedness with and responsibility to one’s group” (p.68). In contrast, European Americans tend to value individual success and “define the self as independent and autonomous of the group where personal goals are given priority” (p. 68).

Dill and Boykin examined the functional use of communalism and individualism on learning (2000), but they included in their study consideration of peer learning; that is, working in dyads, to determine its affect in comparison. Others had found that Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT), which allows students to engage one another in tasks, aids in the growth of particular skills and that students working in an RPT context outperformed those working alone. Dill and Boykin offered three hypotheses. One, students would endorse communal values over individual ones. They found support for this in the study’s results. Two, that communal learning contexts would assist in a text recall task more than a individual learning context would and at least as much as a structured peer learning context (dyad). The study’s results only partially supported this hypothesis; the communal learning context was found to be superior to individual and peer contexts. Three, they expected that participants’ communal orientation would be positively correlated with performance and experiences under a communal learning context. They found partial support for this expectation. Although significant correlations were found between cultural orientation and experience related to the learning context, no significant correlations were noted between the participants’ personal beliefs and their task performances.

Participants in this study (Dill & Boykin, 2000) were 36 male and 36 female African American students from low-income families who attended a urban public school in the Midwestern United States. They were in fifth grade and either 10 or 11 years old.

The participants were told the purpose of the study. They then individually completed a Personal Beliefs and Behaviors (PBB) questionnaire at the beginning of the study. It measured the participants' preferences for communal versus individual beliefs and behaviors through a four-point Likert-type scale allowing for the answers ranging from "not at all like me" to "very much like me" (2000, p. 70). The questionnaire's communal items were created "from five predominating themes the Afro-cultural definition of communalism: fundamental interdependence, social orientation, group duty, identity, and sharing and helping" (p. 70). Scenarios used to assess preference for individual themes favored the importance of acting on one's own. These scenarios focused on the importance of material possessions to reflect one's self worth, individual responsibility, and the conception of self as exclusive. To reduce response bias, five filler items were included.

Participants then completed a text recall task. This required them to directly recall and make inference about information they read in two texts. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the three learning contexts in which they performed the recall task. Twelve female and male students were assigned to each context, and during the learning sessions, the participants were

put into homogenous groups for gender. Thus, there were six students per session for a total of 12 sessions.

The learning contexts were arranged as follows. For the communal learning context, the participants were seated together with a peer and shared one set of materials that included instructions, text, and writing materials. The instructions explained only why it was important for the participants to help each other do well. After the 30-minute learning session, the students immediately completed a performance task individually. No rewards or performance criterion were used.

In the peer tutoring context, participants were seated with a peer and shared one set of materials. They were directed to take turns reading the material and create their own set of questions based upon that material. They were to take turns asking their peer the questions they created. They were then told that they had to jointly answer an average of 75% of the questions correctly in order to receive a reward. These learning sessions were also 30 minutes long with 10 minutes to complete the performance measure on their own while seated separately.

In the individual context, students were each given their own set of materials and seated individually. They were instructed to read the material on their own, generate questions based upon it, and answer the questions individually. If a participant answered 75% of the questions correctly on the performance measure, they would receive a reward. The same amount of time was afforded as in the other contexts.

The participants' mean performance under the communal, peer, and individual contexts were 6.67, 4.29, and 4.21, respectively, and post hoc analysis showed that the students assigned the communal learning context outperformed the other students at the .05 level of significance ($p < .05$). Using a scale analyzing the PBB questionnaire, the participants endorsed communal themes above the midpoint of 2.5, obtaining a mean endorsement of 2.95. The mean endorsement for individual items was 2.20. This difference was found to be statistically significant ($p < .001$). No statistical significance was found for gender.

The relationships between students' preference for communal versus individual beliefs and performance and motivation under assigned learning contexts were analyzed, and included data collected from students regarding their evaluation of the learning experience. There was not a significant association found between task performance and belief preference. However, under the communal context, higher communal preference endorsements were found to be associated with an increased agreement to participate in the study again ($p < .05$), with an increased sense of caring for their peer ($p < .01$), and a decreased preference for studying alone ($p < .01$). Under the peer context, higher communal endorsement was related with liking the learning phase of the study" ($p < .05$). It was also positively related to caring about their peer ($p < .05$). Finally, under the individual context, endorsement of individual beliefs correlated negatively with desire to participate in the project again ($p < .05$).

The participants' preference for communal over individualistic themes on the PBB is at least consistent with the proposition that communalism is important and valued among low-income African American children. Yet, considering personal beliefs alone, there were no significant correlations between task performance and personal beliefs. The hypothesis that learning in a communal context facilitates performance was only partly supported. A significant weakness in this study is its design. It does not account for variables other than communalism to explain performance such as the benefits of working in dyads or groups in general, regardless of the significance of communalism in one's culture. Students who worked together had the opportunity to share the work, to discuss the information contained in the learning materials, to check their own ideas against another's, and tap into each other's prior knowledge. Whether performance was impacted by these variables could be explored through a qualitative study that examines what occurs in the communal groups or dyads. Still, there were significant correlations found between participants' cultural orientations and their reported experiences in the learning contexts. This was demonstrated by the participants' expression of desire to do the project again in the communal context but not wanting to in the individual context (2000).

Dill et al recognized that their study could be extended and strengthened with the use of pretest in order to reduce the possibility that verbal or reading skills are confounding variables. It could also expand to include middle and upper income African American students to test the extent of the cultural orientation suppositions. It also would be helpful to conduct the study with

different aged participants to compare the salience of communal orientation to age.

Findings from a study conducted with African American college students supported the facilitating effects of communal learning contexts (Fullilove & Treisman, 1990). These researchers from the University of California at Berkeley (UCB), asked whether African American college students' participation in academically oriented peer groups would impact their academic achievement as well as persistence in the course of study? Specifically, they asked to what degree participation in a Mathematics Workshop Program (MWP) impacted participating students' mathematics performance and persistence, as measured by comparison of the final Math 1A grades earned by MWP and non-MWP participants. The data clearly suggested that the MWP succeeded in achieving its objectives of improving both achievement and persistence in the course of mathematics study.

First, a description of how the MWP was developed is necessary. African American and Chinese American undergraduates at UCB studying calculus were informally observed because the Chinese American students were disproportionately represented among the ranks of the strong students and the African American students among the ranks of the weak students. The objective was to examine what factors may explain this difference. Twenty African American and 20 American Chinese students who were enrolled in Mathematics 1A (first-semester calculus for scientists and engineers) were interviewed at frequent intervals during the 1975-76 school year. The main finding from this

study was that the students in the two groups used different strategies to prepare for exams and to do homework. The African American students were more likely to study alone. They separated their social lives from their study activities. In contrast, the Chinese Americans were more likely to combine their social lives and study time. They organized themselves into informal study groups. Some benefits of studying together conferred upon the Chinese American students were that they devoted 14 hours per week to math studies and assisted each other with difficult problems. If they could not solve problems together, they would seek of the assistance of a teaching assistant. Having study groups helped group members exchange information. They checked each others' work and offered each other any insights they had either from their own efforts or from conversations with the teaching assistants or professors. The African American students spent less time studying than the Chinese American students; an average of eight hours per week, which was the amount of time typically recommended by the math professors. Also, they did not generally seek help from one another or from teaching assistants.

The MWP study involved 646 African American undergraduates who entered UCB and enrolled in Mathematics 1A between 1973 and 1984. Students who did not complete the course to earn a grade were not included. Of the participating students, those who participated in MWP were compared with those who did not, as well as with other students who took Mathematics 1A, for achievement and persistence in mathematics coursework. Participation as a "workshop student" described any student who attended at least three workshop

sessions during any three-week period of the semester. Thus, the “workshop student” was a conservative classification designed to include a small number of students who enrolled in the program but declined to attend further after a few sessions. These minimal attendees had uniformly weaker performance than those who attended regularly, resulting in an understatement of the effect of continual attendance in the program as well as the overall impact the program may have had on persistence and academic performance. Other student categories were “regular admit” or “special admit”, depending on whether they were admitted to UCB using regular admissions criteria or admitted because of educational or financial disadvantage (Educational Opportunity Program participants).

The MWP was presented to freshman as an honors program that recruited first-year students of all races, but typically enrolls 80% African American and Hispanic students. Labeling it as an honors program was a conscious effort to attract students who perceived themselves as high achievers and who would demonstrate a willingness to work for academic achievement. At a program orientation, the MWP students were given four messages:

- MWP students are among the most successful math students at UCB;
- Some of UCB’s most impressive student leaders were participants in the MWP;
- Graduates earn degrees at rates comparable to White and Asian students at UCB;

- If students attend workshops regularly and work hard, they will likely succeed in first year math calculus and subsequent math courses at UCB.

As part of the MWP program, groups of five to seven students work together for two hours, twice per week, on worksheets containing carefully constructed, difficult problems. The students' primary responsibility in the workshops is to help each other solve the worksheet problems and understand the ideas on which they are based. They must be willing to spend at least some time during the workshop sessions sharing their ideas and critiquing their peers' work. They are encouraged to discuss the problems and instruct each other on them, much like the way the groups of Chinese American students had been observed operate. The workshop sessions were observed by a graduate student workshop leader. The students were asked to demonstrate the same skills they would later have to demonstrate on examinations.

