MIDDLE CLASS AND MIDDLE SCHOOL: DOES OPPORTUNITY KNOCK FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS?

A Record of Study

by

Patricia Ann Mooney

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Jim Scheurich
Committee Members,	Norvella Carter
	Terah Venzant-Chambers
	Gwen Webb-Hassan
Head of Department,	Fredrick Nafukho

December 2012

Major Subject: Educational Administration

Copyright 2012 Patricia Ann Mooney

ABSTRACT

Closing the achievement gap between African American and White students continues to challenge educators in both urban and suburban contexts. Teachers and administrators in America are overwhelmingly White, and have limited training, if any, in understanding cultural differences or developing culturally responsive practices and policies. More importantly, racism and deficit thinking impose invisible barriers that inhibit the success of African American students. This Problem of Practice explored the existing achievement gap between African American and White students at Keller Middle School, a Title I campus in southeast Texas. Using a qualitative research methodology, campus data, policies, and practices were examined through the lens of societal racism, institutional racism, and deficit thinking. Three fundamental themes were revealed in this study: 1) White teachers and administrators believed that African American students were not successful in school because they (or their families) had internal defects that impeded learning; 2) African American parent and student participants had deficit beliefs about other African Americans and used defensive othering as a coping strategy; and 3) African American students and parents perceived themselves as successful and attributed that success to a high motivation to achieve. Recommendations are given to address the gap in achievement for African American learners in middle school.

DEDICATION

To Jerry and Anne O'Connell, my parents – first, thank you for finding authentic school desks complete with ink wells, a "green" Blackboard, a globe, and squeaky White chalk so we could "play school" in the basement. We probably couldn't afford it, but you did it anyway. I'm sure, somehow, that was the actual beginning of my career as an educator. Secondly, thank you for teaching us how important rituals are in life; the rituals of wearing White gloves on Easter Sunday, having dinner together every night, and snow forts and Christmas lights in winter. Most of all, thank you for teaching us the difference between right and wrong, persistence in difficult situations, and the importance of family. You are the best!

To my sweet husband, who… can bring home the bacon, and fry it up in a pan… from the time Kelley and Michael were babies, you have completely encouraged and supported me as an educator and a life-long college student – I love you!

To Kelley – even though we weren't roommates, I loved being an Aggie with you. I'll never forget the excitement in your voice when you called to tell me about your first day as a real, live teacher. I am so proud that you have become a champion for *all* children.

To Michael – who kept me company while I wrote for hours on end… your frequent prompts to "look how cute" Lola and Chloe were as they slept helped to keep me awake and reminded me how much I love your sweet, sensitive nature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my carpool group - Wanda, Robin, and Karen - who served as sounding boards and comedy relief - how lucky was I to have you as classmates, colleagues, and friends.

To my committee members, Dr. Gwen Webb-Hassan, Dr. Terah Venzant Chambers, Dr. Norvella Carter, thank you for your guidance and mentoring, and for gently pushing me to look deeper. I have great respect for your work and commitment to making our educational system a better place for children of color.

To Dr. Scheurich, my favorite advisor and committee chair… your thoughtful conversations helped me to grow stronger as a person and an educator. I would be honored to work with you again in any capacity, any day, any time. And… I promise to work on my APA punctuation ☺.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT ii

DEDICATION iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS v

CHAPTER

I INTRODUCTION 1

Background 1
Problem Statement 4
Achievement Challenges in the United States 5
Achievement Challenges in Texas 8
A Call for Action 10
Purpose of the Study 11
Significance of the Study 12
Overview of Methodology 13
Limitations 14
Definitions and Terms 15
Organization of Study 17

II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 19

Introduction 19
Historical Perspectives on Slavery and Immigration 19
Acculturation as a Coping Strategy for Immigrants 21
Racial Identity and Cultural Values 21
The Power of "Whiteness" 24
White Power 24
White Privilege 26
Color-Blind Ideologies 27
Deficit Thinking 28
The Bias of Poverty 29
Teacher Expectations 30
Cultural Incongruence 31
Identity Orientation 32

CHAPTER Page

Language Differences 34
Learning Styles....36
Stereotypes 37
Achievement, Opportunity, or Receivement Gap? 38
Racism....39
Racism Defined 39
Effects of Societal Racism 41
Wealth 41
Health 42
Housing 42
Criminal Justice System 42
Education....43
Teacher Quality 45
Curriculum 45
Tracking Practices 46
School Funding 47
The Black Middle Class: Does It Make A Difference?....49
Economic Vulnerability 51
Blacks in School Communities with White Middle Class Norms 53
Unique Challenges of Adolescents in Middle School....55
Motivation....55
Efficacy....57
Identity 58

III METHODOLOGY....62

Introduction 62
Choosing a Research Design....64
Focus of the Research 65
Role of the Researcher 66
Participants 67
Research Design and Data Collection 68
Data Analysis 70
Trustworthiness 71
Triangulation 73
Member Checking 74
Peer Debriefing 75
Thick Description 75
Unique Issues in Conducting a “Problem of Practice” 76
Summary 79

CHAPTER Page

IV FINDINGS 80

Introduction 80
Profile of Keller Middle School 80
Participants 82
Students and Parents 82
Jordan and Mrs. Jones 83
Kayla and Mrs. Powell 84
Ciara and Mrs. Barnett 85
Markus and Mrs. Neale 85
Teachers 86
Administrators 87
Findings 88
White Deficit Thinking 89
Parents are Not Involved 90
Education is Not Valued… 93
Teacher Expectations Influence Student Performance 95
Socioeconomic Status is the Root of the Problem 98
Tracking is a Barrier 100
Stereotypes are Used to Explain Gaps 103
African Americans as Athletes 104
African Americans and Deviant Behavior 105
African American Deficit Beliefs about Other African Americans 110
Family Structure and Values 111
Education is Not Valued… 114
Deficit Stereotype - Deviant Behavior 117
Motivation to Achieve 120
Parent Involvement 121
Parent-Teacher Communication 122
High Expectations 124
Caring Teachers 127
Teachers Helped with Academics 128
Teachers Helped with Behavior 129
Teachers Encouraged Students and Parents 131
Ownership 132
Effort 135

V CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 138

Introduction 138
Review of Study 138

CHAPTER Page

Discussion of Results: The Impossible Dilemma of African Americans in a White Middle Class School....141
Dealing with a Newer Racism....143
Aversive Racism and White Resistance....145
Vulnerability of People of Color....146
Coping with Racism: Social Reproduction and Cultural Reproduction....148
Socialization : Coping with Social and Cultural Reproduction....150
Reproducing “White Cultural Values”....152
Work Hard, Do Well....153
It’s Up to Me....153
Coping By Othering....154
Identifying with the Dominant Group....157
Normative Identification....158
Recommendations for This Study’s Middle School....161
Build Campus Leadership Capacity....161
Build Teacher Leadership Capacity....163
Equity Audits as an Evaluation of Cultural Responsiveness....165
Create a Campus Mission Statement....166
Recommendations for General Middle School Practice....168
Adopt a Learning Orientation....169
Use C.A.R.E. to Re-culture....170
Culturally Competent Checklist for Success....171
No Place for Hate....171
Recommendations for General District and State Policies....172
Culturally Competent Action Plans....173
Increase Cultural Competency of Pre-Service Teachers....175
Incentive Programs....175
Create Culturally Relevant and Responsive Model Classrooms....177
Recommendations for Future Research....178
Personal Researcher Statement....179
Conclusion....183

REFERENCES....185

APPENDIX A....233

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE Page

1 Dynamics Between Study Participants 142

2 Priority School Learner Framework 170

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE Page

1 Helms White Racial Identity Model..23

2 Two Dimensional Validity Framework..73

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

As reform leaders in the twenty first century, we are facing what Pauline Lipman (1998) calls "a national crisis", or the overwhelming failure of schools to develop the talents and potential of students of color. Virtually every measure of academic success shows that African American children are underachieving in U.S. public schools. Fewer African Americans perform well on state and national tests, graduate from high school, or attend college compared to Whites. Alternatively, African American students receive disproportionately more discipline referrals and alternative discipline placements than any other student group (Webb-Johnson, 2002). The repercussions of these inequities are far reaching. As adults, African Americans are more likely to live in poverty, face increased health risks, and serve time in prison than Whites.

James P. Comer (2002) declared that the state of our schools reflects the sociological conditions in which we operate, and is fostered by two myths. First, the intense focus on individualism creates the belief that "the life outcome of an individual is due almost entirely to genetically determined intelligence and will" (p. 6). The second myth states that, in general, Whites have been successful and African Americans have not; this premise speaks to the historical scapegoating of immigrants in America and justifies limiting opportunities for those in marginalized groups (Comer, 2002).

Although school district and campus leadership teams have invested inordinate amounts of time and energy analyzing the Black-White gap, a surface level knowledge of inequitable systems promotes acceptance of stereotypical explanations for the underachievement of African American students. Given that textbook interpretations of Black history are composed by White dominants whose contextual background offers no appreciation for the challenges faced by people of color, it is not surprising that deficit stereotypes are prevalent in our society. In fact, Horton and Horton (2006) argue that early and ongoing justification of slavery in the context of a "free nation" (as it is frequently depicted be teachers) has considerable merit in explaining the achievement gap between African American and White students. Rationalization of this idea is promoted when decidedly important historical details are often omitted or altered in classroom s across American to position Whites in a more favorable light. For instance, in 1865, what Anderson (2007) calls the "largest achievement gap" in the history of our country actually originated from the enslavement of African immigrants who were barred from accessing one of the most basic human rights - the freedom to learn how to read and write. Stories (written by those in power) which emphasize how civil rights laws were created to "level the playing field" for African Americans are misleading, as contradictory legislation is often neutralized opportunities for people of color. This was observed when African Americans won the right to vote in 1865, but individual states developed contingency laws that effectively excluded them from the voting process (Anderson, 2007). Other inequities, such as "double taxation" - when African Americans were forced to support schools that only White children could attend and had

to privately fund schools for their own children – are conveniently absent from classrooms across our nation as well (McLeod & Tanner, 2007).

Current scholars agree that the battle between a professed desire for equity and actual practices serves to perpetuate the gap in achievement between African and White students. According to Rod Paige and Elaine Witty (2010), the "mean and brutal chattel slavery, the unfulfilled promises of Emancipation and the Reconstruction period, the heartlessness of the Jim Crow era, and the cold callousness of legally supported racial segregation" have "imperiled the path to racial inequity and social justice for those bearing the mark of Africa" (p. 6). While acknowledging hardships of the past, Anderson (2007) believes that the "capacity to overcome educational and racial barriers to improve education attainment among Black students" is repeated through history (p.1). Certainly, this capacity to overcome obstacles was demonstrated in a number of ways: the determination of slaves to become literate despite consequences of separation from family or death, the creation of the Rosenwald Schools in the 1930's, and more recently, through staunch efforts of civil rights advocates to dismantle racial segregation laws.

It is important to acknowledge that *some* conditions have improved for African American citizens, such as increases in literacy rates, school attendance, graduation rates, and income (Anderson, 2007). However, Anderson (2007) likens the challenge for equity to a "110 Meters Hurdles" race [because] as soon as you cross one hurdle it's time to gear up for the next one that is just as demanding and even more important for reaching the finish line" (p. 3). Thus, social justice researchers are intent on

problematizing achievement disparities between African American and White students for two reasons: to promote a true understanding of the conditions in which Blacks and Whites function in society, and to reduce or eliminate systems and behaviors that perpetuate racial inequities. Addressing what Paige and Witty (2010) call "the greatest civil rights challenge of our time" is a formidable responsibility for educational leaders; this can only be accomplished through the combined and concerted efforts of researchers and practitioners in the real contexts of schools and classrooms.

Problem Statement

In 1983, release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* created a fervor to reform public education in America. Citing declining test scores, low expectations, and poor teacher quality, the report characterized education as a "rising tide of mediocrity" which threatened our nation's future. Education summits were subsequently convened by Presidents George Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush to develop educational goals, and efforts were made to intensify regulations, restructure how education was governed, and develop standards for student performance. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed as part of the response to demands for educational reform. The main purpose of NCLB (2002) was to close the achievement gap by first, increasing accountability for educators and second, providing flexibility and choice for students. As with most educational initiatives, reformation was not a simple fix. Complexities arose from changing national and state demographics, large increases in the numbers of people living in poverty (including a tendency for some Americans to

become “downwardly mobile”). Far less visible were systems of inequity that impacted traditionally marginalized groups.

To address the shortcomings in NCLB (2001), President Barack Obama signed The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) into law. Race to the Top (RTTT) was established by the AARA as a competitive grant program to encourage and reward States to participate in educational reform practices (USDE, 2009). Six priorities were established in RTTT: 1) a comprehensive approach to educational reform,; 2) an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); 3) innovations for improving early learning outcomes; 4) expansion and adaptation of statewide longitudinal data systems; 5) Preschool-through-graduate school (P20) coordination, vertical and horizontal alignment; and 6) school-level conditions for reform, innovation, and learning, (USDE, 2009). States are required to meet a detailed selection criteria in order to receive RTTT funds. As with most educational reform efforts, RTTT is highly controversial (Kolbe & Rice, 2012). A closer examination of the purpose and issues surrounding educational reform will shed light on the perpetuation of these same issues in schools and classrooms today.

Achievement Challenges in the United States

Perhaps the single most important contribution of NCLB (2001) was the provision that states annually assess and report data for students in subgroups with a substantial enrollment, “making each subgroup’s performance highly visible on its own” (Paige & Witty, 2010). The emphasis on group performance stemmed from the discovery that “too many of our neediest children are being left behind (NCLB, 2001, p.

3)." Who were these neediest children? A three decade long study of student performance (from 1971 to 2004) done by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that African American and Hispanic students, students whose parents had lower levels of education, students who did not do homework or read for pleasure, students who were not enrolled in Algebra in the 8th grade, and students who watched more than six hours of television a day were most at-risk (Perie & Moran, 2005). Though national achievement trends show incremental growth, long term data indicate that "African American students score well below their White peers on just about every scholastic assessment measure in use today" (Paige and Witty, 2010). African American children enter kindergarten on equal footing with White children, but by the end of first grade, significant differences are documented in the acquisition of reading skills and mathematic skills (Princiotta, Denton Flanagan, & Germino Hausken, 2006). By the time students reach middle school, this gap is sizable, ultimately limiting opportunites for students of color. In the NCES report entitled *The Condition of Education 2010*, for example, a 24% gap in reading scores between White and Hispanic 8th graders, and a 26% gap between White and African American students was reported (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Kena, Roth, Manning, … & Zhang, 2010). 8th graders showed similar patterns in math; a 32 point gap existed between Whites and Africans and 26 points separated Whites and Hispanics. Achievement disparities also impacted high school graduation rates and postsecondary education opportunities; just 61.3% of Blacks graduate from high school compared to 80.3% of Whites, and nearly 7% of African Americans drop-out of school, more than double the number of White drop-outs

(Stillwell, 2009). Furthermore, fewer African American students took SAT or ACT college entrance exams than White students. Scores of students of color who did test were, on average, 209 points lower than their White counterparts (Stillwell, 2009). Although increases have been noted for all subgroups in the number of students taking Algebra in the 8th grade, enrolling in Advanced Placement courses in high school, and attending college, African American and Hispanics still lag behind Whites (USDE, 2012a).

Continuation of the racial gap in achievement has been complicated by huge demographic shifts in student enrollment. Schools today have more students of color than ever before. The NCES shows that from 1990 through 2010, Hispanic enrollment in U.S. public schools increased from 12 to 23% of the total school population, a 33% growth overall. At the same time, the total enrollment of African American and White students decreased to 15 and 54% respectively (USDE, 2012b). According to Frey (2011), this trend is likely to continue, so that by the year 2023, American children will be majority minority. A second critical factor impacting schools today is poverty. More than one-fifth of all children in the United States under age 18 lived in poverty in 2010, and 25% of those under age six were poor (Simms, 2011). Black and Hispanic children are disproportionately poor; nearly two in five (39%) of African American children and more than one-third (35%) of Hispanic children are poor, compared to about one in seven Asian children and one in eight non-Hispanic White children (Simms, 2011). In schools across America, approximately 47.5% of all students qualify for free or reduced lunch on the basis of family income (Chen, 2011). According to Simms (2011),

"poverty's lasting legacy is national as well as personal" (p. 8). In other words, the cyclical nature of poverty negatively impacts the labor force and employment opportunities; this leads to health and school performance issues, causing those who grow up in poverty to be unprepared to access postsecondary education, jobs, and adequate health care (Simms, 2011).

Achievement Challenges in Texas

Achievement and demographic trends in Texas public schools are similar to those found across the nation; while achievement is slowly trending upward in reading, writing, math and science, gaps in performance continue to increase as students move from elementary to the middle school. According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), NAEP scores show that more 8th grade students in Texas fell in the "below basic" range in math (22%) than did 4th graders (15%) (USDE, 2011) . In addition, fewer 8th graders scored at or above the "proficient" range in math (36%) than their 4th grade counterparts (38%). In science, results were similar; more Texas 8th graders were considered to be "below basic" (47%) than were 4th graders (33%), and a mere 3% increase in students reaching the "proficient" level was observed from 4th to 8th grade. Writing data for Texas 4th and 8th graders remained relatively stable in the "below basic" and "proficient" range. Finally, small decreases were noted in the "basic" and "advanced" ranges for writing, and for "advanced" performance in reading.

Analyzing data among subgroups in Texas, performance gaps between Whites students and students of color are formed in elementary schools and widen as students transition to middle school. Performance for middle school students in Texas on the

2009 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) revealed that 8th grade math scale scores for White students were an average of 28 points higher in comparison to those of African American students (USDE, 2012c). Similarly, a gap of 24 points was observed in 8th grade reading scale scores between Blacks and Whites (with White performance being higher) (USDE,2012d) . Comparable patterns occurred on the Texas 8th grade science and 7th grade writing assessments. For example, 2007 writing scales scores for 7th grade White students were 23 points higher than their African American counterparts (USDE, 2012e). In science, 2005 data indicate a 34 point discrepancy between White students and students of color (USDE,2012f). Those numbers are significant as our student demographics continue to change. Further analysis of the 2008-2009 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reveals that fewer African American students than White students met “passing” criteria for reading, writing, and social studies (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2009). Significant differences in passing percentages were also evident in math and science (19% and 23% respectively). The gaps became even larger when comparing the commended performance (or mastery) of African American and White students on the TAKS test. For instance, only 25% of African American students reached commended performance in reading compared to 46% of White students. Math and science commended performance was 24% higher for White students compared to African Americans. Social Studies commended performance realized the largest gap of 28% between African American and White students.

Sustained and rapid growth in diverse student populations is another challenging factor in Texas schools. Hispanics now represent approximately 51% of all school age children, while African American and White enrollment has declined to 12.9% and 31.2%, respectively (TEA, 2011a). As more children of immigrants registered for school, the number of students identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) increased by 45.8%. Similar to national data, poverty is a significant factor for families in Texas. For instance, 59.1% of all students in Texas were considered to be economically disadvantaged in 2011, with Hispanics accounted for the largest percentage (77.4) followed by African Americans (71.6) (TEA, 2011b). Poverty is not, however, exclusive to those currently living within its confines; researchers point out that "downward mobility" is a possibility for approximately one third of middle class Americans due to a number of factors: special proximity to poor or disadvantaged areas, attending lower quality schools, racial segregation, and lack of economic or social status (Sharkey, 2009). In other words, factors such as divorce, lack of postsecondary education, and differences in test scores make it more likely that one would fall out of the middle class. Furthermore, race and gender matters; Black men are more likely to be downwardly mobile than White men, and White women have a greater chance of moving out of a middle class compared to White men (Sharkey, 2009).

A Call for Action

Without a doubt, the accountability provisions in NCLB (2001) sparked a sense of urgency among educators to ensure the success of diverse student groups. By highlighting the underachievement of students of color and poverty, individual and

systemic inequities in education were unveiled. Furthermore, a light was shined upon those with privilege and power. According to Peggy McIntosh (1988), obliviousness to power and privilege (by those who own it) is a key tenet of White privilege:

> … obliviousness to White privilege is about White advantage … [and] is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

To that end, persistence to maintain the status quo also serves to perpetuate an educational system deemed "broken", yet fails to recognize the prerequisite processes that must be in place to support that change (Darling-Hammond , 2007). Therefore, as educators and proponents of social justice, we have a responsibility to stand with people of color to increase opportunities by changing inequitable processes and systems within our circle of influence.

Purpose of the Study

This study addressed the gap in achievement between African American students and White students at Keller Middle School, a suburban middle school in southeast Texas that recently (within the last three years) acquired Title I status and funding. Given the middle class norms and values that (historically and currently) define the context in which this campus operates, perceptions of students, teachers, parents, and administrators about the achievement gap were solicited. Results of this study will be

used to inform how the gap in achievement between African American and White students might be decreased or eliminated.

Significance of the Study

This study may be useful to principals, especially middle school principals, across Texas who struggle with reducing and eliminating achievement gaps between African American and White students. First, from a practical standpoint, schools are required to report performance of African American students at the state and national level. In Texas, results from the TAKS test are used to rate campuses as Exemplary, Recognized, Academically Acceptable, and Academically Unacceptable. When schools are deemed Academically Unacceptable, they face a range of consequences from developing corrective plans to closing the campus. In addition, meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under NCLB (2001) is also determined by the TAKS scores. Failure to meet AYP for two consecutive years has even greater consequences; they include providing school choice to parents, offering supplemental services, replacing staff, instituting a new curriculum, or providing alternate governance.

Most importantly, this study may be used as a tool for educators to advance positive social change and equitably prepare students to meet the challenges of a global, diverse world. Smith contends that social justice research must “uncover the more nuanced racial ideologies and customs imbedded in the campus climate and how they persist from one generation to the next” (Smith, 2009, p. 305). By creating a platform for social justice, educators can begin to sift through surface level data to gain an understanding of the privileges of those in power, and the barriers faced by those who

are not. Once the "real" issues are addressed, teachers and administrators will better be able to abandon practices that perpetuate the achievement gap and infuse more culturally relevant and responsive practices into daily practices.

Overview of Methodology

This research focused on the African American and White achievement gap at Keller Middle School. Originally, participants were purposefully selected for the study; however, it was necessary to use convenience sampling to find the last student and parent participant. First, the researcher used the Texas Public Education Information Management System to choose four 8th grade students identified as "Black" by their parents at the beginning of the school year; two of these students met commended performance on a minimum of two subjects on the 2009-2010 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and two students failed one or more subjects tested on the TAKS. Secondly, one parent or guardian of each student participant was selected for the study. Next, four teachers from the campus were identified; two demonstrated a higher level of success with African American students than White students, and two had more success with White students compared to Black students. Finally, two administrators with diverse experiences were identified on the campus: one White female (with seven years of experience as an administrator) and one African American male who just transitioned from a classroom teacher into an administrative role.

A semi-structured interview process was used by the researcher. Interviews attempted to capture the lived experiences of study participants and understand their "subjective reality". Interview questions were centered on perceptions of factors that

contributed to the existing achievement gap, and perceptions of intended and unintended outcomes of the achievement gap. Interpretational analysis, using a constant comparison method, was used to reflect on data in this problem of practice. Student achievement data was used in conjunction with interviews to "restory" or develop a narrative about the stories of those individual's lives (Creswell, 2007).

Limitations

As a "problem of practice" qualitative research study, several limitations should be noted. First, the study was conducted in a very specific context (a Title I middle school with middle class norms in southeast Texas). As such, the findings may not be generalized to other contexts. Second, the study was conducted with very specific participants (four African American students and their parents, four White teachers, and two administrators (one White and one Black). Again, engaging in similar research but changing the race, ethnicity, gender, or experiences of participants could alter the findings. Third, this study is a "problem of practice." While teacher and administrator participants agreed to be interviewed, potential issues of power (with the researcher also serving as supervisor) may have affected the way in which questions were answered. Finally, the race of the researcher (being White) may have influenced the responses of African American students and parents. Furthermore, the perspective of the researcher (as a White, middle class, female principal and doctoral student) must allow for the possibility that inherent privileges and unconscious assumptions about people of color may have influenced data interpretation.

Definitions and Terms

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) – an African American variety of American English, also known as Black English (Lemoine, 2010).

Academic Success – the achievement of the similar scores for African American and White groups using state assessment data (NCLB, 2001).

Achievement Gap – the persistent disparity in academic achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their White counterparts (Porter, 2008).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – is the minimum level of improvement required for schools and school districts based on NCLB (2001).

African American - non-Hispanic person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Commended performance - is defined by Texas Education Agency as performing at a level that is considerably above the state passing standard and having a thorough understanding of knowledge and skills at a particular grade level (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Defensive Othering – a term used by sociologists such as Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, and Wolkomi (2000) and Ezzel (2009) to describe identity work done by those seeking membership in a dominant group, or by those seeking to deflect the stigma they experience as members of a subordinate group.

Economically Disadvantaged – a term that describes students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch or other public assistance (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Hispanic - A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Middle Class - A school community in which: 1) the median income was approximately $85,331, and 2) middle class values and norms were practiced and esteemed.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB 2001) – Public law 107–110: Legislation designed to strengthen accountability for schools, ensure that at-risk students have by highly qualified teachers and are taught using research based teaching strategies, and provide educational freedom of choice for parents (NCLB, 2002).

National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP – the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment program that provides results on subject-matter achievement, instructional experiences, and school environment for populations of students and groups within those populations (NCES, 2012).

Subgroup – A particular group within a larger group of students as defined by the state and federal governments. No Child Left Behind identifies these groups as African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Free or Reduced Lunch, Hispanic/Latino, Limited English Proficient, Native American and Special Education (NCLB, 2002).

TAKS – Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills administered to all students in Texas to measure performance in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies (TEA, 2010)

Texas Education Agency (TEA) – TEA is a branch of the state government of Texas which oversees public primary and secondary education as well as charter schools in the state of Texas.

Title I Schools – schools that receive federal funding for participation in programs authorized by Title I of Public Law 107-110, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2002, based on the number of students living in poverty. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012g).

White - A non-Hispanic person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

Organization of Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the problem and a background for the study including the current achievement challenges in education and the significance of this particular study. Chapter I also includes a description of the methodology, limitations associated with the study, and a definition of key terms for the reader.

Chapter II begins by examining how historical perspectives on immigration affect issues of acculturation, coping, racial identity, and cultural values in schools and society today. Further, this chapter discusses how the invisible power of "Whiteness" contributes to colorblind ideology. The myriad of ways deficit thinking is manifested in schools is also described. In addition, Chapter II elaborates on the far-reaching effects of racism. Unique issues related to African Americans (in schools with middle class norms) and adolescents in general are debated next. Ultimately, this chapter summarizes the

barriers currently in place that perpetuate the gap in achievement between African American and White students.

The third chapter outlines the methodology utilized in this study, along with a description of the data content, selection and analysis. Chapter IV includes a profile of Keller Middle School, a description of participants, and the results of the study. Chapter V contains a discussion of the findings, and makes recommendations for this studies' middle school, middle schools in general, and future research directions. Finally, this chapter concludes with a personal statement from the author.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter examines pertinent issues related to the existing gap in achievement between African American and White students. It begins by briefly reviewing the historical nature of immigration and the strategies used by African American immigrants to cope with cultural dissonance. Broad issues weighing on the education of African American students are discussed next; these include White privilege, deficit thinking, and cultural incongruence. Additionally, unique factors affecting the motivation, efficacy, and identity of African American middle school students are considered. Finally, this study reflects how these isolated and oppressive factors combine to form the framework of societal, institutional, and aversive racism. This, ultimately, constitutes the foundation of the gap in achievement between African American and White students in our nation. As this study shows, evidence of deficit thinking and aversive racism impacted the performance of Black students at Keller Middle School.