The degree to which the MWP impacted the mathematics performance and persistence of participating students was measured by a comparison of final Mathematics 1A grades earned by MWP and non-MWP students. However, the findings from such a comparison were confounded by a variety of important factors. For one thing, MWP students are a self-selected group so their level of motivation or some other unmeasured intervening variable that may correlate with their decision to join the program and succeed in mathematics could have been the cause of their performance and persistence. The researchers did construct a variety of hypotheses that might explain any observed differences between MWP and non-MWP students. They tested their assumption that an

effective program would produce similar achievement levels regardless of differences in aptitude for math as measured by SAT Math scores or admission status. This was done by comparing workshop students in the same SAT score categories and admissions status categories; regular admits or membership in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

To control for differences in achievement that might be explained because of self-selection and, thus, motivation, the researchers examined three distinct periods in the MWP's history. The first period encompassed years before the establishment of the program; 1973 to 1977. This period provided baseline data about the performance of pre-MWP African American students. This data was used as a "control group", against which participation in the program could be compared. The second period covered years between 1978 and 1982, when the program was fully funded and served 57% of the African American students completing Math 1A. The third period was the period between fall of 1983 through fall of 1984, when less funding was available and thus fewer African American students could be served; only 23% of those completing Math 1A. The different funding levels were important. They suggested that participation in the MWP was more a function of funding than of individual student motivation to participate. From this, the researchers felt they reasonably could assume that if performance levels did not vary from the higher funding era to the lower funding era, it was the content of the program rather than its size or the characteristics of its students that accounted for any observed differences in performance.

The chi-square test was used to test the association between group membership and three outcome measures: 1) earning honors level grades in Math 1A, which was defined as a final grade of B-minus or better; 2) earning a failing grade, which was defined as a D-plus or less; and 3) persisting at UCB, which was defined as either graduating or being in good academic standing in the fall 1985 semester.

The failure rate among African American students in the control group from the first era (pre-MWP) was 33%. This did not differ statistically from those in the non-MWP group in the second era (40%) and third era (41%). The failure rate for the MWP group in the second era was just 3% and in the third era, which had reduced funding, the failure rate for MWP students was 7%. These amounts did differ significantly from that of all three eras of non-MWP students. ($p < 0.0000$.) (1990).

Dramatic results also were demonstrated in the evaluation of students who earned honors level grades in Math 1A. MWP students were two to three times more likely to earn grades at the honors level than non-MWP students, regardless the year enrolled. ($p < 0.01$).

As mentioned above, the data was analyzed by dividing students into subgroups according to their admission status and SAT-Math scores. Regardless of how MWP and non-MWP students were subdivided, two trends emerged. First, when MWP and non-MWP students within a given category were compared, MWP students significantly outperformed their non-MWP peers. Second, even MWP students that were generally presumed to perform poorly

(special admission students) outperformed non-MWP students from presumably stronger backgrounds. This was most significant when the researchers considered the SAT Math scores. There was no significant difference in the final grades of B-minus or better between MWP students with SAT-math scores in the lowest triad of score distribution and non-MWP students with scores in the highest triad. Finally, MWP students of all eras, irrespective of how they were grouped, were two to three times more likely to earn grades at the higher score level than non-MWP students in comparable categories.

With respect to persistence and graduation rates of MWP and non-MWP students, the data demonstrated that MWP students who entered UCB in 1978 earned degrees or were enrolled in a mathematics-based major by the spring of 1985 at a rate of 65%. The rate among non-MWP students who entered UCB during this time was 41%. The rate of pre-MWP African American students who entered UCB in 1983 was 39%. Comparisons of persistence with SAT-Math scores was highly significant. MWP persisters with SAT-M scores in the lowest triad were higher than the proportion of non-MWP persisters with SAT-M scores in the highest triad from the same period. These MWP high persisters also persisted at rates higher than those African American students in the control group who had SAT-Math scores in the top triad.

The researchers proposed three explanations for the outcomes of their study. First, they contend the workshops create an academically oriented peer group whose participants value success and academic achievement. Finding success in a typically challenging subject creates commitment to maintaining

success. Further, when success is highly prized, students work hard to achieve it. Related to this is the second explanation: students spend more time on learning tasks and the workshops give them the opportunity to spend this time efficiently. Third, these first-year in college MWP participants acquire, through the workshops, social and study skills that they then use throughout their college careers and become connected to a network of participants in the program.

The Fullilove & Treisman study (1990) did not purport to investigate the value of incorporating the afrocultural theme of communalism into the learning context of the African American college student participants. Instead, the researchers sought to incorporate into the learning experience strategies that had been observed among successful Asian American students. Still, those strategies included a group oriented approach where students were required to help each other solve math problems, understand math concepts, share their ideas and critique their peers' work. They were encouraged to discuss the problems and instruct each other on them. Such strategies are similar to the many communal learning contexts presented in the studies conducted by Boykin and associates discussed above. While Fullilove and Treisman offer three reasons for the programs' success, arguably a connection between the participants' cultural familiarity with the communal context worked in their favor. Is it possible that having been schooled for years in a culturally incongruent context, that is, one that stressed individualism, African American students had been deprived of their use of the cultural capital they had originally brought to school? Perhaps Fullilove and Treisman's study supports Boykin et al's in this

way. On the other hand, perhaps the study sheds light on the benefits to all students of learning communally.

The Role of Student Perceptions

Several studies have considered the impact of student perceptions on learning. Howard (2002) considered students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching and of their own academic identities (2003), and Williams, Garza, Hodge, & Breaux (1999) considered students' perceptions of their teachers and whether teacher race had any impact. Sankofa, Hurley, Allen & Boykin (2005) and Fisher (2005) considered students' perceptions of high achievers, and Steele (1997) considered the effect of stereotyping on students' perceptions of themselves and further, on student performance. Flowers, Milner, and Moore (2003) and Adams and Singh (1998) used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) to evaluate the impact of student aspirations, motivations and perceptions on achievement. If we want to discover why Black students, as a group, are failing in school, are performing poorly on standardized tests, are not graduating or attending college, it is important to get their opinions about their teachers as well as investigate the possibility that racism may play a role in student performance. The studies that follow provide insight into students' perspectives.

How do students' perceive what researchers describe as culturally congruent teaching? Do they consider such practices effective? Howard followed his 2001 study of effective teachers of African American students with one that looked to the students of their teachers for insight (2002). Three central

themes emerged from this qualitative study. The students reported the presence of family, community and home characteristics in these teachers' classroom. They also identified what Howard described as culturally connected caring. Finally, the students described their teachers' passionate and sometimes stern verbal expressions as an indication that they cared, and the students felt this increased their learning and achievement.

The students involved in this study came from five urban elementary and secondary schools in the northwestern and midwestern United States. They were purposefully chosen and included 17 girls and 13 boys. They were a cross-selection based upon their academic achievement and classroom behavior, per their teachers' classification. They represented the low, medium, and high achievement and behavioral categories. This way, the study was less likely to obtain uniformly glowing recommendations of teachers that may not be representative of student opinions and perceptions.

Data was collected during the 1998-1999 school year through semi-structured interviews. Each student was interviewed once individually and once in a group setting where two or three students involved in the study also was present. During these interviews, which occurred on school premises, the students were asked about their perceptions of school in general and about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their teachers' pedagogy. Data was also collected from classroom observations conducted two to three times per week. These visits lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. The reason for classroom observations was to compare students' classroom performance, engagement

and achievement with their interview responses. A constant comparative method was employed in the data collection, as it was assumed that collection and analysis are recursive. That is, one informs the other throughout the study. Emerging patterns and themes were identified.

To assist in understanding the students' perceptions, the teachers whose practices the students described need to be described themselves. These teachers had different philosophical approaches to teaching. One was an African American male that had seven years of middle school teaching experience. He was in his fourth year of teaching eighth-grade U.S. History and government at a charter school that incorporated African American cultural heritage in its curriculum. This teacher sought to develop his students' critical consciousness. Another of the teachers was an African American female who taught fifth grade. She was in her tenth year of teaching and had received an excellence award. A third teacher taught fourth grade and was a Haitian immigrant and former corporate attorney who left that profession because she wanted to make a difference in young peoples' lives. A fourth teacher taught fourth grade and had taught for 20 years. She had taught special education and believed that African American students were often misdiagnosed as special needs students. Yet another teacher was an African American woman that had taught for 15 years, six of those in a second grade classroom. To elaborate on the study's emergent themes, first was the presence of family, community and home characteristics mirrored in the classroom. One way this was accomplished was through the use of daily rituals and classroom traditions such as morning circle time, which gave

the students a chance to sit and talk with their friends and share their interests. One of the teachers talked to her students about the importance of not shaming the classroom family, themselves, or the teacher. Each of the students in her class that were interviewed expressed the importance of not shaming and leaving a good impression with others. They noted how important it was to be held accountable for their own actions and of maintaining their reputation. Many students liked their teachers because they actually resembled their mothers or other family members in terms of their mannerisms, modes of interaction, and communication styles.

Culturally connected caring was another identified theme. This referred to the students' identification of displays of caring that occurred within a familiar cultural context. That is, the students did not have to abandon their own cultural integrity and could trust the nurturing patterns and forms of affection that took place. Many of the middle school students expressed how they could tell their teacher cared about them because he asked them about themselves and their home lives, which established a personal connection between students and teacher. Another way culturally connected caring was shown, according to the students, was through the range of emotions a teacher displayed when expressing approval or disapproval of student academic performance. One teacher even cried in front of her students when she was happy and proud of them. She brought her own life into the classroom, showing emotion when her father died and telling the students that she was able to deal with that a little better when the students did well academically and behaviorally. While such

behavior in some cultures might be called laying a guilt trip on someone, these students responded to this positively, and sought to give their teacher the support she needed by complying with her requests. They saw her as a human being with emotions, just like them. Some of the students indicated that there was a connection between a teacher's display of care and the amount of effort they put forth. Sometimes, as one student described, it is the "little things" a teacher does that show you he cares, such as giving you a ride home from school when you miss the bus, even when it is out of his way. This type of teacher effort showed holistic or comprehensive concern for the student; concern that extended beyond the context of the classroom. Such a holistic approach was identified in Howard's 2001 study discussed above. The students also recognized their teachers' emotional or passionate verbal expressions as an indication that they cared. Although the students reported that these teachers sometimes sternly expressed anger at them, students at times, they also showed care and concern and the students were motivated by the angry expressions to do better. These findings, the researcher explained, are consistent with the classification of "warm demanders", described in a study done by Kleinfeld (1975). The students expressed that stern and affirming communication increased their learning and achievement. The students' positive reactions to teacher sternness were not universal within this study (2002). Some students instead did not like it when their teachers yelled and it make them fearful to answer questions in class. However, the researcher noted that many African American students

experienced authoritarian parenting styles in their homes, and that the "warm demander" style may be familiar to such children (2002).

Although there is no suggestion the students involved in Howard's 2002 study were taught by teachers identified in his 2001 study, the mutuality of these two studies in their descriptions of successful teachers are remarkable and strengthen both studies' findings. Many of the students' positive descriptions of their teachers and classroom environment were qualities present in the descriptions of successful teachers in Howard's 2001 study described above. Teachers in that study (2001) used a holistic approach. Students described such teachers positively as teachers they knew cared about them (2002). As students generally identified as positive their teachers' verbal communication styles (2002), teachers in the 2001 study incorporated African American discourse patterns in their communications with students in order to connect students' out of school experience with the content of their studies in school. They also supported the use of BEV while explicitly teaching and promoting student proficiency in standard English. Additionally, the teachers' use and acceptance of BEV mirrors the community and home characteristics the students' identified in the 2002 study.

Although the teacher qualities positively identified in this study (2002) have much in common with other qualitative studies reviewed here, (Ladson-Billings (1994), Howard (2001), like those studies, there is no clear connection between these qualities and positive student achievement. The selection of students for this study included high, middle, and low achievers, further calling

to question whether these qualities and attributes described as culturally congruent actually aid in academic achievement.

Ladson-Billings (1994) argued seeing color is basic to culturally congruent pedagogy. But do students' perceptions of their teachers' color impact academic achievement? This question was raised in a study conducted among community college students (Williams, Garza, Hodge and Breaux, 1999). The study asked, specifically, whether there would be a change over a semester in the perceptions and experiences of college students regarding their instructor's race/ethnicity.

The students involved in this study were enrolled in a course on Race and Ethnic Groups in America. These 288 students were registered for this class in the fall of 1996, the spring 1997, the fall of 1997, or the spring of 1998. The college was predominantly attended by females, and over 87% of the students involved in the study were female. Over half were white, 18% were African-American, 9% Hispanic and 8% Asian or other.

For each of the four semesters, two or three sections of the class were offered by instructors who were White, African American and Hispanic. The White and Hispanic instructors were the same during the four semesters; however, there were two different African American instructors. The White instructor taught two sections during the two years, the Hispanic three, one African American taught three and the other two. The instructors took several measures to ensure that all sections were substantially the same in content, in distribution of time and in evaluation of student performance. All classes were

structured around a lecture format enhanced by audio-visuals and class discussion.

Students completed surveys before and after completion of their class to measure student change between expected (at the beginning of the semester) influence of the instructor's race/ethnicity on course content, teaching methodology, and pedagogy on actual perceptions of this influence at the end of the semester. Prefaced by, "Do you think the instructor's race/ethnicity will influence the following," students were asked to answer "yes" or "no" to seven items: (1) grading, (2) what the student received from the class overall, (3) presentation of class material (bias), (4) management of class discussion, (5) giving the various racial/ethnic groups studied equal treatment (time), (6) overall objectivity, and (7) fairness in presentation of content about the various ethnic groups under study. The researchers dropped this last item from the analysis of data because it was not clearly differentiated from item three. Students were asked the same questions at the beginning and end of the semester. They did not receive any operational definitions of these variables. Each variable was self-defined, no doubt subjectively, by the students. This initial self-definition was one of the research objectives. The researchers wanted to tap students' preliminary, intuitive responses at the beginning of the semester and their more thoughtful ones at the end.

With the exception of grading, almost 25% to 40% of students expected that the instructor's race/ethnicity would influence course content, teaching methodology, and pedagogy. However, at the end of the semester, with the

exception of grading, the proportion of students who actually thought the instructor's race/ethnicity made a difference had declined to 15 percent. At the beginning of the semester, a few students (3.8%) expected the instructor's race/ethnicity to be a factor in grading, and more students (4.5%) at the end of the semester perceived that the instructor's race/ ethnicity influenced grading. While less than a 1 percent increase, this was, nevertheless, the only variable to show an increase in importance over the semester.

The data suggested two tentative conclusions. First, students were less likely to expect the instructor's race/ethnicity to influence grading than other variables. However, a few grade-conscious students seemed sensitive to anything that could influence their grades. Second, a sizeable portion of students (almost 25% to 40%) were aware enough of their instructor's race/ethnicity that they expected it to be a factor in the conduct and content of the course. While the researchers did not ask students for positive or negative assessments, they interpreted these findings as suggesting that the actual experience with an instructor's race/ ethnicity can be beneficial, in that, at the end of one semester, fewer students thought that the instructor's race/ethnicity was an important influence than was expected at the beginning.

The collected data suggested that the dynamics of race/ethnic relations in the classroom went far beyond that of black and white. In fact, the dynamics between African Americans and Hispanics appeared to be among the most interesting of this research. Although the data was not sophisticated enough to support conclusions about changes from negative expectations to positive

perceptions of minority faculty members, it suggested that students could change their initial impressions or expectations that may have been based on the unknown or on stereotypes. It was also clear from the data that White students were less reactive to the instructor's race/ethnicity than were African American and Hispanic students. However, the data suggested that the minority students were more likely than White students to finish the semester placing substantially reduced importance on the instructor's race/ ethnicity. The authors called for research to determine if these changes in perceptions over the semester represented disappointment or acceptance of minority teachers as a natural part of the educational experience.

The sample size with respect to the student participants and longevity of the data collection are relative strengths of this study, but the sample makeup – over 87% women – could influence the validity, value and generalizability of the finding that there is an increase in student acceptance of an instructor of a different race over a semester. Also, the researchers noted some limitations of their study. Specifically, it was impossible to control for instructor's personality, style of lecturing, or interaction with students. Since the student-participants' academic achievement was not a factor in this study, there is no data to analyze. However, the impact of personality, pedagogical style and interaction with students may have played a role in the change in student perception. The course involved in this study, Race and Ethnic Groups in America, was a sociology class that met the college's core curriculum requirement for multicultural content and for sociology majors. Fifty-five percent of the students

that took the course were sociology majors. This type of course and students drawn to it also may have influenced the findings regarding student perception.

Ogbu proposed that African-American students' low academic achievement stems from the involuntary minority status of African Americans (2004). Involuntary minorities develop secondary cultural differences, which evolved as coping mechanisms under oppressive conditions. Involuntary minorities in general have no incentive to give up these differences as long as they feel they are still oppressed. Instead, the secondary differences become markers of involuntary minorities' collective identity. One secondary difference is resistance to the values of mainstream culture, including the value of becoming educated.

Boykin (2005), on the other hand, has argued that the cause of low academic achievement among African American students is related to a deficit not within the students, but within the schools. He argued that schools have failed to embrace African American culture and place it in the center of the learning context and content presented in school.

A study focused on student perceptions about and attitudes toward high-achieving students suggests that both Ogbu's and Boykin's arguments had merit (Sankofa, Hurley, Allen & Boykin, 2005). In this study, the researchers sought to extend the research findings of Marryshow (1992). Marryshow had attempted to determine whether the poor academic performance of Black children was due to a negative attitude among such children toward achievement in school or due to feelings of alienation "that are the result of a complex interplay between culture,

expectations, and learning outcomes” (Sankofa et al, 2005, p. 2) as advanced by Boykin and his associates. To do so, Marrayshow investigated Black students’ attitudes toward four high achievers whose approaches to high achievement differed. He assessed these students’ *social* attitudes and perceptions about achievers with culturally distinct orientations. He asked whether these social attitudes were dependent upon other characteristics the high achievers displayed. He questioned whether there would be a preference for high achievers that achieve via attitudes and behaviors that are congruent with African American cultural values. He found that the study participants did not reject all high achieving students but only those that exhibited mainstream cultural behavior in their pursuit of achievement.

In the study conducted by Sankofa et al (2005) the researchers investigated students’ *academic* attitudes and perceptions of high achievers. The participants in this study were 80 African American children ranging from ages eight to 11. Thirty-nine were girls and 41, boys, and came from a suburban school in the southern United States. These students were bussed to the suburban school from lower income Black communities and were free or reduced fee school lunch eligible. The students were identified by the schools’ administrative staff.