Historical Perspectives on Slavery and Immigration

The metaphor of America as a melting pot promotes the belief that diverse groups of people assimilate harmoniously into society to create a utopian culture. For African Americans, that has simply not been the case. In fact, perceptions of the African diaspora vary and have been colored by the individual perspectives of those within and

outside of academia. For example, Martin and Midgley (2003) contend that people of African descent arrived to the New World in one of three ways; coercion, colonization, or immigration. Ogbu (1978) distinguishes between ‘‘voluntary’’ immigrants or those who maintained their collective identities, .and “involuntary” immigrants – those who lost their collective identities;. Berlin (2009) frames the African diaspora as forced and free migration. Additionally, discussions of the physical hardships, degradation, and isolation of slavery are absent from textbooks, curricula, and classroom discussions (Trumbull, Marks Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2003). According to Lisa Delpit (2012), “the cultural framework of our country has, almost since its inception, dictated hat “black” is bad and less than and in all arenas ‘white” is good and superior (p. vi).”

Thus, over time, African Americans either assimilated into the culture of power by shedding their identities and conforming to White standards, or resisted dominants by developing an oppositional identity or subculture (Trumbull et al., 2003). Creative resistance was yet another strategy used by African American slaves as a motivation tool to persist through White oppression (Cal Logue, 1981). For example, when learning to read and write was forbidden , Blacks used an “aggressive” behavior of assertive exploitation by going “underground” or concealing their actions. Another creative resistance strategy was “accommodation;” this occurred when messages between slaves were concealed within songs or through clever dialogues. According to Logue (1981), accommodation is a defensive posture designed to maintain a constant state of vigilance and respond to Whites in ways that appeared to be deferent, but actually promoted autonomy and freedom .

Acculturation as a Coping Strategy for Immigrants

More recent views of acculturation describe how the processes of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization are used when diverse groups come together (Rudmin, 2003). From a White assimilationist perspective, for example, adaptation into the White culture is the only choice (Trumbull et al., 2003). This requires forfeiture of immigrants' cultural identity, yet does not guarantee acceptance by Whites. Furthermore, White assimilationists often devalue those who do not conform to White standards. Lacy (2004) proposes a segmented assimilation model to explain processes through which people acculturate. For example, immigrants can: 1) identify with the White middle class, or assimilate; 2) identify with the Black underclass or marginalize (by rejecting both the dominant and native culture) ; 3) deliberately retain the culture and values of their immigrant community, similar to Rudmin's (2003) notion of separation; or 4) use strategic assimilation by functioning in both African American and White worlds – otherwise known as integration or biculturalism (Lacy, 2004).

Racial Identity and Cultural Values

While African Americans adopt acculturation strategies purposefully and, more importantly, out of necessity, middle class Whites have the luxury being born with a racial and ethnic identity that will never be questioned (Martin, 2010). According to O'Hearn (1998), racial identity refers to the frame in which individuals categorize one another; most often, this is skin color. Ethnic identity, on the other hand, is an individual's identification with those who have similar traditions, behaviors, values, and beliefs (Ott, 1989). Race and ethnicity are typically invisible to Whites "because societal

norms have been constructed around their racial, ethnic, and cultural frameworks, values, and priorities and then referred to as "standard American culture" rather than as "ethnic identity"." (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999, p. 39). Invisibility, then, prevents Whites from understanding how systems and processes designed around White racial identity devalues people of color and contributes to racism.

A multitude of studies have documented connections between racial identity development and racism (see Cross, 1971; Helms, 1993, 1994, 1995; Katz, 1989; Parham, 1989, and Phinney, 1990). Thus, racial identity models were developed to explain those connections. For example, Helms' Racial Identity Model (1984, 1990) outlines how interracial exposure is a powerful trigger for the development of racial identity, and proposes movement through two separate stages (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Helms White Racial Identity Model

Stage	*Status*	*Description*
Stage 1	Contact	Oblivious of own racial identity
Stage 1	Disintegration	Conflict over contradictions between beliefs and behaviors
Stage 1	Reintegration	Retreat to previous attitudes about superiority of Whites and the inferiority of people of color
Stage 2	Pseudo-Independence	Intellectual acceptance of own and others' race
Stage 2	Immersion/Emersion	Honest appraisal of racism and significance of Whiteness
Stage 2	Autonomy	Internalization of multicultural identity with non-racist Whiteness at its core

Helms, 1984

The first stage of Helms' model addresses the abandoning of racism, while the second stage describes the development of a positive White identity. According to

Helms (1984), the model is intended to help Whites see educational practices through the lens of the oppressed, develop an appreciation for other cultures, and eliminate structures that are socially destructive (Helms, 1984). Evidence suggests that Whites in the higher stages of White racial identity development exhibit less prejudice toward those who are culturally different and appear to be more comfortable in multicultural environments (Ponterotto et al., 2006). On the other hand, those in the lower stages consistently demonstrate racist views and display more negative attitudes toward other racial and ethnic groups (Ponterotto et al., 2006). Furthermore, Dodd and Irving (2006) found that those who become "stuck" in the early stages of White racial identity may employ a "colorblind" attitude toward African Americans. Though researchers have discovered that stages of racial and ethnic identity development that promote awareness and acceptance of diversity, an educational system "puppeteered" by Whites has little chance of creating culturally responsive environments. In fact, the rights afforded to Whites are frequently manifested in White power, White privilege, and color blind ideologies.

The Power of "Whiteness"

White Power

Bourdieu's (1971) theory of social and cultural reproduction provides an explanation of how power differentials in schools are formed and influence students of color. Habitus, according to Bourdieu (1971) is "a system of embodied dispositions which generate practice in accordance with the structural principles of the social world" and is used to explain and challenge the practices of schools which contribute to social

reproduction. In middle class White schools, children who possess the habitus of the dominant culture are perceived as "ready to learn" (Nash, 1990). Alternatively, children who are not successful (typically students of color), are often viewed as having deficits. As mentioned earlier, the invisibility of racial and ethnic identity for middle class White teachers prevents acknowledgement that a habitus (dissimilar to their own) may explain Black students' failure. In fact, teachers and administrators commonly isolate, attempt to transform, or eradicate children whose habitus is viewed as different, and therefore "resistant", to the dominant culture (Nash, 1990). Furthermore, educators may ignore or devalue the cultural assets of children who are not part of the majority culture (Delpit, 1988; Trumbull, Greenfield, & Raeff, 2003). Social and cultural reproduction in our educational system, then, occurs when these processes are sustained or perpetuated in a given social structure over time (Bourdieu, 1971).

The concept of habitus aids in understanding the traditional roles of educators and students within the educational system. Williams (2006) believes that schools have historically been designed to "even" differences and create a one-culture society that reflects the majority culture. In other words, cultural hegemony, or the reproduction and dominance of Whites in reproducing an educational system that singularly promoted White values, was instrumental in creating the habitus in American schools in different ways (Hopson, 2003). First, cultural hegemony legitimatizes the existing social order and maintenance of power (Lipman, 1998). Another effect of cultural hegemony is the minimization of opportunities for diverse groups of students to fully participate in an equitable system of education (Dodd & Irving, 2006). More importantly, it prevents

implementation of classroom practices that fairly accommodate a variety of cultures, and reduces academic or behavioral success of students (Dodd & Irving, 2006). For the purposes of this study, the "culture of power" will be used to describe those who promote cultural hegemony. Researchers have found that schools who impose the "culture of power" do not meet the needs of those who are without knowledge of, and do not function within, its culture (Bourdieu, 1977; Delpit, 1988; Monkman, Ronald, & Theramene, 2005).

White Privilege

House (1999) asserts that early notions of White privilege appeared in colonial times when those who were "White and free" were compared to those who were not (slaves and Native Americans). As settlers escaped European class systems and formed new systems of governing and control, a "hierarchy of human worth" was created. While most immigrants were characterized by their ethnic backgrounds (Irish, German, etc.), African Americans were defined by their skin color. Therefore, "immigrants gained Whiteness by African Americans being excluded" (House, 1999, p. 4). More recently, White privilege has been described as a single race consciousness (Landsman & Lewis, 2006), a socially constructed process of negation and assertion that it is not "the Other"(Chubbuck, 2004), and the unearned advantages of being White in a racially diverse society where power is largely unacknowledged by most White individuals (Delpit, 1988). Critical theorists purpose White privilege as a way to expose inequalities based on social hierarchy (McIntosh, 1992; Rains, 1998; Weiler, 1988). For example, McIntosh (1988) compares White privilege to "an invisible package of unearned assets

that I can count on cashing in at the end of each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious (McIntosh, 1992). She cites numerous examples of White privilege, including being able to shop alone without being followed or harassed, knowing that her children will be given curricular materials that reflect their race, and being able to dress in second hand clothes without people attributing it to the poverty of illiteracy of her race (McIntosh, 1992).

The power of White privilege, according to Williams (2002) stems from its invisibility to Whites and pervasiveness in the culture of power. As a result, exposure to the ideology and examples of White privilege can be painful for European Americans. Often, there is a tendency to refute the personal role one plays in the intentional or unintentional use of power and privilege. According to Rains (1998), Whites commonly react to notion of White privilege in a way that enables them to prove “nonracist” thinking or actions; these include a sense of entitlement reaction, citations of exceptions, the “well I can’t speak for (a color) response, sense of guilt reaction, and the color blind and racial neutrality response. For educators, color blind ideologies play a significant role in perpetuating gaps between Black and White students.

Color Blind Ideologies

Ideologies are images or concepts that create the framework through which we interpret and understand the world. According to Lewis (2001) colorblindness is an ideology of meritocracy, and is based on the belief that a student’s merit will determine their success or failure (Lewis, 2001). In her ethnographic study of a suburban middle and upper-middle class neighborhood, Lewis (2001) found that explicit expressions such

as, “We’re all human.”, “People are people.”, and “Everybody’s the same.”, were used to convey the message that all members of the community were equal. Furthermore, colorblindness was used by those in power to: 1) mask the reality of racial thinking, practices and understanding; 2) explain and promote the status quo; 3) avoid the topic of racism; and 4) devalue the unique qualities of diverse groups of people. Other researchers (see Gallagher, 2003; Irvine, 1991; Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000; Marx & Larson, 2012; Milner, 2009), likewise, believe that colorblindness leaves African Americans on the margins of society.

Together, White power, White privilege, and colorblind ideologies contribute to the cultural hegemony rampant in American schools today, laying the groundwork for schools to become places where students of color are seen as deficit. Unfortunately, patterns of deficit thinking are continually reinforced by White power and privilege. Characteristics of deficit thinking and the implications for students of color are discussed next.

Deficit Thinking

Deficit thinking is, according to Valencia (1997), an educational paradigm used to describe the ways in which teachers’ negative beliefs about students of color and poverty pervade schools and classrooms, ultimately impeding the progress and potential of African American students. Consistent with the notion of White privilege and color blind ideology, Ryan (1971) believes the base of deficit thinking emanates from where the “powerful blame the innocent.” In other words, when White teachers lack understanding of how power, privilege, and meritocratic beliefs serve to protect and

promote their success, the failure of students of color is blamed on a perceived lack of effort or ability (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002). Thus, deficit thinking in public education is manifested in a number of ways: promotion of stereotypes and biases, curriculum development, instructional practices, teacher perceptions of student ability, teacher expectations, and over-representation in discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions ((Boykin, 1983; Delpit, 1995; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Ryan, 1971).

The Bias of Poverty

Framing the concept of the "culture of poverty" from a deficit perspective, anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1998) proposed that the poor create a distinct subculture through socialization of attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate the cycle of poverty. This belief has been commonly accepted by the culture of power. In fact, poverty has historically been the main characteristic used to compare schools to one another, determine federal resources, and measure student success. By attributing African American student failure to poverty, race is automatically discounted as an explanation, thus saving Whites from the painful process of reconciling how power inequities promote success for some, but not for others. More recent perspectives on poverty take a different stance. For example, Garcia and Garcia (2004) offer an "ecological view of factors influencing the students' underachievements or failures to include school-, classroom-,teacher-, and pedagogy-related variables that could have contributed to their academic difficulties" (p. 159). Balfanz and MacIver (2000) believe poverty may produce some harmful effects on the success of students of color. However, in their

study of high-poverty secondary schools, they found that low student achievement was actively manufactured. According to Balfanz and MacIver (2000), “this occurs, often unacknowledged or unknowingly, when inattention to the technical core of schooling (curriculum, instructional materials, academic learning time, professional development, etc.) severely limits students’ opportunity to learn (p. 143). Similarly, Kunjufu (2002) focuses on the educational system, and stresses that the most important factors impacting the academic achievement of African American children are low teacher expectations, mismatched teaching and learning styles, lack of time, tracking, and an irrelevant Eurocentric curriculum.