The researchers developed a measurement to assess the students’ attitudes toward four types of high achievers, which it called the Learning Context Scenario (LCS). This measurement included four scenarios approximately 90 words long that described various high achieving students. Two of the scenarios

described high achievers in learning contexts that showed individualism or interpersonal competitiveness, which were considered to be behaviors and attitudes characteristic of mainstream cultural values. The other two scenarios were of high achievers in learning scenarios that exhibited behaviors thought to be congruent with African American cultural values; specifically, communalism and verve. Verve describes a preference for high stimulation and variability in activities. The study participants were asked to answer three sets of six questions after having been read each scenario. Two of the six were labeled C-Own. These questions assessed the participants' own attitudes toward the achiever described. Two were labeled C-Parent, and assessed what the participant predicted his or her parents' perceptions of the achiever would be. Finally, two were identified as C-Peer, and assessed what the participants believed their peers' attitudes and perceptions of the achiever would be. The students were tested in mixed gender groups of seven to 15 students, and were excused from their classes to do so. The students were assured that their responses would be confidential. The students read the scenarios to themselves and answered the questions. The achievers they read about were of the same gender as each of the student participants.

The results of the C-Own questions showed an overall endorsement of all four achiever scenarios, but showed a greater preference for the verve and communal high achievers over the mainstream-oriented ones ($p < .001$)(2005). The results of the C-Parent and C-Peer scores showed a similar pattern of significance. In both instances, $p < .001$. In evaluating the relationships among

the participants' ratings of the four high achievers, the researchers found that the ratings of interpersonal competitive high achievers were positively correlated with their ratings of individualism high achievers. Similarly, the ratings of verve high achievers and communalism high achievers were positively correlated. This applied to the C-Own, C-Parent, and C-Peer questions.

The study's (2005) results differ from Marryshow's to the extent that the students did not reject achievers with mainstream orientations in the academic context, but rather, endorsed those with African American orientations to a significantly greater degree. This also held true for the students' expectations regarding their parents' and peers' ratings. The researchers offered suggestions about the difference in findings. Perhaps the students' responses were a reflection of their awareness that mainstream learning orientations are the only ones approved in school and the students therefore had to endorse these even while showing their preference for African American orientations. The sample also may have impacted the outcomes. In Marryshow's study (1992), the participants were low-income African American children attending a predominantly African American school, and the school was located in a low-income neighborhood. In the present study (Sankofa et al, 2005), the participants were low-income African American students, but they were bussed to a predominantly White school located in an affluent neighborhood. These students' exposure to the predominantly White schools may have sensitized them to the cultural demands of their mainstream classrooms.

Fisher considered student self-perceptions in search of differences among high and low achieving students (2005). Specifically, she investigated the differences in self-concept, academic behavior, and self-reported personal experiences between high-achieving African-heritage students and underachieving African-heritage students. In this study, the researcher referred to the students examined as “African-heritage” students to encompass the diversity of “Black” students, some of whom may be African-American, some Afro-Caribbean and some recent African immigrants.

To begin the study, teachers at a Massachusetts high school were asked to identify African-heritage students who were high achieving and under-achieving. Teachers were asked to identify specific characteristics for members of these two groups. When these characteristics had been established, they selected students for the study that had at least three or more of the identifiable characteristics. This amounted to 26 students between ages 14 and 16. These 26 students formed two focus groups; one for high achievers and one for low. The number of students in those groups was further whittled down because of students’ lack of time, opting out, or dropping out of school. Because of the students’ schedules, two focus groups of high achievers were formed. One group had three students; the other had six. This resulted in an asymmetry of data. The underachiever group formed only one focus group containing five students. The focus groups then met over a four-month period with each session lasting 60-90 minutes. The researcher facilitated discussion sessions and audio-recorded them.

The overall questions that guided this research were 1) What experiences have under-achieving and high-achieving Black students had that they feel were obstacles or barriers to success in school? 2) What experiences have these students had that helped them succeed in school? and 3) How are the experiences and reflection of the high-achieving and under-achieving students similar or different? These guided the focus group discussions.

Before the focus group sessions, the students completed a demographic questionnaire, asking about ethnicity, age, gender, parental education, family socioeconomic status, and extracurricular activities. They then completed the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (PHCSCS, Piers & Harris, 1999). It is a self-concept assessment scale developed in the 1960s and contains 80 items covering six subscales: 1) physical appearance and attributes, 2) anxiety, intellectual and school status, 3) behavior, 4) happiness and satisfaction, and 6) popularity.

The researcher noted that all of the high achievers were immigrant or first-generation U.S. citizens. Also, they were bi-lingual. All of the underachievers were U.S. born and their families were in the U.S. for multiple generations. They were monolingual. It is unknown whether the researcher considered Black English Vernacular a language when she identified the underachievers as monolingual. Ethnic diversity emerged as a primary factor for high versus underachievement.

The high achievers cited many barriers to academic achievement, including teacher stereotyping of Black students as troublemakers. It appeared

that some students internalized this stereotype, themselves viewing many Black students as troublemakers. Others showed a desire to prove these teachers wrong, and show that they are capable and worthy of academic success. Confidence was a key contributor to the high-achievers' academic success. Academic success appeared to be a direct result of high self-concepts, time management skills, parental support and high expectations, the desire to prove stereotypes wrong, and the desire to be responsible for their own lives and control their destiny. The PHCSCS showed high levels of stress and anxiety among these students.

The underachievers' reported obstacles to success that included both teacher stereotypes and their own reports of being smart yet lazy. They did not feel supported or encouraged at school and mediocre grades were accepted at home, all of which appeared to contribute to underperformance. Many reported having interests other than academic pursuits, and saw "financial and emotional opportunities outside of the traditional educational system" (p. 4 of 8).

The researcher compared her findings to Ogbu's oppositional culture model, which proposed that the circumstances under which a group enters into the United States affects that groups' success in school. Involuntary minorities, having been previously placed into a subordinate "caste" system in society, such as African Americans, suffer low effort syndrome as a reaction to the oppression experienced by their parents, grandparents and other adults in their lives. Given their culture's historical experience, they believe society will not reward them for their academic efforts so choose other paths in life. The author believed the

results of her small study did not support the oppositional culture model. Rather, the underachievers reported that they respected determination and commitment to academics. They cited individual personality differences rather than racial or ethnic divide as the cause of the achievement disparity between the groups.

The author looked to studies by Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, which criticized Ogbu's oppositional culture explanation. They blamed low Black achievement on economic inequalities and racial segregation, not on the attitude or outlook of the student. The author felt her findings were more in line with theirs. Ultimately, she concluded that all of the students she studied valued education, but the high achievers saw it as valuable to themselves and the underachievers saw it as valuable to others; they did not see education as directly benefiting them.

Fisher's conclusions are congruent with the purpose of her study, but she did not anticipate the ethnic diversity between the low and high achievers. Also, this sample of this study is quite small, which limits any generalizability. Interestingly, though, the high achieving students note that the negative stereotyping of students of color inspires them to prove these teachers wrong, while the same negative stereotyping plays a role in the lower achieving students' attitudes about schooling. Perhaps Ogbu's theory has more validity than Fisher realized, as it suggested that the lower achieving students, who are also involuntary immigrants, carry the secondary cultural differences Ogbu identified. The high achieving students, on the other hand, were recent

immigrants or first generation Americans, and would not have developed those secondary cultural differences.

The effect of stereotyping on student performance and achievement has been documented in studies conducted by Steele and associates (1997). Although the immigrant status of the minorities studied was not relevant in these studies, Steele's conclusions challenge Fisher's in the sense that he found stereotype threat reduces academic performance rather than motivate greater performance. Steele acknowledged the social structure in the United States that has limited African Americans' academic success; socioeconomic disadvantage, segregation, inadequate social resources, and others. But his studies looked into barriers faced by those who have achieved identification in a given discipline or "domain", but face the "social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (p. 614). This is called "stereotype threat", and it is situational. When it is negative, Steele posited, the emotional reaction to it can interfere with performance. The negative part of the stereotype equation is derived from the social structure, exacerbating it with the emotional effect of stereotyping. Thus, the disadvantaged are doubly disserved; first they are deprived by the social structure, yet when they overcome those barriers, they must constantly question their ability and worth. Steele specifically defined stereotype threat as "the event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having or for the situation one is in, that has relevance to one's

self definition” (p. 616). Steele conducted studies regarding stereotype threat that involved both women and African Americans. His findings are compelling.

In a study conducted by Steele, Spencer and Quinn, but reported by Steele (1997), they hypothesized that the stereotype threat to women who were strong in math would impair their performance in math-performance settings if two conditions were present. One, the performance “would have to be difficult enough so that faltering at it would imply having reached an ability limit, but not so difficult as to be nondiagnostic of ability” (p. 619). Second, the women would have to be those who identified with math “so that faltering and its stereotype-confirming implication would threaten something they care about, their belongingness and acceptance in a domain they identify with” (p. 619). The stereotype, of course, is that women are not as capable in math as men are.

The participants in this study were male and female college students, mostly sophomores, who were good at math and strongly identified with it. That is, they saw themselves as strong in math and saw math as important to their self-definition.

The students were given a difficult math test one at a time. The questions were taken from the General Records Examination (GRE), and were expected to frustrate the students’ skills without completely exceeding them. Presuming that the results reflected stereotype threat, “the women significantly underperformed in relation to equally qualified men” (p. 619). To tie the results to stereotype threat, the students who had strong literature skills and identification were given an advanced literature rather than math test. There, the women performed as

well as the equally qualified men. The researchers reasoned that this occurred because women are not stereotype threatened in this domain. Finally, another study using math tests on math-identified students was conducted. A difficult test resulted in the women's underperformance again. An easier one more within the students' skill levels was also administered. On this test, the women did not underperform as they had on the more difficult test.