Teacher Expectations

Teacher expectations have been found to have a powerful effect on the success of African American students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Haberman, 1995; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Yau, 2002). Though many educators espouse the belief that “all children can learn”, the way in which the message is conveyed may actually deflect teacher responsibility and lay blame on students (Williams, 2002). Several frameworks exist to explain the stages and significance of teacher expectations in relation to African American students. For instance, Gay (2000) identified five recurring themes about teacher expectations in the research; they highlight the negative influence low teacher expectations has on students of color and the difficulty in changing strong stereotypical beliefs held by White teachers. Winfield (1986) suggested that teacher beliefs about inner city students can be categorized along four dimensions: tutors, general contractors, custodians, or referral

agents. On one hand, tutors and general contractors believe that students can improve, but vary in their belief about their level of responsibility in helping them. Custodians and referral agents, on the other hand, do not believe that students can be successful; thus, the custodian does nothing to help, and the referral agent shifts responsibility for helping to others. Variations of Winfield's (1986) four dimensions are suggested by Ladson-Billings (1994) (adding the roles of conductors and coaches) and Kunjufu (2002), who distinguishes between custodians, referral agents, and coaches. Finally, Haberman (1995) and Williams (2002) identified strategies that promote powerful belief systems to support students of color. In *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty*, Haberman (1995) contends that effective teachers demonstrate high expectations for students by persisting, motivating, and assume responsibility for student success. Williams (2002) agrees that a "no-excuses" approach can, in fact, enable educators to go beyond rhetoric and slogans to sustain actions that support success, citing four important components - valuing cultural diversity, defining and identifying multiple abilities, engaging experiences and interests, and fostering resilience – that contribute to this approach.

Cultural Incongruence

Decisions about the daily structures and processes that occur within schools and classrooms are usually made from a single cultural (European American) perspective (Trumbull et al., 2003). When uniformity in school values and practices is overlaid with a culturally diverse student population, the result is cultural incongruence. On the other hand, cultural congruence can be achieved when teachers alter speech patterns, communication styles, and participation structures in the classroom to resemble the

culture of students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to Ortman and Thandiwe (2002), the degree of congruency between students' identities and experiences and those of the dominant culture contributes to the likelihood that they will identify with and find affirmation in schools.

Cultural conflicts arise primarily when 1) White teachers perceive African American students as lacking in social and cultural capital, automatically framing them as deficit, and 2) when school environments are not conducive to change (Monkman et al., 2005). The amount of social capital, or access to groups that facilitate upward mobility, and cultural capital - one's acquired cognitive schema and behavioral dispositions - directly impacts cultural congruence (Nash, 1990; Sobel, 2002). In essence, children whose habitus embodies the cultural and social capital of those in power will more likely experience school success (Nash, 1990). An anecdote from Dr. Noma Lemoine (2010) vividly illustrates the concept of cultural incongruence:

> When fresh water fish are placed in salt water, they die. We know fresh water is a good thing. So we take the fresh water fish and put them in fresh water. Some of them still die. Clearly, the problem is with the fish! American education is the fresh water – a good thing. As educators, we provide students with a good education. When gaps in achievement occur, clearly the problem is with the students! Failure of African American students is blamed on poverty, lack of parent involvement, lack of motivation, insufficient cognitive ability, and disruptive behavior. Rarely do educators assume responsibility for the accumulation of rigor mortis in children. We believe the institution of education

> is exactly what it ought to be; and it is for some kids - but not for all (personal communication, 2010).

According to Dr. Lemoine (2010), African American students learn everything they need to learn through their culture, and, like fish, will do well within the context they were developed and shaped. She contends that educators must shift paradigms and realize there is nothing inherent in students of color that prevent them from learning.

Identity Orientation

Literature on identity orientation describes the way one interacts with group members based on knowledge of self-traits and characteristics, their role in relation to others, and their role in relation to the group (Brickson, 2000). In their research on the collective impact of how people see themselves, behave, and are motivated, Brewer and Gardner (1996) found three levels of self-orientations; individual, relational, and collective. Individual identity is the inclination for one's personal beliefs to drive their goals, values, and feelings (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). Those with individual identity orientations are motivated to enhance their own wellbeing, and evaluate themselves in comparison to others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson 2000). For example, traditional Anglo-Saxon origins favor a culture that promotes an individualistic, competitive cultural identity orientation (Trumbull et al., 2003). Collective identity orientation, on the other hand, has African roots in collectivism and cooperation, and favors "the good of the group" (Trumbull et al., 2003). The relational identity is derived from interpersonal relationships; thus, the primary motivation for individuals is to enhance the wellbeing of those they interact with (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Identity orientation plays a significant role in the educational system. When teacher and student identity orientations are closely matched, student opportunities are enhanced. Disconnects between identity orientations, however, lead to misunderstandings and conflict in the classroom. For example, White teachers operating with an individual identity orientation may incorporate competition into classroom activities, believing they are creating conditions that motivate African American students (Kunjufu, 2002). For those students, however, competition frequently represents coming in last, receiving failing grades, qualifying for special education, or being barred from advanced placement courses (Kunjufu, 2002). Replacing traditional teaching practices with differentiated instruction that values cultural differences can, instead, build confidence and self-esteem in students of color (Burris & Garrity, 2008).

Language Differences

Language differences between White middle class teachers and African American students impacts deficit thinking and student achievement (Lemoine, 2010). For some children of color, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Black English is the native language spoken in the home. Compared to European Americans' preference for traditional, visual communication, African American language is highly oral with an interactional pattern of "call and response" (Akbar, 1981). AAVE is further characterized by using body language, rhythm, and dramatization, adjunctive meaning reversal (bad means good), and multi-connotation expressions which camouflage meanings from unwanted audiences (Akbar, 1981). Differences between African American language and Standard American English are easily noticeable and frequently

addressed in classrooms for two main reasons: our society does not acknowledge Black English as a language, and teachers do not understand what Black English is or why African American students choose to speak it (Thompson, 2004). As a result, "different" is perceived as deficit. In other words, students who use African American language are often considered "lazy and low class" by White teachers (Borum, 2007).

In the classroom, white teachers often see attempts to "correct" the use of Black English as well-intentioned and supportive of African American students. Delpit (2012) asserts this occurs "because the middle-class home culture is so taken for granted, so "transparent," it often exists outside of conscious awareness for those who are members of that culture, especially in schools (p. 54)." As a result, teachers may remind African American students to speak the "appropriate" way or compare their "mistakes" to the teacher's own language learning experiences and "rules". This may create conflict in the classroom for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the myth of African American inferiority is reinforced for both White and Black students (Delpit, 2012). Another factor, according to Lemoine (2010), is that a child's first exposure to language is instrumental in hard-wiring the brain to develop language patterns. Thus, regardless of whether that first language is Spanish, Fars, or African American, a second language learner cannot be "corrected" out of his or her native language. Furthermore, Kinloch (2010) suggests that Black English can actually be a vehicle through which identity can be positively affirmed and utilized in classrooms. In other words, by embracing the intellectual and spiritual strengths of African American students, white teachers are more likely to foster a classroom climate of achievement.

Learning Styles

The premise of African Americans as deficit learners is evident in research surrounding how cultural learning styles influence perceptions of White teachers (Guild, 2002). In general, significant differences appear between African American and White learning styles related to rules, movement, noise, and behavior. For example, Hilliard (1989) points out that "traditional" schools value standards and rules, control, low movement, precise concepts of space and time, isolated experiences, and individual learning activities. On the other hand, African American students prefer variation, improvisation, expressiveness, high movement, approximate concepts of space and time, and collaboration in learning. Thompson's (2004) work on learning styles highlights the "noise factor" or noise level of African American students as a concern typically voiced by White teachers. While speaking loudly is a cultural norm in the African American family and community, most White teachers espouse traditional beliefs that children should be "seen and not heard" (Thompson, 2004). In fact, evidence shows that African Americans may speak loudly as an attempt to be heard or get attention, or because they are socialized to view discourse as interactive and dynamic (Thompson, 2004). This is, again, in direct contrast, to the way Whites handle conflict (in a static and passive manner).

Differences in learning styles also contribute to increased discipline referrals for African American students. Boykin's (1983) nine dimensions of African American culture (spirituality, harmony, movement, verve, affect, communalism, expressive individualism, oral tradition, and social time perspectives) highlights the contrast

between the cultural norms of Black students and White teachers. For example, while sitting still and conformity to rules is valued in the White culture, African Americans, and boys in particular, have a high energy level, or what Boykin (1983) refers to as "verve". Teachers often interpret this behavior as disrespectful and problematic (Webb-Johnson,1999). Furthermore, African American students' coping responses to cultural conflict (i.e. game-playing or defiance) result in the assignment of additional discipline consequences (Webb-Johnson, 1999).

Stereotypes

In 1954, the infamous "doll studies" investigated how segregation impacted children's perceptions about race, and concluded that Black children developed low self-esteem as a function of race-based segregation (Clark & Clark, 1940). This research contributed to the U.S. Supreme Court decision deeming *de jure* racial segregation in public schools as unconstitutional (Murrell, 2009). Unconscious bias, as evidenced in the doll study, leads to what Moule (2009) calls "blink of the eye" racism – a stereotype learned as part of the normal socialization process. These stereotypes are "simplistic images or distorted truths about a person or group based on a prejudgment of habits, traits, abilities, or expectations (Moule, 2009)." Throughout our history, Blacks have been referred to as lazy, prone to violence, unintelligent, unmotivated, indifferent to the value of education, and natural athletes (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). As such, stereotyping has become part and parcel of a society whose bias or racist behaviors and attitudes work to continually oppress those outside the culture of power.

Achievement, Opportunity, or Receivement Gap?

As educators and proponents of social justice work to improve the conditions for students of color, some have called for a reevaluation of the terminology used to characterize the gap in achievement between African American and White students, as many imply superiority of the dominant class over other marginalized groups (Venzant Chambers, 2009). Terminology describing achievement disparities often emanates from those in the power group who assume that equal opportunities exist for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). When White students "perform better in comparison to African American students, terms focusing on "people" (i.e. achievement gap) imply the differences are due to greater effort and ability (Venzant Chambers, 2009, p. 417)." By default, failure of Black students is attributed to lower ability, lack of motivation and discipline, absence of parent involvement, or socioeconomic status. Other researchers have referred to disparities in achievement as the "Black-White test score gap" (Jencks and Phillips, 1998) and "education debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) . More recently, a fresh perspective problematizes the gap in achievement between African American and Whites as structural. In other words, success for students of color is dependent upon societal and institutional structures. For example, Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) promotes the idea that an "opportunity gap" is responsible for inequalities that exist in our country; she defines the opportunity gap as the accumulated differences in accessing key educational resources that support learning at home and at school. These resources include expert teachers, personalized

attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, and good educational materials (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Venzant Chambers (2009) believes the term "receivement gap" more accurately characterizes the issue (p. 427). In other words, "'receivement gap' focuses attention on educational inputs, or what students receive on their educational journey, instead of outputs, or test performance" (Venzant Chambers, 2009, p. 418).

Racism

Racism Defined

Race is defined as a social construction in which people are identified by their skin color, language, and physical features, and are clustered and ranked into distinctive racial groups (Carter, 2007). Racism, then, has been defined in a number of ways: unfair treatment based on one's race that results from interpersonal interactions (Harrell, 2000); a system of advantage based on race (Wellman, 1993); and prejudice plus power (Tatum, 1997). Scheurich (1993) offers that racism may, in fact, be defined differently when looking through the lens of highly educated Whites and people of color. This version is based on the idea that Whites identify overt (stereotypical) behaviors as racist, while Blacks have what Du Bois (1961) called "double consciousness"; in other words, by virtue of living in a racist society, Blacks must look at themselves through their own eyes (as African Americans) and through the eyes of Whites (as Americans). While overt racism certainly exists, researchers have devoted much attention to the unconscious behaviors that devalue people of color, citing their invisibility to Whites as a major deterrent to recognizing and accepting responsibility for the racist practices that

benefit them and harm others (Carter, 2004; McIntosh, 1988; Rothenberg, 2006). For example, Dovidio and Gaertner's (2005) study of bias highlighted how African American and White participants differed in their awareness of unconscious biased behaviors; whereas they were readily visible to Blacks, White participants were unaware of the manner in which their positioned them as "better". Furthermore, when confronted by researchers, Whites maintained their position and tended to "blame the victim" for the discrepancy. Such is the case across America, where acknowledgement of racial bias is rare. In fact, common reactions to racial confrontation come in the form of dismissing the relevance of race (King, 1991), espousing meritocracy (Stanfield, 1991), using code words that give the appearance of taking responsibility but actually sustain racial dominance (i.e. students at risk) (Sleeter, 1994), and derailing conversations about or dismissing race (McIntyre, 1997). In addition, Rains (1998) identified five "benign" manifestations of racism induced by Whiteness: a sense of entitlement; citation of exceptions (i.e. African Americans who overcame racism and achieved success); distancing Whites from claims of people of color (the I-can't-speak-for response); guilt; and colorblindness.

Explanations of reactions to racial confrontation also abound in the literature. For example, Audrey Thompson (2003) contends that "because Whites are uncomfortable with the implications of acknowledging White racism we are tempted to position ourselves as "good Whites" (p. 8). Thus, people may recount personal stories that "sing of their colorblindness" and proclaim friendships with people of color to prove they are antiracist (Moule, 2009; A. Thompson, 2003). Sleeter (1994) attributes

behaviors that assist Whites in screening out real issues of racism to unwillingness or fear. In other words, to acknowledge racial inequities requires bearing responsibility to find a solution; in that process, Whites risk losing material resources and the psychological advantages that come from being membership in the power group. Regardless of the manner in which culturally sanctioned beliefs are defended, White advantage ultimately reinforces societal and institutional policies and practices that limit opportunities for people of color. Among those are wealth, housing, incarceration rates, education, teacher quality, curriculum, tracking, policy development, and school funding. As is evident in the data, cycles within each area serve to create unbroken, and almost impenetrable, forces.

Effects of Societal Racism

Wealth

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2010), more African American children (35%) are considered economically disadvantaged than White children (11%). In addition, poor Blacks face substantially different challenges than poor Whites. Even when African Americans gain employment, they earn less than Whites ($28,000 compared to $44,000), a difference of 64% (Kunfuju, 2006). African American adults who experienced poverty in childhood are more likely to be poor through early and middle adulthood than Whites who experience similar levels of poverty as children (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2010).

Health

Those with limited or nonexistent incomes rarely get adequate health care. According to Rothstein and Wilder (2005), African American women are twice as likely to get no prenatal care compared to White women, and their children are twice as likely to lack health insurance compared to their White counterparts. Because of inadequate care, children born to African American women are more likely to have a low birth weight and suffer from specific health conditions (i.e. iron deficiency anemia, poor eye-muscle development), resulting in an increased susceptibility to academic, behavioral, and emotional disorders.

Housing

Jaret, Williams Reid, & Adelman (2003) found that residential housing markets are influenced by wealth disparities; as a result, African Americans are more likely to be stranded in economically depressed areas while Whites are able to relocate to the suburbs. Consequently, when African Americans are residentially segregated, the resulting social and economic isolation can exacerbate the harmful effects of poverty Shaffer, Ortman, & Denbo (2002). While most disadvantaged African Americans are clumped together in housing projects, poor White Americans are spread throughout rural America, the mountains, trailer parks, and the suburbs, increasing its "invisibility" to those in power (Kunfuju, 2006).

Criminal Justice System

According to Kunjufu (2006), if African Americans are not in our public schools, it is likely they will be found in our nation's prison system. African Americans account

for only 12% of the U.S. population; however, they comprise more than 50% of the prison population (Kunfuju, 2006). According to the U.S. General Accounting Office (2000), when African Americans pulled over for traffic stops, they are much more likely to have their vehicle or own person searched, be handcuffed or arrested, have excessive force against the driver compared to Whites (Scheurich, Gonzalez, Dantley, Huggins, & Ozel, 2009). Furthermore, data from the Prison Policy Initiative (2012) indicated that more Black males are incarcerated compared to White males in U.S. prisons (a ratio of 4,347 to 678 per 100,000). For young Black males, the future is even more dire; over 8,900 young Black males, ages 25-29, were in prison in 2004 compared to 1,437 per 100,000 of their White counterparts. Interestingly, this trend does not extend into other countries. Even under apartheid in 1993, only 813 Black males per 100,000 were imprisoned in South Africa.

Education

How do the previously addressed cycles impact opportunities for African Americans to receive an equitable education? According to Shaffer (2002), poverty, lack of housing, insurmountable numbers of African American incarcerated males, and stringent employment opportunities all contribute to a gap in achievement between African American and White students. Research shows that by the time they start school, only half of all African American kindergartners have more than 35 children's books in their homes compared to 91% of White children, and only 30% have access to a home computer compared to 62% of Whites (Rothstein & Wilder, 2005). Furthermore, 42% of African American children watch six or more hours of television a day,

compared to 13% of White children (Rothstein & Wilder, 2005). This leads to fewer opportunities to engage in supervised play that develops hand-eye coordination or to enjoy the benefits of early (more formal) literacy experiences (Rothstein & Wilder, 2005).

Although Kunjufu (2006) contends that African American youth in poverty are just as brilliant as other children, inaccessibility to resources limits their readiness for school experiences compared to the children in the culture of power. Thus, once in school, early patterns of underachievement begin to emerge for African American students. They are less successful on all content area proficiency tests (Paige & Witty, 2010), more likely to disengage to maintain a positive self-concept (Shaffer, et al., 2002), and have fewer vertical social ties, thereby limiting access to educators and professionals (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). By middle school, research shows that African American males often demonstrate characteristics of "oppositional identity" in middle class White classrooms, as they are fighting back against an oppressive system (Shaffer, et al., 2002). Ogbu (2004) identified that African American male students cope with the "burden of acting White" by assimilating or emulating Whites, accommodating without assimilating (or maintaining ambivalence) or responding with resistance or opposition. When students choose this option, they are, in turn, perceived by teachers as "defiant, aggressive, and intimidating" thus reinforcing the teacher's low expectations (Shaffer, et al., 2002, p. 23).

Teacher Quality

Numerous studies exist depicting the importance of teacher quality in educating African American students. High expectations for success are demonstrated by teachers who show commitment and take responsibility for student learning (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Winfield, 1986). Teachers who align standards, curriculum, and assessment are also more likely to help students achieve (Fullen, 2005; Marzano, 2005). Effective teachers plan and employ curricula that is culturally responsive and relevant to the interests and needs of students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). They purposefully teach the "hidden curriculum" or "culture of power" so students can fully participate in the mainstream (Delpit, 1988; B. Williams, 2003). Unfortunately, system wide supports for teacher preparation are insufficient to adequately meet the needs of our growing diversity (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Research shows that poor children and children of color are disproportionately assigned to teachers with the least preparation and experience (Denbo, 2002b; Ingersoll, 2001; Murnane & Steele, 2007). Teachers in the poorest communities receive lower salaries and have radically different resources (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Furthermore, teaching mentoring and coaching is not available to build and sustain growth in pedagogy and practices (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Curriculum

According to Dr. Noma Lemoine (2010), "traditional pedagogy has always been culturally responsive as American education was designed for about middle class Europeans". Tongue in cheek, Dr. Lemoine's comment on the current pedagogical

system in place in American schools is all too true. She contends that, from the perspective of the White middle class, the curriculum focus in public schools *is* culturally responsive and relevant, as it makes critical connections to the history and language *of Whites*. Furthermore, Dr. Lemoine believes that the behavioral and experiential norms established for the White middle class are entrenched in schools and classrooms. As a result, culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies are rarely used to ensure the success of a diverse student population. Other proponents of culturally responsive teaching agree. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings, "the pedagogical instruction that many teachers of African American students received – from their teacher preparation programs, from their administrators, and from "conventional wisdom" – leads to an intellectual death" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 19). Similarly, Denbo (2002a) contends that diverse groups of students are taught with curricula that are less challenging, geared to slow learners, and repetitious and boring. Resistance to a newer, more culturally responsive curriculum can be attributed to the level of White knowledge and understanding about diverse cultures (Lemoine, 2010; Murrell, 1994) and a lack of processes to dialogue and reflect on the classroom and organizational practices that perpetuate inequities (Williams, 2006; Delpit, 1995 Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Tracking Practices

Proponents of tracking, or ability grouping, argue that narrowing the range of student abilities in a classroom enables teachers to better target and change the pace of instruction, thus keeping students more engaged in learning (Figlio & Page, 2002).

While tracking is typically associated with special education, students in gifted classes are considered tracked as well. Clear divisions among student populations are evident in tracking programs across the U.S. For example, African American students are more likely to be tracked into lower ability groups and special education than any other student group (Denbo, 2002b; House, 1999). Students in AP, Honors, and Gifted classes, on the other hand, are predominately White and Asian (Kunfuju, 2006). Researchers have also documented the mismatch between the demographics of tracked classes and the diversity of the student body (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Despite teacher support for tracking as a strategy to increase student success, research evidence points to the contrary; tracking leads to overrepresentations of African American and economically disadvantaged students in lower tracks, a slower delivery of curriculum, an overabundance of discipline issues, and disproportionate retention, suspension, and expulsion rates for African American students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Denbo, 2002b; Webb-Johnson, 2002).

School Funding

In recent studies analyzing issues in educational finance, educators have voiced concerns about pressures to close the gap in achievement between students of color and Whites, but are undecided as to the best way to use the economic and human capital available to them (Corbett, Hill, & Rose, 2008). More often than not, demands for additional funding are deemed necessary to achieved desired results. Add to that the long list of constraints (or what some might deem as excuses) generally given to explain why targeted interventions didn't or can't work (i.e. class size, teaching methods, restrictions

on hiring and certifying teachers, kids who don't want to learn, and parents who don't care about education). According to Roza, Guin, and Davis (2007), funding inequities, which began in the early 1900's and still exist today, are caused by three major flaws in our system: 1) lack of clarity in the process of tying resources to student needs; 2) little or no documentation on different options for structuring targeted allocations and how those options relate to policy objectives; and 3) policy makers have not figured out how to channel funds from one governmental level to the next so they ultimately reach the intended students . However, as Cross and Roza (2007) discovered, the millions of dollars issued to schools through categorical programs are not changing the educational outcomes for students of color and poverty. As Denbo (2002b) cautions us to remember, unequal funding and lack of comparable resources are byproducts of inequitable funding systems in the United States today.

So far, significant issues surrounding the oppression of African American students in society and public education have been examined. The literature clearly supports the idea that racism and social reproduction creates gaps in opportunities for African American students. Thus, this problem of practice examined perceptions of teachers, administrators, and African American students and their parents at a suburban middle school in southeast Texas that recently (within the last three years) acquired Title I status and funding. The diverse nature of the student population (i.e. approximately half are considered "middle class/middle income" while the other half qualify for free or reduced lunch) called for an examination of the literature through multiple perspectives. Thus, a discussion of the Black middle class *and* Blacks in school communities with

White middle class norms was important. In addition, the complexities surrounding adolescence were investigated.

The Black Middle Class: Does it Make a Difference?

The Black middle class has been described by some as beginning when "descendants of enslaved Africans, through tenacity and hard work and in the face of openly racist policies and practices, made great sacrifices to achieve the academic and industrial advancements that gave them financial benefits, political influence, and social mobility (Gordon, 2010). Du Bois' essay on the Talented Tenth, for example, emphasized that the most able 10% of black Americans should be educated to become leaders of the African American race (Du Bois, 1961). A powerful tenet of the Talented Tenth ideology is that under the right leadership, Black society as a whole will experience positive progression , enabling the Black elite to grow larger and the Black poor to grow smaller .

Indeed, academic and economic growth were highly influential in helping African Americans to achieve middle class status. While these changes were largely perceived to benefit those in the African American community, they were problematic as well. For example, the hegemonic nature of education caused middle-class educated some Blacks to "separate themselves socially and geographically from their working-class counterparts through exclusive organizations, clubs, societies, and neighborhoods (Gordon, 2012, p. 3)." Black scholars saw this as an enormous challenge to maintaining unity among African Americans (Du Bois, 1961; Woodson, 1933). In addition, removal of overt discrimination laws prompted the belief that racial subordination was a "thing

of the past", resulted in race-neutral policies, and promoted more covert forms of racial oppression (Evans & Feagin, 2012).

A well-known ethnographic study conducted by John Ogbu (2003), professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley addressed the achievement of middle class African American students in Shaker Heights, Ohio – a middle class suburb of Cleveland. While their performance was well above the national average, Ogbu (2003) found that students of color were underrepresented in honors and advanced placement classes, and lagged behind Whites in grade point average, subject proficiency scores, and high school class rank (Ogbu, 2003). The Shaker Heights community, however, is not unique to this problem. Despite the increased number of students of color residing in middle to high income neighborhoods, race continues to depress both mobility and achievement (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Landry & Marsh, 2011; Seyfried, 1998). Ferguson (2002) found that 85% of African American middle and high school students reported making lower grade point averages, understanding less of their teachers' lessons, and having less comprehension of what they read in school than White students, while Shaffer et al. (2002) noted that performance levels of middle class African American students are commensurate with poor White students on some standardized tests. A number of factors appear to be highly influential in perpetuating this gap in achievement between middle class African Americans and Whites. These include economic vulnerability despite having a "middle class income" , cultural differences, family dynamics, school practices and teacher expectations, and issues of privilege.

Economic Vulnerability

Regardless of having an income defined as “middle class”, economic vulnerability is, in fact, a very real threat to middle class African Americans (Wheary, Shapiro, Draut, & Meschede, 2008). Using the “Middle Class Security Index” to measure the overall percentage of families considered middle class by income, Wheary et al. (2008) found that five key factors determine middle-class security or vulnerability: education, assets, housing, budget, and healthcare. Families are considered to be economically secure if they meet three or more of the factors. Statistics about African American middle class families who are considered economically vulnerable indicate the following:

- Assets: As a whole, 31% of all middle class families have overall economic security compared to 26% of African American families. Middle class African American families are most vulnerable because they do not have the financial assets that provide a foundation of middle class economic security. For example, only 2% of African American middle class families have enough net financial assets to meet three quarters of their essential living expenses for nine months if their source of income disappeared (compared to 13% of all middle class families). Even more alarming, only 5% of African American middle class families have enough net assets to meet three-quarters of their essential living expenses for even three months if their source of income disappeared. Nationally, 22% of all middle class families meet this indicator. Finally, 68% of

African American middle class households have no net financial assets whatsoever and live from paycheck to paycheck.

- Education: 32% of African American middle class families meet the education threshold for economic security since at least one member of the family has a bachelor's degree or higher. 34% are at high risk because neither the primary earner nor spouse has an education beyond high school. The national middle class average for this indicator is 27%.
- Income to Meet Housing Expenses: 40% of all middle class families spend less than 20% of their after tax income on housing compared to 26% of African American families. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines being housing burdened as spending 30% or more of after tax income on housing expenses. 31% of African American middle class families meet this indicator compared to the national average of 28%.
- Income to Meet Essential Expenses: 36% of African American middle class families are secure in meeting essential family needs; they have $25,000 or more left over after paying income taxes and meeting essential family needs each year. 19% of African American families, however, are at risk of falling out of the middle class; they have less than $5,000 per year left over after paying for taxes and essential expenses. This is lower than the national middle class average of 21%.

- Methods of Accessing Resources: While White middle class families tend to use mobility related resources in a vertical pattern, African American middle class families often diffuse their resources horizontally (Gosa & Alexander, 2007).
- Healthcare: Only 70% of middle class African Americans have every household member covered by insurance; the middle class average for this indicator is 77%.

Overall, this notion of economic vulnerability for the Black middle class directly conflicts with assumptions that " middle class" membership ensures a level playing field for African American students (Kunfuju, 2002).