Although the results of these experiments reproduced what already had been reported in the literature, that women underperform on difficult math material, the researchers sought to establish support for their interpretation of this. That is, that it was the result of stereotype threat. Therefore, they conducted a third experiment. In this one, they varied how the test was represented to the students. The students were told either that the test showed gender differences or that it showed no gender differences. The same difficult ability test was used in both conditions. On the gender difference represented test, it was expected that women would underperform; the opposite was expected on the no-gender difference represented test. In fact, this occurred. Women performed worse than men when told the test produced gender differences. They performed equal to men when told the test was not sensitive to gender differences.

Steele, with Aronson, examined stereotype threat among African Americans (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and reported findings here (Steele, 1997). Participants were both Black and White Stanford University students. They were given a test containing the most difficult items on the verbal GRE exam. That the

students identified with the verbal skills represented on the test was presumed. In the first experiment, the tests were represented alternatively as they were in the study with women. One test was presented as ability-diagnostic, or a test of intellectual ability. The other was represented as ability-non-diagnostic, or as a laboratory problem-solving task unrelated to ability, and therefore unrelated to stereotype about ability. "Analysis of covariance was used to remove the influence of participants' initial skills" (p. 620). As hypothesized, the Black students underperformed the White students on the test represented as ability-diagnostic, and their performance equaled Whites on the test represented as non-diagnostic.

A second experiment was conducted with a different manipulation of stereotype threat. Although the tests were described to students as non-diagnostic, a demographic questionnaire was presented just before the students took the tests. Students that identified themselves as Black underperformed.

Steele and Aronson then tested to determine whether their manipulations to create stereotype threat activated the racial stereotype in the thinking and information processing of the threatened test-taking students or whether it produced a specific motivation in them to avoid being seen stereotypically. To determine this, they administered to Black and White students a test represented as ability-diagnostic or ability-nondiagnostic. Just after the condition instructions were given and sample test items were completed, and just before the students expected to take the test, the students "completed measures of stereotype activation and avoidance" (p. 621). This measure asked students to complete 80

word fragments. Ten of these 80, the researchers knew from pretesting, could be completed with words symbolic of African American stereotypes. Five could be completed with words that signified self-doubts. To measure the students' motivation to avoid being seen stereotypically, they were asked how much they preferred certain types of music, activities, sports, and personality traits. Some of these, a pretest had shown, had rated as stereotypic of African Americans.

The researchers hypothesized that if taking an ability-diagnostic test activated the racial stereotype in Black students' thinking and motivated them to avoid being stereotyped, these students would show more stereotype and self-doubt word completions and fewer preferences for African American things than would students under other conditions. Their findings supported this hypothesis (1997). The Black students in the diagnostic testing condition completed more fragments with self-doubt related and stereotype words than the others participants and had fewer preferences for items related to the African American experience such as jazz, basketball, and hip-hop. Yet, the White and non-diagnostic condition Black students results were essentially the same.

Steele's findings raise important issues in the education of African Americans. More than just its effect on immediate performance, stereotype threat impacts a student's identification with school. It prevents or breaks down that identification as an esteem-saving adaptation to the stigma. Why identify with school, where you are stereotyped as a low achiever? Why not reject school and protect self-esteem?

Steele offered a solution, which he termed "wise" schooling. Wise

schooling amounts to situational changes that reduce stereotype threat. The origin of the name “wise-schooling” is apt. The term “wise” was used in the 1950s by gay men and lesbians to designate heterosexuals who saw gays and lesbians beyond the stereotypes and stigmas that were assigned to them by the larger society.

Steele noted that since stereotype threat exists when one identifies with a given domain or discipline, more will need to be done in the case of students who do not identify. They will need to be encouraged to identify. Steele’s wise strategies to assist for domain-identified and domain–unidentified students were as follow:

- Optimistic teacher-student relationships. Mentoring programs and critical feedback coupled with optimism are such strategies.
- Give challenging work to all students rather than remediation because this conveys respect for potential.
- Stress the idea of incremental intelligence.

For domain-identified students, Steele recommended the following:

- Directly affirm students’ belongingness in the domain, and base this on the students’ intellectual potential.
- Value multiple perspectives and make this public.
- Provide role models of people from the stereotype threatened groups.

Finally, Steele made the following strategy recommendations for domain-unidentified students:

- “Nonjudgmental responsiveness”, or little direct praise, Socratic direction of student work and minimal attention to right and wrong answers. Such a situation creates little cost to failure.
- Build students’ sense of competence and self-efficacy.

Steele’s wise-schooling recommendations are hypotheses that are supported by his research findings. Many have similarities with qualities Ladson-Billings (1994) found to be present in the classrooms of teachers using culturally relevant practices. For example, multiple perspectives are valued in Steele’s recommendations and this is part of the culturally relevant classrooms Ladson-Billings observed. Steele recommended optimistic relationships with students, and Ladson-Billings observed fluid and humanely equitable teacher-student interactions and that the teachers showed connectedness with all students. Steele recommended that students’ sense of competence and self-efficacy be built, and Ladson-Billings observed that the teachers believed all students could succeed. Steele’s recommendations also found a common point with the teachers Howard observed and interviewed (2001). Both identified the importance of promoting the idea of incremental intelligence with students.

In an experiment with colleagues Spencer, Nisbett, Hummel, Schoem, Harber, and Carter, Steele implemented wise schooling strategies in a freshman-year program at the University of Michigan (U of M) (1997). Steele acknowledged that the outcome of the program could not serve as a test of psychological theory given the confounding variables each strategy created. However, if a particular group of wise schooling practices created success, it would encourage their

application in schools. The U of M program was aimed at the low retention rates and underachievement of African American students. The participants in the program, entitled “21st century”, each year included approximately 250 freshman whose ethnicity reflected the larger campus but with an oversampling of about 20% Black students and 20% non-Black minority students. These participants were randomly selected and recruited. They lived together in the wing of a large dorm.

The wise student strategies implemented were as follows. Students were told that as admittees to the U of M, they had survived a competitive selection process and the program was meant to help them maximize their potential. The program was represented as nonremedial. Their participation acknowledged their potential and that the U of M had high expectations for them. The high expectations were reflected in a challenge workshop in which they voluntarily participated. Also, the students voluntarily participated in weekly small discussion groups that centered on readings and allowed students to discuss social, personal, and adjustment related issues. This activity let students see that they were not alone in concerns they may have had about adjustment to college life. These two programs lasted the first ten weeks of the semester, and half of the students participated in one or both of them regularly.

The results were a comparison of the participants' first semester GPA's to the GPA's of White and Black students outside of any program at the U of M and to White and Black students in a remedial program. These were first-semester

grades averaged over the first two years of the project. These results were as follows:

- White students in the 21st century program (n=288), performed modestly better than White students outside of a program (control group – n=6,515), though this difference was not significant.
- Black 21st century students not participating in the campus minority program (n=27) significantly outperformed Black students in the control group. Furthermore, they showed almost no underperformance as compared to predictive tests such as the SAT or ACT, underperformance being suggestive of stereotype threat. Those in the top two-thirds of such tests distribution had essentially the same grades as White students. Follow up showed that these students continued to so perform through their sophomore year and four years later only one had dropped out of school.
- Black students that had participated in a large minority remediation program, despite having been given a lot of attention, performed worse than all other groups at almost every level of preparation for the coursework. At the beginning of this groups' junior year, 25% had failed to register. Among those in the top one-third of the test distribution, 40% failed to register. It is possible that some of these students may have carried other risk factors not controlled for. These results, though, suggest that the remediation program actually disserved the students by

“institutionalizing the racial stereotype by which they are already threatened” (p. 627).

Although the findings of the U of M program show that students receiving wise schooling experiences during their freshman year performed better than those that did not and stayed in college at a greater rate, as Steele acknowledged, many variables not accounted for could have played a role in these students' success. Furthermore, the wise schooling practices may have equally benefited any college freshman, not just those at particular risk for stereotype threat such as minorities. Nonetheless, if these practices are a benefit to all students, even better that they are instituted.

Steele was interested in connections between stereotype threat and academic identities and tested his hypotheses using quantitative studies. Among other things, he found that stereotype threat can result in student disidentification with academic endeavors. Based on his findings, he made recommendations to teachers of students who already identified with a given discipline and for those that did not. Howard considered high school students' perceptions of their academic identities in a qualitative study he conducted at two urban high schools (2003). Through analysis of interviews, he found that the participants related three central themes that influenced their academic identities: the role of parents, the perceptions of teachers and counselors, and the role or interest of attending college in their future.

The participants, ten boys and ten girls, attended two urban high schools. One was in the western United States and the other in the Midwest. The

participants ranged from ninth to twelfth grade. The student body of both schools was majority African American, with smaller numbers of Asian American and Latino attending. Over 90% of the students at these schools were low income. The researcher sought a balance of students based on academic performance and behavioral adjustment to obtain input from challenged, middle of the road, and college potential students. Some of the students chosen to participate were enrolled in courses considered high status such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Other participants were instead enrolled in non-AP courses or vocational courses. They were recommended to participate by their teachers.