Blacks in School Communities with White Middle Class Norms

Gosa and Alexander (2007) suggest that White privilege and racism significantly impact opportunities for African Americans – even those living in middle class communities. In a school with traditional middle class norms, for example, the lens of the dominant culture (i.e. White middle class) serves as a filter for the beliefs, behaviors, and values of other student groups (Cox, 1993). Thus, when mismatches between values and norms occur, blame is automatically assigned to the "other" (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Lisa Delpit (2012) attributes this to the transparency of middle class culture:

> Because middle-class home culture is so taken for granted, so "transparent," it often exists outside of conscious awareness for those who are members of that culture, especially in schools. It is assumed to be what 'everyone knows," just the background of normal life – knowledge that does not need to be taught.

> Consequently, when this knowledge is not exhibited by children or adults, there is a sense that something is wrong, perhaps a lack of basic intelligence (p. 54).

In general, negative perceptions of African American human and social capital significantly impact opportunities for students of color. For example, Ferguson (2002) found that teachers attributed differences between African American and White students' behaviors and homework completion rates to the African American students; in other words, because Blacks were less academically engaged and had a poor work ethic, they exhibited inappropriate behavior and didn't complete homework assignments. Delpit (1995) confirms this phenomenon, saying "when a significant difference exists between the students' culture and the school's culture, teachers can easily misread students' aptitudes, intent, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns" (p. 167). Cultural differences also exist in networking styles and preferences for academic validation; while Whites seek validation from school personnel, grades, and achievement test scores, African Americans rely on friends and family to form an academic identity (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

Opportunities for African Americans in middle class schools and communities are often diminished as a result of White cultural dominance (Denbo, 2002b; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Kunfuju, 2002). For example, research shows that African American students have limited access to accelerated curricula, resulting in tracking practices. Tracking creates huge disparities in the underrepresentation of students in gifted programs and advanced courses, while overrepresentation occurs in special education and behavioral intervention programs (Paige & Witty, 2010; Webb-Johnson, 2002). For

example, in their work with high achieving African American students, Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) found that African American students who actually qualified for Gifted programs were often referred for special education testing because White teachers saw differences in language and vocabulary as deficit.

Other disadvantaging conditions exist for African Americans in middle class neighborhoods (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). For example, African American mothers are less likely to graduate from high school and college than Whites (Ferguson, 2002). Additionally, many African American students attend suburban schools with a predominate minority population (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Finally, racist views and stereotypes from white neighbors, denial of bank loans or credit, or physical avoidance because of skin color are additional barriers faced by African Americans in middle class communities (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg, 1991). Beyond the issues of race, culture, and socioeconomic status, unique challenges also exist when middle school students are moving through the developmental stages of adolescence.

Unique Challenges of Adolescents in Middle School

Motivation

The ability to know what motivates others is critical to developing a positive organizational climate. Motivation theories are highly influential in education. Locke & Latham's Goal Theory, for example, contends that difficult and specific goals result in higher levels of performance. Moreover, the motivational effects of assigned goals can be just as powerful as jointly set goals (Locke & Latham, 2002). Attribution theory uses causal explanations about past behaviors in regard to achievement efforts and

expectancies, and helps one determine the cause, locus, stability, and controllability of behaviors (Locke & Latham, 2002). Achievement goal theory, or the aims and purposes that are pursued or perceived in an achievement setting, has also been studied with middle school students (Midgley & Edelin, 1998). Personal goal orientation is a students' pursuit of achievement goals; personal goal structure is a student's perceptions of the emphasis on achievement goals in the learning environment. Personal achievement goals can be set to develop ability or to demonstrate ability or avoid demonstrating the lack of ability. Mastery goals differ in that they are concerned with gaining understanding, insight and skill; learning is valued as an end in itself. According to Midgley and Edelin (1998), working on the relationship dimension is "cosmetic" in nature. Mastery learning, however, creates structural changes; therefore, relationships are enhanced when children are truly learning, and learning is enhanced when children are in a caring environment (Midgley & Edelin, 1998). Self-efficacy, or a person's perceived judgment about his or her capability to execute a course of action to attain a certain level of performance , is another motivation theory used frequently in education. Hertzberg's (1966) work on needs and satisfaction identified motivators and hygiene's in organizations. Motivators (qualities that tend to produce satisfaction) include achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement. Hygiene's – those things that produce dissatisfaction – consist of interpersonal relations, supervision, policy and administration, working conditions, salary, and personal life. Knowledge of both systems and motivation theory can assist in designing and managing successful schools and classrooms for African American students.

Efficacy

According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is the belief about one's capability to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that effect their live. These beliefs, in turn, determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Not only are self-efficacy beliefs strong predictors of behavior, they influence motivation, goal setting, acceptance of challenging tasks, and effort to persist in the face of setbacks (Hoy, 2004). Most significantly, research has shown that student achievement is significantly and positively correlated to collective self-efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy (2000). McKenzie & Scheurich, (2004) contend that dismantling equity traps – the ways of thinking or assumptions that prevent educators from believing in students of color – is critical to developing successful African American learners. Mastery experiences are most often cited as a source for developing self- efficacy; however, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal have also been found to influence self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2006). In fact, Bandura (1994) believes that adult development of psychosocial skills contributes more heavily to career success. Subsequently, "development of coping capabilities and skills in managing one's motivation, emotional states and thought processes increases perceived self-regulatory efficacy" (Bandura, 1994, p. 11). Urgency, responsibility, and efficacy were highlighted in a study of ten districts in Texas (The Charles A. Dana Center, 1999). The schools all serve very poor communities, yet generate high levels of student achievement. Findings in this study indicated that district leaders first created a sense of urgency in their communities for the improvement of

academic achievement. Secondly, the district leaders shaped an environment in which improving academic instruction became a responsibility shared by everyone at every school. Progress was anticipated, planned, monitored, and celebrated. Finally, district leaders recognized that high expectations needed to be accompanied by high quality support. They provided a quantity and quality of support that helped school personnel feel that they had the power to effect measurable changes in the achievement of students. Thus, a variety of support structures were developed to increase the capacity of schools to address instructional improvement issues.

Identity

For middle school students, so much is changing. Physically, they are growing at a rapid pace. Socially, they have an intense need to belong and be accepted by peers. Emotionally and psychologically, they are vulnerable, unpredictable, and moody. Intellectually and morally, they are curious, motivated to achieve when challenged, capable of complex thinking, and they want to make the world a better place (National Middle School Association, 1995). As educators, we have a responsibility to respond to middle schooler's developmental needs; this can be accomplished by focusing on six main areas: intellectual capacity, differentiating instruction, redesigning curriculum to meet the needs and interests of pre-teens, helping students to develop a voice and leadership skills, creating a safe yet challenging environment, and engaging students in community service (National Middle School Association, 1995). Knowing that adolescence is such a time of growth and change, it is important to understand the impact of "fitting in" socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Possession of social

capital is one way middle school students can "fit in". Social capital refers to the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties, plays a vital role in student success (Horvat, et al., 2003). Drawing on the theory of social capital, resources are transferred through social networks. Research shows that for middle class families, social ties are abundantly woven through children's family and school lives (Horvat, et al., 2003). By contrast, kinship ties are the main source of social networking for poor and working class families (Horvat, et al., 2003). Thus, informal access to educators and professionals is limited (Horvat, et al., 2003). Horvat et al. (2003) found that middle class parents mobilized resources to respond collectively to teacher concerns, used their children's outside activities to forge connections, and used networking connections to access specialized services in the school. Working class and poor families, on the other hand, tended to address teacher concerns with the school individually. Parents also "accepted the luck of the draw" with regard to teacher assignments and special requests. For middle school students, lack of social capital can compound difficulties with peers and adults. Agreement exists that social capital within the school community can and must be increased for students in poverty (Farquhar, Michael, & Wiggins, 2005; Monkman, et al., 2005; Warner, 1999). That may occur through the development of horizontal relationships and building leadership, or by creating meaningful interactions and teacher participation to open access to parents (Farquhar, et al., 2005). Monkman (2005) contends that high teacher expectations and critical examination of assumptions, beliefs, and practices is essential to build social and cultural capital.

Wanting to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance are natural for middle school students. Goodenow (1993) found positive relationships between urban middle school students' feelings of belonging and their academic motivation and effort (Goodenow, 1993). Students who feel they belong in schools are more likely to adopt healthy and adaptive motivational orientations toward academic achievement (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Likewise, a 1995 study on the connection investigating "sense of community" in middle school yielded interesting outcomes; for this study, "sense of community" referred to caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in the classroom, caring and supportive relationships throughout the school, and student autonomy and influence on classroom norm setting and decision making (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). Results indicated that 1) an individual students' sense of school community is positively related to different variables on attitude, motivation, and behavior variable; 2) a strong, negative correlation was found between sense of community and poverty and most student outcome variables. Thus, for students in poverty, school is perceived as less pleasant and rewarding. Changes in middle school students' sense of school belonging was examined in relation to grade point average, motivation variables, and teachers' promotion of mutual respect in classes (Anderman, 2003). Survey data from 618 students was collected in three waves during the sixth and seventh grades. Initial levels of school belonging were predicted positively by students' grade point average, academic task values, and perceived classroom task goal orientation, but sense of belonging declined over time. When teachers promoted mutual respect in the classroom, a small

effect in ameliorating the decline occurred. The findings suggested that students' sense of school belonging is enhanced when teachers promote adaptive academic and interpersonal contexts in their classrooms.

Research has suggested that teasing, especially about physical appearance, is a common experience with negative consequences for adolescents (Agliata, Tantleff-Dunn, & Renk, 2007). Results of one indicated that adolescent girls recalled appearance-related teasing more readily than competency teasing, adolescent girls with high body dissatisfaction recalled fewer positive appearance words, and participants exposed to competency teasing were more likely to recall competency words. The findings indicated that cognitive processes may be important in the study of adolescents' interpretation of teasing and for clinical treatment of adolescents who are teased.

The preceding literature and data on national and state level achievement gap was necessary to build a foundation for this qualitative research study. Furthermore, the literature on middle class African Americans and characteristics that influence adolescent development combine to form a framework to investigate and interpret perceptions of students, teachers, parents, and administrators at Keller Middle School about the achievement gap.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Qualitative inquiry encompasses any and all forms of social investigation that rely on the subjective meaning of human actions (Schwandt, 2007). Definitions of qualitative inquiry can vary based on the philosophical perspective of a researcher. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative inquiry as a "situational activity that locates the observer in the world", and uses interpretive practices (i.e. field notes, interviews) to create representations of that world and make it visible. Rolfe (2006) defines qualitative research by method or the way in which research is grounded in ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. Qualitative research has also been described as a self-reflective and ever-changing practice, and a merging of understandings (Creswell, 2007). In other words, through individuals' cultural and social lens', both the participant's experiences and researcher's interpretation of those experiences contribute to the research findings (Creswell, 2007). For researchers and practitioners, then, using a qualitative research design is a way to explore and understand *why* and *how* people make decisions. Acceptance of qualitative research methods in the realm of social and behavioral science research, however, has been highly contested and controversial over time (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Lincoln and Cannella (2004), qualitative research is viewed as an "academic evil" or threat to studies of western civilization for a number of reasons: 1) it philosophically opposes the idea of objectivity;

2) the "subjective" nature of qualitative research is often linked to lack of rigor; 3) because qualitative research is focused on the "lived" experience, it exposes oppression and threatens the status quo, and; 4) deep levels of understanding of social phenomena and the deconstructive, probing nature of that understanding "prove a wedge of support for reform of existing social arrangements." Furthermore, NCLB (2002), with its emphasis on the use of effective, research-based educational programs and practices, has given great political clout to advocates of quantitative research and created alliances with those who believe in a positivist, evidence based epistemology (Maxwell, 2004).

This shifting of research philosophies is not new. Following the Chicago school era in the 1930's and 1940's, an evolution of qualitative research beliefs and practices occurred called "the eight historical moments" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Each era is described by the prevailing assumptions held by leading researchers of the time: the traditional (1900-1950); the modernist or golden age (1950-1970); blurred genres (1970-1986); the crisis of representation (1986-1990); the postmodern (1990-1995); post-experimental inquiry (1995-2000); the methodologically contested present (2000-2004); and the future (2005 to the present). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the order of the "eight moments" is neither progressive nor exclusive to those time periods, as pieces of each historical moment may still be operating today in the form of beliefs or practices. Although they predict a "fractured future" when research designs are pitted against one another, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) believe that the paradigm shifts within the last twenty-five years have proven advantageous to advocates for social justice:

> [The paradigm shifts] have "enlarged sophistication regarding the ends of our research" and "led to a powerful force for expanding knowledge of social processes, especially oppressive social practices, which remained largely obscured or glossed until the past quarter century. By shining a light on moral discourse and promoting critical conversations about race, gender, and class, we can promote social justice and create "good societies and a better world" (p. 207)."

Opportunities to explore the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, then, can shed light on the how contradictions (between words and actions) actively perpetuate the marginalization of African Americans (Charmaz, 2008).