The data was collected from the participants during the 2001-2002 school year through semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked questions that sought information about their perceptions of their academic identities and about the factors that shaped those identities. The participants were interviewed once individually and once with two or three other participants present. The interviews took place at the schools and lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. They were taped and transcribed. Participants were informed of the purpose of the interview and the researcher told them he was interested in how they viewed their ability to be academically successful and how they felt about their performance in school and their potential for attending college in light of their performance.

The researcher applied grounded theory in this qualitative study. The data was triangulated to crosscheck the themes and patterns that emerged, and as they did, the researcher analyzed the responses' meanings in search of

consistent phrases, concepts and information. The data was analyzed as it was collected and the findings were compared against existing frameworks, though the researcher does not explicitly state what these were (2003). The three main themes that emerged will now be discussed.

One of the themes was the influence of parents and family in students' education. The participants with positive attitudes about their academic identities cited their parents' influential roles frequently and parents' expectations that these students attend college. The participants reported that such expectations were frequently expressed by their parents, including descriptions of parents' actions such as hiring tutors, and the researcher found that the influence of parents' expectations of college attendance overcame negative expectations the participants may have heard from others. Even low-achieving students in this study reported that their parents maintained high expectations of them. The importance of the participants' identification of parental expectations on their academic success, Howard argued, challenged the myth that parents of urban school students are not concerned with their children's academic pursuits (2003).

Both negative and positive perceptions and expectations of students that teachers and counselors expressed or implied also were identified by the participants as an important influence on their self-perceptions and the development of their academic identities. Some expressed the belief that teachers' and counselors' negative perceptions of their ability were race-based, and that decisions about placement into lower-level versus AP classes were affected by such perceptions. One student analogized teachers' expectations

and behaviors toward Black students to racial profiling, calling his educational experience “learning while Black.” He described a difference in a teacher’s attitude toward Black and Asian-American students, explaining that this teacher expected more from the Asian-Americans. However, he limited his comment to only some teachers while adding that a particular White teacher believed in all of her students and this led him and others to believe in themselves. Another student described teachers’ low expectations implied by their actions and expressions. Still another reported explicit statements by a counselor that she was not college material. Finally, one described what became the study’s title: a tug of war for one’s mind. Teachers, principals, and counselors, he felt, were prejudice and stereotyped the students because of their culture and race. The students had to convince themselves that they were smart and capable of attending college, owning their own businesses, and being successful.

When asked about their perceptions of their academic identities, many of the participants described the role college played. Several distinguished between the idea of intelligence and of being college material. These were different things to them. Some kids have book smarts, but one can be smart without going to college, they reported. Other students, though, connected academic ability with attending college, but expressed apprehension about whether they will be as prepared as students from other schools.

Due to sample size and investigative method, this study (Howard, 2003) does not provide findings that can be generalized to a larger population. Also, it relies on student reports entirely. No evidence was obtained to substantiate

student complaints about prejudiced placements into lower-level courses or alleged treatment based upon race as opposed to, for example, fulfillment of prerequisites for taking a course. Of course, if prerequisites in fact were not met, was that because previous opportunities were not made available to students? Furthermore, student complaints, even if unsubstantiated, still implicate their perceptions. The study offers insight to the represented populations' view of school, of their perceptions of their own academic identity, and how these are shaped by parents, teachers and counselors, and students' perception of college's role in their lives. It provides implications about which school personnel as well as parents should aware. They influence high school students in important ways. The researcher offered recommendations for teachers, counselors and all concerned when they interact with this population. Although this study, in and of itself, does not provide empirical data to support all of the recommendations, the validity of Howard's findings as well as recommendations are strengthened when considered together with the Steele stereotype threat studies (1997) and the Ladson-Billings' ethnography (1994). First, Howard recommends that one, teachers must believe in students. Two, college should be presented as an expectation for all students. Three, smartness should be reconceptualized; teachers should capitalize on skills students bring to school, including social problems solving skills, financial literacy, and overall resourcefulness. These are forms of smartness that often go unrecognized. Four, teachers should engage African American students in discussions about race and racism in American society so they can recognize the negative way it

may be influencing their self-perceptions and academic identities. Five, teachers must become culturally and racially proficient and aware of their own practices, beliefs and attitudes, as these may devalue students' cultural integrity (2003).

Flowers, Milner, and Moore (2003) investigated African American high school seniors' educational aspirations in a study that used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). The focus of their investigation was the impact of locus of control on students' higher education aspirations. By locus of control, the researchers referred to the location of the attribution of motivation and how this relates to academic success or failure. Is it internal or external to the individual, they asked. They further sought to establish what impact family, student and school characteristics had on African American high school seniors' educational aspirations.

The NELS:88 is a nationally representative, long-term study that was designed to measure the impact of various factors on student academic achievement, social growth, career attainment and student experiences and outcomes. Five waves of data had been collected in this study from students, parents, teachers, and schools within the sample. This data collection occurred in 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. The sample of schools involved was randomly selected based upon stratification techniques. Of the 1,655 identified, 1,052 agreed to be part of the study. Twenty-four students were randomly selected from each of these schools. In 1988, the base year, 25,599 eighth-graders participated, as did 22,651 parents of such students. Data was also collected from teachers regarding their expectations, strategies, and evaluations

of student behavior and performance. Such data came from at least two teachers for each student participant. A total of 4,193 teachers answered questionnaires. School administrators provided information about the schools. They completed 1,035 questionnaires. Cognitive tests were developed to evaluate student academic achievement and involved four multiple-choice tests in the areas of reading comprehension, mathematics, science and history/citizenship/geography. NELS:88 applied a weighting procedure that permitted the researchers to generalize their results to the entire population of schools and students in the United States. Because this was a longitudinal study, follow up data was collected from a large portion (18,221) of the base year participants in 1990, when the students were in tenth grade. In 1992, a large portion of the participants were resurveyed again, when they were in 12th grade. This amounted to 16,842 students. It is the second follow-up data in 1992 that was used in this study. It amounted to an analysis based on 863 African American high school seniors; 433 female and 430 male.

One dependent variable was employed from the second follow-up data collected. It measured students' educational aspirations. The independent variable was a measurement of locus of control, which was broken down into the three categories involved in this study: parent, student and school characteristics. The family characteristics included the control variables of socioeconomic status and students' perceptions of their father's and of their mother's expectations of their educational future. The individual characteristics included the control variables of gender and cognitive ability. The school

characteristics included the control variables of attendance at a public or private school and of the students' perceptions of their high school teacher's expectations of their educational future. The data was analyzed in two stages. First, a regression analysis was used to estimate the unique effects of all of the family, student, and school characteristics on educational aspirations for African American high school seniors. Second in the data analysis, the researchers determined whether the impact of locus of control was general or conditional. Ultimately, the data analysis allowed the researchers to determine how the effect of locus of control on students' educational aspirations differed in magnitude for African American high school seniors with different student characteristics, family characteristics and school characteristics.

The results of the data analysis revealed that, when controlled for socioeconomic status, students' perceptions of parent expectations, gender, cognitive ability, and school characteristics, the locus of control showed a significantly positive effect on educational aspirations. The seniors who believed that they had control over their life, as opposed to those that believed chance played a greater role, reported higher educational aspirations. Additionally, the data demonstrated that students' perceptions of their parent's expectations for their educational future had a strong and positive impact on their educational aspirations. Students' perceptions of their mother's expectations influenced them more than their perceptions of their father's expectations ($b = .977$ for mother's expectations versus $b = .610$ for father's expectations). Also, students' perceptions about their high school teacher's expectations showed a significant

impact on students' educational aspirations ($b = .969$). Researchers concluded that the effects of locus of control were similar in magnitude among all African American high school seniors.

This study used general data collected by NELS:88 to reach its conclusions. The sample was quite large and varied. Weights were developed to adjust for potential sample bias, and reportedly allowed the researchers to generalize the results to the entire population of schools and students in the United States. The importance of this study's findings, for purposes of this paper, is that it strongly implicates the impact of teachers' expectations on students' educational aspirations. How students perceive teachers' expectations was nearly as important as how they perceived their mothers' expectations and more significant than their perceptions of their fathers' expectations. It adds to Howard's findings and ultimate recommendations (2003) that teachers must believe in students and that college must be presented as an expectation for all students. Flowers et al offered that teachers must develop teaching strategies that help students develop and maintain higher educational aspirations. They referenced strategies offered in an article by Bartz and Mathews (as cited in Flowers, Milner & Moore (2003)). There, it was recommended that teachers demonstrate to students the relationship between their schoolwork and careers by using job-related examples in school work, determine what students are interested in and relate these to vocations and careers, stress skill acquisition needed for specific careers and vocations, note the relationship between school and work success, and assure students that they all have attributes that can lead

to a successful career if properly coupled with training and aspirations.

Additionally, parental expectations are important and teachers need to reach out to them and seek their involvement in encouraging their children's academic endeavors.