Choosing a Research Design

The inquiry design process incorporates several theoretical frameworks: philosophical assumptions or paradigms of the researcher, ontological or nature of reality, epistemological (how we know what we know), axiological or values, and methodological – how will the research be implemented (Creswell, 2007). In general, qualitative research is used when there is a problem to be explored, a need to study a group or population, or silenced voices that must be heard (Creswell, 2007). Its design is distinguishable by a number of characteristics. First, qualitative researchers attempt to "know" participants by becoming "insiders" (Creswell, 2007). Second, detailed descriptions of people's knowledge, feelings, perceptions, actions, and behaviors are used to understand the "meaning of human action" (Schwandt, 2007). Finally, the subjective nature of qualitative research lends itself to the use of quotes and themes in

the words of participants; these are typically used in an informal literary or narrative style as a way to interpret experiences (Creswell, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that qualitative research privileges no single methodological practice over another. Therefore, when deciding on research methodology, Guba and Lincoln (2005) recommend focusing on paradigmatic similarities and differences to find the best fit for each research investigation. For example, those with constructivist inquiry beliefs favor interpretive research methods such as ethnography, case study, naturalistic inquiry, and focus groups, among others (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). While all are viable qualitative research options, this study will focus on naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry is considered by some to be an alternative to traditional positivistic inquiry (Bowen, 2008). Its purpose is to describe and interpret human phenomenon in naturally occurring settings rather than in laboratories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry is characterized by the use of purposeful sampling, robust data collection techniques, grounded theory, inductive analysis and a special criteria for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Focus of the Research

This “problem of practice” focused on understanding the “subjective reality” of students, teachers, administrators, and parents at Keller Middle School about the African American and White achievement gap. For the purposes of this study, the achievement gap was defined as the persistent disparity in academic achievement between students of color and their White counterparts (Porter, 2008). Participants were interviewed in an attempt to capture their “lived experiences” and perceptions of issues that contributed to

the existing gap in achievement between African American and White students. Perceptions of intended and unintended outcomes of the gap in achievement were sought as well. Student achievement data was used in conjunction with interviews to "restory" or develop a narrative about the stories of those individual's lives (Creswell, 2007). This study was developed with the hope that it could be used to reflect on factors that perpetuate oppression and those that serve to maintain the status quo in middle schools across America.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the primary data-gathering instrument in this qualitative study. Multiple sources of data were collected from interviews and document analysis; these data were reviewed and organized into categories or themes in an attempt to make sense of them (Creswell, 2007). Using the theoretical lens of racism and deficit thinking, the multiple perspectives of participants were interpreted to develop a holistic picture of the existing gap in achievement between African American and White students at Keller Middle School (Creswell, 2007). As the researcher, it was imperative that I remain focused on "learning the meaning that the participants [held] about the problem or issue", not the meaning that *I* brought to the research or explanations in literature" (Creswell, 2007). Being cognizant of the way in which my personal, subjective lens impacted my role as "co-constructor" of this story was necessary as well (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, the fact that I was functioning in dual roles (that of campus principal and researcher) also required vigilance; in other words, protecting

study participants (i.e. current employees and former students) from harm throughout the research process was of utmost importance.

Participants

Choosing study participants is a crucial responsibility of a researcher (Creswell, 2007). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) point out that the purpose of a research study should determine the selection of participants. In naturalistic inquiry, purposeful sampling is frequently the process by which researchers select study participants to best provide an understanding of the research problem. When choosing a purposeful sample, researchers must consider participant accessibility, willingness to share information, selecting individuals who best represent the group being studied, and the participants' capacity to shed light on the issues being explored (Creswell, 2007). Thus, a purposeful sample was used in this study to identify fourteen "key informers" who could provide insight, based on their differing views, about the gap in achievement at Keller Middle School. Originally, four African American students who attended Keller Middle School as 8th graders in the 2009-2010 school year were identified; two who met the commended performance standard (or mastery level) in at least two subjects on the 2009-2010 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and two students who failed one or more subjects tested on the TAKS. During the selection process, however, only three African American students from the purposeful sample agreed to participate in the study; Thus, a convenience sampling was used to find the last African American student participant. Of those four African American students, one met commended performance in a minimum of two subjects on the 2009-2010 (TAKS), two students failed one or more

subjects tested on the TAKS, and one student achieved the passing standard on a modified version of the TAKS. All four African American parents selected were the parent or guardian of the student participants. The four teachers (all White) and two administrators (one White and one African American) were employed at Keller Middle School in the 2009-2010 school year, and were currently on the staff as well. Teacher participants were selected for the study after comparing their 2009-2010 TAKS passing rates for African American and White students. Specifically, data for two of the teachers revealed that a higher percentage of Black students passed the TAKS than did White students. Conversely, a lower percentage of African American students passed the TAKS compared to Whites for the remaining two teachers. (It is important to note that I was not attempting to directly link student performance to specific teachers in this study. Rather, the overall focus in teacher selection was on the relationship between African American and White student performance in that teacher's class for that particular school year.) Finally, two administrators with diverse experiences were identified on the campus: one White female (with seven years of experience as an administrator) and one African American male who just transitioned from a classroom teacher into an administrative role; both were employed at Keller Middle School in the 2009-2010 school year and during the time the study was conducted. Additional formative and summative student assessment documents were also used as data sources in this study.

Research Design and Data Collection

According to Huseyin (2009), interviews are research tools used to obtain detailed information from respondents that is not directly observable. Therefore, it is

critical to decide not only what format is best, but what questions will elicit the participant's understandings of the topic. In this study, a semi-structured interview format was used for several reasons. First, semi-structured interviews are designed to elicit stories of experiences by probing more deeply using open forum questions (Huseyin, 2009). They also give greater freedom in the sequencing of questions, amount of time, and attention given to different topics (Schwandt, 2007). Finally, although semi-structured interviews have a set of certain questions, more flexibility is available to modify the questions (Huseyin, 2009).

Interview questions (see Appendix A) were designed to stimulate participant's thoughts and understandings about the gap in achievement between African American and White students (Frankel & Devers, 2000). Therefore, questions were focused on asking participants to describe their experiences based on "what they thought" and "how they perceived" these experiences. While I recognized that qualitative research was dynamic in nature, I chose to use the structure of focus group questions as a guide. For example, teachers were asked why they originally decided to become teachers at the beginning of the interview. Transfer or "bridge" questions, such as "Why do you think there is an achievement gap between African American and White students at our school?" were used to move the participant toward the main topic of discussion. Key questions were developed to probe more deeply into participant experiences (i.e. What role do you think our African American parents play in the success or failure of their children?). Finally, a closing question asked participants to conclude and provide suggestions about the topic.

Once participants were selected and the interview process was solidified, parents were contacted by phone to explain the research study and gain permission for them and their children to participate. Options were provided for the interview location (i.e. the participant's home or on the Keller Middle School campus). Three out of the four student and parent participants chose to meet me at the school, while one parent asked me to make a home visit. Teachers and administrators were solicited for the study either by phone or in person, and were also asked if they preferred to be interviewed on the campus or in a location of their choice; all chose to meet at Keller Middle School. Written permission and consent was provided by all participants before interviews were conducted, and interviews were tape-recorded with permission as well. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Member checking was performed during the interviews to ask for clarification and summarize key points.

Data Analysis

Narrative researchers begin interpretation of interviews by focusing on or "listening to" the narrators' voices and the stories within each narrative (Chase, 2005). This "listening" can take a variety of forms. For example, one can read an interview four different times to attend to: the overall shape of the narrative and the research relationship, the narrator's first-person voice (how and where she uses "I", the psychological development, and the psychological risk and loss (Chase, 2005). Or, according to Bamberg (1997) three levels of narrative positioning can be considered when listening to and interpreting interviews: 1) how narrators position self and others; 2) how narrators position self in relation to the audience and; 3) how narrators position

“themselves to themselves” when interpreting interviews. Chase (2005) suggests researchers be aware of the voice through which they are interpreting interview data. For example, an authoritative interpretive voice respectfully conveys that that the researcher and participant have different interests or ideas (Chase, 2005). Additionally, a supportive researcher voice pushes the participant into the limelight so their story is heard, while an interactive voice shows the complex interaction between researcher and narrator (Chase, 2005). In this problem of practice, I attempted to shine a light on participants’ experiences and truths in order to understand why disparities in achievement exist between African American and White students. Data from audiotapes was transcribed in a word processor format. Transcripts and audiotapes were compared and checked for accuracy. Through systematic coding using key words in context and word repetition, broad themes or categories emerged. Using a constant comparison method, newly gathered data was continually compared with previously collected data and codes until emergent categories formed patterns and theoretical saturation was achieved (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Subcategories were created after the main themes were identified. In the end, a combination of themes and subthemes formed an explanation or understanding about the gap in achievement.

Trustworthiness

A dilemma exists between the unique aspects of qualitative research and the need to establish a way to justify qualitative research results. Therefore, most traditional quantitative validity methods (internal and external validity, reliability, objectivity) inherently conflict with qualitative research paradigms. Trustworthiness is an alternative

method to ensure the rigor of a qualitative design without compromising the philosophical beliefs of qualitative paradigms. Trustworthiness consists of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Each of the four criteria for establishing trustworthiness may contain techniques that are unique to one criteria or that overlap to other criteria. For example, credibility may be established through triangulation, member checks, thick description, and examination of previous research to frame findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Transferability is achieved by providing background data to establish the context of the study and a detailed description of the phenomenon to be studied to allow comparisons to be made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability entails use of overlapping methods and an in-depth description of methodology so the study can be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability takes place when triangulation is used to reduce investigator bias, recognize the limitations of the study, and provide an in-depth description of methodology to ensure integrity of research (Patten, 2005).

Many leaders in the field of qualitative research are recommending the use of validity checklists to enhance qualitative research studies (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity checklists highlight techniques to establish validity for the duration of a research study (Lewis, 2009). Procedures such as member checking and triangulation are frequently used and included on validity checklists (Lewis, 2009). To align research paradigms and validity procedures, Creswell and Miller (2000) developed a two-dimensional validity framework which includes the perspectives of the researcher, participant, and paradigm (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Two Dimensional Validity Framework

Paradigm assumption/Lens	Postpositivist or Systematic Paradigm	Constructivist Paradigm	Critical Paradigm
Lens of the Researcher	Triangulation	Disconfirming evidence	Researcher reflexivity
Lens of the Study Participants	Member Checking	Prolonged engagement in the field	Collaboration
Lens of People External to the Study (Reviewers, Readers)	The audit trail	Thick, rich description	Peer Debriefing

Creswell & Miller, 2000

This framework assists the researcher by developing a rationale for choice of a procedure, choosing appropriate validity procedures, and selecting procedures based on the philosophical positions of the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124).

While Creswell and Miller's (2000) framework is useful as a guide, a researcher must make individual decisions about ways to establish trustworthiness. In this study, four procedures were used to establish trustworthiness: triangulation, member checking, thick description, and peer debriefing.

Triangulation

Qualitative research naturally focuses on triangulation to secure an in-depth understanding in the data analysis process and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2008). Denzin (1978) identified several types of triangulation: convergence of multiple data sources, methodical triangulation, and investigator triangulation. Given the purpose for this study (examining the African

American and White achievement gap from different vantage points), data were triangulated using both data sources and data methods as a way to check the integrity of inferences and examine themes from more than one vantage point (Schwandt, 2007).

Member Checking

Member checking, or respondent validation, is a way to solicit feedback from respondents on the researcher's findings and to ensure the intended meanings of study participants (Schwandt, 2007). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checking provides the opportunity for the researcher to understand and determine what author intended to do through their actions; in other words, it reinforces data by having participants confirm what was said and observed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Furthermore, member checking allows the researcher to correct errors and challenge what is perceived as inaccurate interpretations (Lewis, 2009). Member checking can be done during the interview process or at conclusion of a study (Lewis, 2009). First, researchers need to build rapport with participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Next, results of key findings are presented to study participants to confirm the researcher's interpretation of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For example, the researcher restates or summarizes information and then questions the participant to determine accuracy. At the end of a study, member checks can be completed by sharing all findings with participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Here, researchers incorporate narrative comments into the final narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, member checking was used during interviews and at the conclusion of the study. Clarification of

participant statements occurred as interviews were conducted; in addition, key findings were restated or summarized, and participants were asked to either confirm or refute those findings.

Peer Debriefing

Peer review or debriefing provides an external check of the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the role of the peer debriefer as an individual who keeps the researcher honest, asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations, and pushes researcher to next step methodologically. In the process of peer debriefing, a peer (external to the study) but familiar with the research involved reviews the data, decision matrixes, and other documentation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lewis, 2009). The debriefing process is ongoing to avoid problems that would be difficult to correct at a later time (Lewis, 2009). In this study, a colleague of the researcher, who was familiar with the research on the African American and White achievement gap, served as a peer debriefer throughout the study.

Thick Description

Rich, thick description is the process of using a plethora of details about study participants or settings when analyzing data so that the reader is transported into the environment (Lewis, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description encompasses sketching an in-depth picture of the research setting, participants, and themes (Lewis, 2009). In addition, thick description should capture the physical appearance, emotions, feelings, and experiences of participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The purpose of

thick description is to describe as much detail as possible about the interactions, experiences, and actions of study participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Such detail enables readers to make determinations about whether the findings may be transferred to other settings and helps the reader understand whether the account is credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research study, thick description was used to depict the research setting (Keller Middle School and the surrounding community), and describe study participants, experiences and actions. Finally, themes were paired with participant summaries and specific quotes were included in the text to illustrate those themes.

Unique Issues in Conducting a "Problem of Practice".

Conducting a "problem of practice" while serving as the campus principal created some unique considerations in both selecting study participants and obtaining IRB and district approval for the study for two main reasons: limited knowledge and experience (at the university and district levels) with the "problem of practice" as a valid research tool for educational practitioners, and addressing potential issues of power with the researcher serving as a supervisor to study participants.

Indeed, the nature of the relationships between the researcher and study participants deserves extensive consideration. A multitude of research exists showing that power differentials or webs of affiliation between researchers and participants can either promote or constrain relationships. Power issues can arise in focus groups, for example, in which selected participants work together, but some are ranked higher than others (Gall et al., 2007). In this case, conducting a study in one's *own* place of work or

organization may raise issues of power and risk to the researcher, participants, and the site (Creswell, 2007). To address the potential issue of power, I included the following background information and rationale for using the "problem of practice" in my university and district research applications:

> In 2010, the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development (EAHR) at Texas A&M University developed and implemented "a problem of practice" option for students completing their Ed.D. Based on the Carnegie Foundations' recent multi-year project, called "The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate" (CPED), the goal was to foster the development of educational leadership doctorates that are thoroughly focused on preparing school leaders. Thus, the Ed.D "Dissertation" focuses on a specific problem within a specific context of a particular school or district, rather than a more generalizable research issue. However, components of traditional research methodology are observed in "a problem of practice" with action plans, drawing directly on the data, being developed to address the problem. One of my primary responsibilities as a campus principal is to disaggregate data for the purpose of monitoring student achievement. Over the past ten years, a consistent pattern in student achievement was observed in both low and high socioeconomic communities. First, in low socioeconomic schools, the percentage of African American students passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test was consistently and significantly lower than that of their White counterparts in all content areas. In higher socioeconomic schools, a similar

> passing percentage was observed for both African American and White students. However, a substantial difference was noted in Commended (or mastery) performance on those same tests. Again, African American students were far less likely to earn the Commended performance rating than White students taking the same test. Given my responsibility to promote equity and success for all students, I decided to focus my "problem of practice" research in this area.