The NELS:88 data was also used in a study conducted by Adams and Singh (1998). They examined the direct and indirect effects of several variables that they believed influenced the academic achievement of African American tenth graders. Those variables were based on earlier research by others. They chose tenth graders because the academic decisions of this group limit or expand both their future choices of subjects to study as well as their postsecondary options. Looking at tenth grade academic achievement, they believed, would provide a link for building understanding between such achievement and its antecedents. Similar to the Flowers et al study (2003) into educational aspirations, this study was based upon the belief that academic achievement is a function of schools, parents, and students acting in a synchronous and synergistic manner. It took into consideration students' perceptions of the school environment, teachers and teaching, parental involvement and educational aspirations for their children and student characteristics, which measure both students' motivation to achieve and educational aspirations. The researchers sought to determine which of these variables made a significant impact on academic achievement. They were primarily interested in eight endogenous variables: prior achievement, students' perceptions of the school environment, of teachers and teaching, parental

aspirations for their children, parental involvement, and student aspirations, motivation and achievement. Some of the operational definitions that describe the variables the study examined are as follows:

- SES: a composite based upon father's and mother's education, occupation, and family income
- Prior achievement: average of students' item response theory scores on standardized tests of reading, math, science, and social studies
- School Environment: a composite based upon students' responses to two Likert-type items, each containing four anchor points
- Teachers/Teaching: a composite derived from students' responses based upon two Likert-type items, each containing four anchor points
- Parental Aspirations: a composite from students' responses to two Likert-type scales with seven anchor points
- Student Aspirations and Expectations: a composite of students' responses to two Likert-type scales with seven anchor points
- Homework and Course Work: a composite derived from students' responses to three Likert-type items, the first two with eight anchor points and the third with three
- Academic Achievement: averaged students' scores on standardized tests of reading, math, science, and history

The sample selection used is described in the Flowers et al study (2003) discussed above. However, the population focus was tenth graders as opposed

to twelfth graders, and the researchers used data extracted from the first follow-up student files, which was obtained in 1990.

The study (1998) design permitted the researchers to examine the impact of the independent variables on academic achievement, the final outcome variable, and at the same time they estimated the relationship between the independent variables. They used a path analysis to study causal patterns among a set of variables in order to estimate the effects of school, parental and student variables on academic achievement. They were able to determine which factors exerted significant, unique influences on achievement both directly and indirectly. The study results suggested that the academic achievement of this nationwide sample of African American tenth graders was significantly effected by prior achievement, perceptions about teaching and teachers, and SES. These students' aspirations were influenced by parental aspirations, prior achievement, and SES. Student motivation was influenced by SES, gender, and prior achievement. The researchers recognized that this was a non-experimental study, however, and thus, the data were only correlational; not causal. Inferences should be drawn cautiously.

There was a significant path between SES and achievement (.134), which supports the position that students with higher levels of SES have greater access to the resources that assist in their academic achievement. However, this finding shows a higher path coefficient than shown in other studies that used grades as opposed to the achievement test results used in this study. Thus, SES and standardized test scores appear to be more strongly related than SES and

grades, suggesting that antecedent influences for standardized test scores and grades are different.

When gender and SES are statistically controlled, the correlation between academic achievement and prior achievement shown in this study is strong; stronger than in previous studies that used grades rather than achievement test scores. The strength of this correlation may explain why other factors present later in students' school lives seem to have such little effect. The cast was set years before. Still, the importance of early standardized test achievement to later achievement raises questions about the source of such early achievement and should be studied further. Is the early achievement due to early school experiences, early instructional quality, or early parental expectations, aspirations, and involvement?

The significant path shown between students' perceptions of their teachers and teaching and their achievement on standardized tests suggests the unique and positive impact teachers have on students, however, the data is only correlational. Though the magnitude of the effect was small, it represented a net effect over and above the contribution of other variables. The items on the Likert-type scale included students' perceptions regarding rapport with teachers, positive feedback from teachers regarding student effort, instructional quality, and the respect teachers showed for students.

Neither parental aspirations nor involvement demonstrated a significant impact on student achievement on standardized tests. The researchers suggested explanations for this. First, the large effect of prior achievement,

which accounted for most of the variability in future achievement, may account for apparent non-significance of any of the other variables. It may also be that the items used to measure parental aspirations need to be improved for reliability and validity. Finally, this study provides only a snapshot of the effects that operated between the ninth and tenth grades and did not consider prior levels of parental aspirations or involvement. Ninth and tenth grade is a time when adolescents begin to establish independence from family. This may explain student responses on the questionnaire regarding family influences. Still, there may be other factors at play that explain the findings. In addition to path analysis, frequency analyses were conducted for demographic variables such as parent educational levels. This showed that though 82% of the students sampled had mothers and fathers that aspired for them to attend a four year college or beyond, 16% of the students' parents had never themselves completed high school, 23% had completed high school only, and almost 45% graduated from high school but had less than a four-year college degree. This suggests that the African American parents of students in the sample wanted their children to exceed their own educational achievements, demonstrating that they valued higher education even though they had not obtained or benefited from it. This raises an interesting point in relation to the oppositional identity model Ogbu proposed (2004). If students reject achievement as defined in dominant culture's terms, why does this study indicate that their parents promote it in such high degrees? Is there really a cultural rejection of such achievement, or, instead, is

there a misidentification of structural or other barriers to these parents' ability to provide their children with what they need to succeed?

The researchers noted what they considered another anomaly among their findings: "neither these students' educational aspirations nor their motivation had significant effect on their academic achievement after controlling for other variables such as SES, previous achievement, perceptions of teacher quality, and so forth" (Adams & Singh, 1998, *The Effects of Student Influences on Achievement* ¶ 1). In explanation, though, the researchers offered that motivation is very complex and multidimensional. It may be difficult to distinguish its contributions from students' aspirations. Better and multiple measures of motivation and aspiration should be studied in future research, they suggested.

Gender and SES were found to contribute to motivation, too. Females were shown to be more motivated than boys to achieve academically (1998). Higher SES was also correlated positively with motivation levels with this group of tenth grade African Americans.

The data indicated students' perceptions of their teachers and teaching did not significantly influence student motivation or aspirations when the other variables were statistically controlled (1998). The researchers offered explanations for this finding. They suggested that African American high school students may have developed what they called resilience to teacher efforts. While the students may have perceived their teachers as helpful, they did not perceive them as influential to their academic motivations.

Rather than show a positive connection between parental aspiration and student motivation, the data showed the opposite. Parental aspirations were related to lower levels of student motivation, though this effect was very small. But parental involvement was shown to have a slightly significant effect on student motivation, suggesting that when parents communicate with their children about future college attendance this creates a home environment that values achievement. The small significance, though, may be related to parents' own lack of knowledge of what it takes to plan for and get into college. The largest significant effect on students' aspirations was parent aspirations, and this was followed by parental involvement. These correlations far outweighed both SES and prior achievement.

This study (1999) has attempted to find correlations between several variables in students' lives and their academic achievement, as measured by averaged scores on standardized tests. The data used, however, is composite and depends heavily on student responses to Likert scales. These responses are subjective and it is unknown whether there was an effort made when students completed the surveys to create any uniformity in definitions.

Summary

Researchers have described and identified culturally congruent pedagogy as a pedagogy that empowers students by teaching from students' cultural referents. Teachers that employ such pedagogy have been identified as those that help their students maintain their cultural identity and meet more objective measures of success. Researchers have considered whether the public school

classroom curriculum fails to actually use students' cultural referents and, instead, teaches from a White, middle class perspective. They have studied whether including certain afrocultural themes in both content and learning context influenced the cognitive performance of African-American children in public schools. They found some support for this hypothesis, but a closer examination is in order. Student perception of teachers and of themselves, to some degree, particularly as shown in the studies of Steele (1997), correlates with academic success and persistence in school.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This literature review has focused on research that tried to link identified causes for the achievement gap for African American students to solutions involving teaching strategies rather than solutions involving overall structural changes in society. I do not mean to suggest that structural changes are not needed. From my research of the causes for the gap, many of which were outside the scope of this paper, I cannot say whether it is caused by structural inequities in our education system, secondary cultural differences African Americans developed that cause them to reject the academic goals of the dominant culture, segregation, integration, racist teachers, or whether all of the above play a role. Research offers some focused and reasoned solutions supported in varying degrees. The educational researchers identified in Chapter Three have sought to identify various causes for the achievement gap that arise in the classroom or at school. They looked to strategies to overcome barriers to Black students' academic success that a teacher or school can employ. Some also included parental and cultural influences and how these interact with the classroom. Some researchers attempted to correlate teacher and school practices, including with Black students' academic success. From this effort, many have offered solutions.

Summary of Findings

Ladson-Billings (1994) and Howard (2001 & 2002), through qualitative research, identified the nature and qualities of successful teachers of African

American students. They called the teaching strategies these teachers employed culturally congruent or relevant pedagogy. None of their studies strictly tied the teachers' practices to measures of success such as student grades, standardized test scores, high school graduation, or movement onto college. The teachers Ladson-Billings studied were initially identified by parents as those who deemed effective teachers those that helped their children maintain positive cultural identities. Howard (2001) studied teachers chosen by parents and community members because they made a difference in students' academic success, though not data about that success was provided, and they employed practices deemed culturally congruent. These studies do not demonstrate that these practices result in or even can be correlated with academic success.

Love and Kruger (2005), taking Ladson-Billings' findings, sought to establish, through quantitative means, that the identified qualities and strategies were, in fact, successful. In many respects, they did so. However, they used data of teacher beliefs as provided through Likert-type scale surveys completed by teachers. Thus, the data with which student achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, was compared, was highly subjective and not corroborated by observations. One area in which they diverged was in relation to the teacher's role in disseminating knowledge, where the study (2005) found a positive correlation between achievement in language arts and reading and a teacher belief that her role was to disseminate knowledge. Ladson-Billings (1994) characterized as assimilationist this attitude about the teacher's role. Yet, she deemed culturally relevant helping students develop necessary skills.

Ladson-Billings and Howard (2001) both acknowledged the importance of teaching skills, which could be argued is circumstance where the teacher is passing knowledge to the student. In Howard's study, the teaching of skills was expressed by successful teachers as their highest priority. These skills included how to speak clearly and stand straight, how to behave in public, how to listen and follow directions. This could be considered an assimilationist approach, too.

The importance of skill building finds support in the essays of Delpit (1995). Her essays are not research, but are analyses and opinions based upon Delpit's experiences and observations as a teacher and education scholar. Like Ladson-Billings and Howard, Delpit acknowledged the importance of honoring students' cultural experiences and backgrounds and using these in making connections to the curriculum. However, she argued it is necessary to explicitly teach students the skills they need to succeed in the dominant culture. Included in these skills were what Delpit referred to as "codes of power" (p. 40). She put it this way:

To imply to children or adults . . . that it doesn't matter how you talk or how you write is to ensure their ultimate failure. I prefer to be honest with my students. I tell them that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful but that there is a political power game that is also being played, and if they want to be in on that game there are certain games that they too must play (p. 40).

It makes sense that a teacher must disseminate these codes of power. The codes are essentially the way of the dominant culture. But

along with being explicitly taught the codes, students should be instilled with pride in their own culture and given the opportunity to maintain their cultural identity. Much of Boykin's work (2000), (2001), (2004), and (2005) considered how that cultural identity could be capitalized on in the classroom context and in the content of instruction.

Seeing color was essential to providing culturally relevant teaching, according to Ladson-Billings (1994). Yet, the data assembled by Love & Kruger (2005) revealed a significant correlation between teachers who reported that they did not see color and high student achievement. The offered excuse for this difference was the negative connotation some associate with the idea of seeing color. It suggests different treatment and that sounds unfair, unequal, even racist. Thus, the teachers presumably did not report that they saw color. The fact is, one cannot be a learner-centered teacher without identifying the student's culture and race. These are important aspects of who students are.

I believe that many of the culturally relevant teaching strategies Ladson-Billings (1994) and Howard (2001 & 2002) explicated are strategies that apply more generally to any group of children. For example, Ladson-Billings identified as culturally relevant encouraging students to work collaboratively and as a community. In collaborative or group work, students are expected to exchange ideas, information and skills. Another example is a teacher's belief all students can succeed. What student, Black, White or other would not react positively to a teacher's confidence? Yet another is maintaining an equitable relationship with students. I would argue fairness is a universal value. I would further argue that

these strategies and teacher dispositions are similar to the types held by those who maintain a constructivist view of teaching; they are learner-centered. The culture and background of the student matters. What Ladson-Billings (1994), Howard (2001) and (2002), Boykin and associates (2000), (2001), (2004), and (2005), Fullilove & Treisman (1990), Steele (1995) and (1997), and others suggest is that African American students need is what all students need: culturally relevant pedagogy that exploits, in a positive sense, the particular students' cultural capital.

Boykin and associates' studies offer some support for the position that the culture of school reflects White America, not the students of its community, and that if African American students' culture were better represented in their classrooms, such students would find greater academic success. However, they did not fully explore whether the inclusion of the identified afrocultural themes in classroom context and content might also correlate with greater academic success for all students. Fullilove and Treisman (1990) have provided strong evidence that communal learning supports African American college students' academic performance and persistence in school. Yet it was observation of Asian students' communal learning that prompted the study, suggesting communal learning is not a useful pedagogical approach for only African Americans. Steele (1995) and (1997), in experimental studies, found that students under racial and gender stereotype threat, when tested in a discipline with which they identify and are invested, do not perform as well as those not facing such a threat. His suggestions to reduce the threat were implemented

with one group of college students and preliminary results showed that group's performance and persistence was greater than students who did not receive Steele's suggested treatment.

African American students also need skills, teachers invested in the whole student, self-reflective teachers, teachers with high expectations, teachers who offer challenging coursework, and safety from stereotype threat. These are the main themes gleaned from the reviewed studies that I believe carry significant merit.

Providing African American students culturally congruent education is easier said than done, particularly when only six percent of the teachers in public schools are African American. Although several teachers interviewed in studies indicated that non-African American teachers can do what they do, being prepared to do so takes work, thought, and time. It takes the work of learning about students' home cultures. It takes the willingness to and then the act of thinking about one's own beliefs and behavior. It takes critical self-examination and critical examination of the status quo. And all of this takes time. The successful White teachers Ladson-Billing (1994) interviewed had been teaching African American students for many years. In fact, so had the Black teachers. Both White and Black teachers displayed the same attitudes of professionalism and beliefs described in the oral histories in Siddie Walker's research (2001) of Black teachers in the segregated South. They developed relationships and were part of the community, they were committed, held high expectations for students,

related the curriculum to the students' needs, interests, and purposes, and assured that students' culture was reflected in that curriculum.

Classroom Implications

When I began this project a year ago, I expected to find juried research that told me what to do when I got into multi-cultural classroom that included a significant number of African American students. I expected to find studies that said, "this works and this does not." I found nothing like that. I did find an article that offered anecdotal evidence of what worked, however. Hefflin (2002) described how, as an English teacher of African American elementary students, she developed a framework for culturally relevant pedagogy and used this framework in developing her lessons. She then shared her framework and lesson planning process with another teacher who had been having difficulty reaching her students and maintaining their interest. Through their joint examination of the student disengagement, they were able to develop a literature lesson using Hefflin's framework that engaged and involved the students. The experience of the two teachers was that instruction could be tailored to fit the social, cultural, and personal lives of students and also meet curricular goals. To do this, they found "is largely about seeing the materials and methods of our work through the norms and practices of our students' lives" (p. 247). It was about starting from their students lives when lesson planning and enacting.

I also found that there was a body of research focused on improving the academic performance of African American students. The research of Boykin and many associated with him (2000), (2001), (2004), and (2005) sought to

determine whether incorporating certain orientations or themes associated with African American culture and life into the curriculum and school context could enhance the academic performance of African American students. Essentially, Boykin et al have attempted to examine what makes African American culture “African American,” and these studies serve as a primer for future teachers like me interested in learning about the lives of many, particularly low-income, African American students, and what can be done in the classroom to incorporate students’ lives. Boykin, Miller, and Tyler (2005) provided some evidence for the argument that there is a hidden curriculum in public schooling in America and that curriculum seeks to assimilate all students into the dominant culture by making school a dominant culture event. This research reminds me to examine carefully the culture represented in my classroom, either by my actions or the schools and make changes if it does not match the culture of my students.

A teacher from the dominant culture may quite naturally perpetuate dominant culture themes if she does not reflect on her practice. Having now student taught for ten weeks in a culturally and racially diverse middle school, I found that daily reflection was the most important part of my preparation for the next day. It started on my drive home each afternoon. Had I thought of it sooner, I would have taped the conversations I had with myself and I intend to do so in my future teaching experiences. Through those daily mental reflections, I discovered prejudices I held and had never realized I had, skewed expectations, and incorrect assumptions. I will offer one of many examples. I held unreasonable expectations about the emotional and intellectual development

level of an 11 year-old female Samoan student. She is a large girl. That and her expressions and demeanor led me to think of her as an older teen. This led to misunderstandings between us, and I unfairly disciplined her. That night, I reconsidered all of what I had originally assumed. I realized my mistaken judgments, and the following day privately apologized to this student and acknowledged my mistake. What a positive change in our relationship resulted! Teachers I observed and respected at the middle school further reinforced my positive experience with daily reflection. They did it, too, nightly, and in writing.

All teachers need to learn about their students' cultures in order to provide culturally congruent education. Boykin et al's research (2000), (2001), (2004), and (2005) suggests efforts should be made to incorporate afro-cultural themes in the learning content and context. Ladson-Billings' (1994) and Howard's (2001) and (2002) work offer ideas to inservice and preservice teachers about teacher attitudes, styles, and values that promote achievement for Black students. Ladson-Billings' (1994) recommends teachers of African American students should be those that desire that assignment and who understand the important role culture plays. They must be willing to critically examine their own culture in the process of learning their students' and challenge their own assumptions. Application of Steele's (1997) wise student strategies may assist in reducing the stereotype threat African American students may face and help them develop stronger identification with academic endeavors.

Not only is it important to know and understand students' culture, it is important to know and form relationships with students as individuals. The

qualitative research I reviewed offered the voices of teachers of African American students. Almost universally, the importance of forming personal, caring relationships with all students was recognized. My short student teaching experience has confirmed for me the value of personal relationships with all students.

Implications for Further Research

This review did not include the issue of incongruent assessments of academic achievement. Is our current system of achievement testing misrepresentative of actual student learning? Does it enhance the effect of stereotype threat raised by Steele (1997)? Although I located academic articles that raised this issue, I found no research and thus, left it out of my discussion.

Although many studies were found addressing the benefit of incorporating afro-cultural themes in the classroom, only one compared the relative effects of such themes on White student performance. It suggested that White students showed lower performance levels under conditions that improved performance for the African American students. This could have been due to the unfamiliarity of such themes in the learning context and content. With greater incorporation of such themes over time, perhaps White students, like Black students have had to do since *Brown*, will learn codes of a different sort?

Longer term studies also should be done relative to the effects of teacher training in the cultural aspects of African American students and their students' academic performance. Although researchers call for such training, I found no studies that actually sought to correlate its positive effect.

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