The Texas A&M Institutional Review Board also recommended that I first collect my data for this study as work product (defined as any data I might collect in my role as a campus principal). Using "work product" (assessment and demographic data from the 2009-2010 school year), I identified students, parents, teachers, and administrators to participate in interviews. I was advised to submit my application to approve the use of this work product as the data for my "problem of practice" study.

Potential issues of power between myself (as the researcher and supervisor) of study participants, the second issue, was handled by implementing a number of safeguards prior to interviews. Only students who were no longer enrolled at Keller Middle School and had no siblings attending (or who would attend) Keller Middle School in the future were considered as participants. Potential teacher and administrator participants were provided with verbal and written assurances that their participation was voluntary, were given contact information for my supervisor in case they felt I was exerting pressure based on their participation in the study, and were also given contact information for local teacher unions as an alternate way to express concerns.

Summary

Qualitative research methodology is both complex and evolutionary in nature. An interrelationship between the research purpose, format, questions, and data analysis is critical to ensure the desired phenomenon to be studied is, in fact, the focus of the research. The current direction of qualitative research methods supports the social justice perspective; to promote equity, the acknowledgement of multiple truths, and shifting of political strength to support the Other.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This “problem of practice” study was conducted for two purposes. First, I hoped to capture the “lived experiences” and perceptions of issues that contributed to the existing achievement gap at Keller Middle School. The second goal was to uncover perceptions about intended and unintended outcomes of the achievement gap. Holistically, I was attempting to answer this question: does opportunity knock for African American students in my traditionally “middle class normed” middle school?

Profile of Keller Middle School

Keller Middle School is located within a fairly large, historically White, middle class community in the southeast Texas county of Lola Hills. Though it is considered a suburban middle school, Keller Middle School was recently (within the last three years) assigned Title I status and funding as a result of the substantial changes in student demographics over the last two decades. For example, in 1990, 1, 097 students attended Keller Middle School; 73.2% of the students were White, 11.5% Hispanic, 7.0% African American, 6.7% economically disadvantaged, and 1.6% were LEP (TEA, 2009). Today, Hispanics represent 44.3% of the total school population; 27.9% of students are White, 16.1% are African American, and 9.3% are Asian. In addition, 48.2% of Keller Middle School students are economically disadvantaged and 7.7% are LEP (TEA,

2009). The median household income is $94, 474 34% of the residents are college graduates, and 74% have White collar jobs (Point2, 2012).

Housing approximately 1,543 students, many academic programs are provided; they include a gifted program, Special Education, ESL, Advanced Academic Strategies, morning tutoring, Saturday School Camps, and a mentoring program. Electives classes include Band, Orchestra, Choir, Athletics, Industrial Technology, Art, Speech and Debate, French, Spanish, and Personal and Family Development. A variety of extracurricular activities are available for students including music concerts and contests, athletics programs (track, volleyball, cross country, football and basketball), Student Council, and student clubs (i.e. Fellowship of Christian Athletes, soccer, chess, art, fitness, etc.). Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) is used as a school-wide model to communicate and reinforce behavioral expectations for students, and provide strategies for teachers to create a positive classroom learning environment. Several site-based committees have been established to assist with campus decision making, and a small, but very dedicated, group of parent and community volunteers are regularly on hand to support the efforts of students and staff.

In keeping with national trends, the majority of teachers (75.3%) at Keller Middle School are White; 10.4% of the staff is African American, 10.3% is Hispanic (TEA, 2009). This is a shift from 1990, when 97.1% of the staff was White (TEA, 2009). Being a neighborhood school has contributed to the longevity and stability of staff members. Over 37% of teachers have eleven or more years of experience, and several have been at Keller MS since its inception. However, almost 40% of the

teaching staff has one to five years of experience, creating somewhat of a dichotomous staff in terms of experience, attitude, and knowledge of working with diverse groups of learners (TEA, 2009).

Keller Middle School staff and parents have historically taken great pride in the academic achievement of students on state assessments. Student success at the state level is defined using the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) standards as outlined by the Texas Education Agency. For many years, Keller MS was rated "Exemplary" or "Recognized" based on reading, math, writing, science, and social studies performance. However, in 2008-2009, the campus dropped to an "Academically Acceptable" rating (TEA, 2009). Achievement gaps in "passing performance" between White and African American students on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills are evident in every core content, but are exacerbated when comparing "commended performance" (what would be considered mastery of content).

Participants

Students and Parents

Four African American students were included as study participants based on the following criteria: 1) each student was identified as "Black" by his or her parent in the Texas Public Education Information Management System; 2) all were 8th grade students enrolled at Keller Middle School in the 2009-2010 school year; 3) all participated in the 2009-2010 TAKS, and; 3) they were no longer students on my campus when interviews were conducted. Originally, I hoped to further refine student selection criteria by including two students who earned "commended" performance in a minimum of two

content areas and two others who did not meet “minimum standards” in one or more content areas. Since only one student who met the “commended” performance criteria was available, a fourth student was included who met minimum standards in all content areas on the same 2009-2010 state assessment. The criterion for parent participants was fairly simple: their child must be part of the study, and the parent must reside in the community located near or serving the school.

Jordan and Mrs. Jones

Jordan and his mom, Mrs. Jones, met with me on a Sunday afternoon to share their experiences at Keller Middle School. Jordan is a quiet yet self-assured fifteen year old male who attended the local high school. As an 8th grader at Keller Middle School, Jordan earned “commended performance” scores on the Reading and Math TAKS. He participated in football, basketball, and track in middle school. Jordan was also selected by his teachers to receive two prestigious awards at the end of his 8th grade year; one for athletics and one for overall outstanding performance in middle school. Mrs. Jones is an attorney and mother of four. Born in Nigeria, she attended high school in England and came to the United States at age twenty-four to pursue an MBA and law degree. She and her husband (also an attorney), have resided in the Keller community for approximately eighteen years.

Although I did not specifically ask Mrs. Jones how she identified herself in terms of ethnicity, there were some indications that she did not perceive herself as an “African American”, but as an “African” instead. For example, while Mrs. Jones described her husband as “the only black attorney in his office,” she referred to her children as “not

typical African American." Mrs. Jones also commented on how her perspective was different from other African Americans, saying "I've looked at [the achievement gap between African American and White students], coming from, not being African American , but coming from somewhere different in Africa, I've looked at it objectively." This is important to note, given the differences in the way people of African descent are socialized in the United States (Jackson & Cothran, 2003). In other words, it is possible that Jordan and Mrs. Jones were oriented to a "kinder, more accepting" America as a result of their Nigerian background. Accordingly, they may be more likely to express negative, stereotypical beliefs, similar to those of Whites, towards African Americans (Darboe & Agorshah, 2012).

Kayla and Mrs. Powell

Kayla is a sweet and self-described "outspoken" young lady with "lots of friends". Kayla's enthusiasm for her current high school dance classes was apparent as she as her mom, Mrs. K., visited with me on a chilly spring morning. In her 8th grade year at Keller, Kayla struggled with making passing grades in math and science. Despite the addition of science tutoring and an extra math class, she did not meet minimum standards on the 2009-2010 Science TAKS or the first administration of the Math TAKS. Ultimately, Kayla was successful in passing the second Math TAKS administration (a requirement for promotion to 9th grade) after participating in an intensive two-week math intervention program. Mrs. K. is a high school graduate and single parent of two from a large mid-west city. A 24 year company veteran, she was

transferred to the Keller community at the beginning of Kayla's 8th grade year. She, Kayla and her older sister live in an apartment complex near the school.

Ciara and Mrs. Barnett

Ciara is a fifteen year old freshman with a passion for photojournalism and cosmetology. Her calm demeanor and strong beliefs about focusing on school work were evident. Ciara's initial description of school - "I like it but I don't like it" – exemplified the dichotomy between her academic successes and struggles. Indeed, Ciara struggled with math throughout middle school. She failed both the Science and Math TAKS in her 8th grade year, missing the passing standard on the first math administration by more than 13 questions. While improving her score after the second and third math administrations, Ciara was still unable to reach the minimum passing standard, and was placed in a 9th grade remedial math class. At her home in a nearby subdivision, Ciara lives with her mom, Mrs. C., and step-dad. Mom is a high school graduate and works in the local retail market part-time.

Markus and Mrs. Neale

Markus, a 9th grader at the local high school, was the only student who did not meet the original criteria. However, his experiences at Keller Middle School were unique from the other student participants; he received special education services throughout 6th, 7th, and 8th grade as a student with a learning disability. In addition, Markus referenced issues with his own behavior as a middle school student. While he did meet passing standards for the Reading, Math, and Science TAKS in 8th grade, Markus took a modified version of the test with accommodations such as larger print,

fewer answer choices, and oral test administration.. Markus' interest in middle school sports continued into 9th grade, where he seems to have found his niche in the ROTC program. Markus lives in a nearby subdivision with his mom, dad, and two-year-old brother. Mrs. Neale. is a stay-at-home mom, and Mr. Neale is a police officer.

Teachers

Four teachers and two administrators from Keller Middle School were selected for this study. Using "work product", the four teachers were identified after analyzing state assessment passing rates for African American and White students enrolled in their classes for the current and prior school year. Data for two of the teachers, Mrs. Morgan and Mrs. Murphy, showed a pattern of success with African American students; in other words, the percentage of Black students passing the 2009-2010 TAKS was higher than the passing percentage for Whites. Mrs. Morgan, is a young, single, red-headed teacher of five years with a sweet, positive disposition. She grew up in the Midwest, attended a mid-size university, and, upon graduation, was offered a teaching job out of the country. While that was an adventure for several years, Mrs. Morgan wanted to be closer to her family, and found a home at Keller Middle School. Mrs. Morgan's classroom is neat and organized. Because she has strong relationships with her students, parents rarely, if ever, complain about her. Ms. Garcia is a native Peruvian, immigrating to the United States when she was just six years old. She has been teaching science at Keller Middle School for the last eight years, and is currently working on getting her master's degree with an on-line program. Because she is quietly consistent and constantly motivating students, she is a popular teacher on the campus. Mrs. Nash is the most experienced of all four

teacher participants. Over a career span of twenty-seven years, she has taught middle and high school students in the northeast and deep south. A lifelong learner, Mrs. Nash is always searching for professional development opportunities to improve her teaching practices. Typically, however, traditional structures and methods (i.e. students sit in desks in rows) are in place in her classroom. Mrs. Murphy, a fourteen year veteran, transferred to Keller Middle School from another campus outside the district. Her classroom is warm and inviting, and she is viewed as a leader on the campus. Although she grew up in a White middle class family, Mrs. Murphy embraces diversity and teaches her students the importance of valuing each other.

Administrators

Mrs. Cross, a White female, has worked in an administrative capacity at Keller Middle School for the last three years. She too grew up in a White middle class family, and has four young daughters under the age of seven. Mrs. Cross is extremely patient, and her extensive counseling background lends itself to assisting students who are struggling behaviorally and academically. Mr. Douglas is one of two African American administrators at Keller Middle School. In his prior district, he taught high school math, and coordinated a mentoring program for African American and Hispanic boys. Though he is still fairly new to the campus, he has developed positive relationships with many students and parents.

As one-on-one interviews with parents, students, teachers, and administrators were conducted, three main themes emerged. First, unconscious racism and deficit thinking clearly impacted the perceptions of most of the White teacher and administrator

participants. Secondly, African American student and parent participants held deficit beliefs about other African Americans. Third, African American student and parent participants attributed academic success to parent involvement, caring teachers, and motivation to achieve.

Findings

Consistent with the literature, White teachers and administrators attributed the achievement gap between African American and White students at Keller Middle School to factors associated with societal racism, institutional racism, and social reproduction. However, a unique and, to date, rarely documented phenomenon also emerged – African American parents and students believed that equitable opportunities existed for them in this middle class normed school and community. Specifically, three main themes emerged. First, for the most part, teachers and administrators expressed deficit beliefs about African American students and parents. Secondly, African American parent and students held deficit views of other African Americans, somewhat comments mirroring the perceptions of White teachers and administrators. Third, African American students and parents believed that a motivation to achieve leveled the playing field and accounted for their success, clearly conflicting with both campus and district data.. In essence, immersion of African American families in this middle class normed neighborhood and school created "middle class blinders" – an altered perception of the context in which they live and work as a result of institutional racism, societal racism, and social reproduction. Similar to sunglasses, these "middle class blinders" shielded participants from the harsh realities of racism and offered social, emotional, and economic

protection as African American students and parents maneuvered through roadblocks in a dominant White society.

White Deficit Thinking

Unconscious racism, along with the underpinnings of colorblindness and White privilege, are intricately woven together to create blankets of deficit thinking in schools across our nation cite. They strongly influence the way educators act and react to students of color in several ways. On a macro level, unconscious racism (Blanton & Jaccard, 2008) refers to individuals' lack of awareness of how their actions affect other people or social institutions. Stereotypes, or popular beliefs about specific types of individuals, often emerge from this unconscious behavior cite. On a micro level, colorblind ideology and White privilege results in the refusal to acknowledge the costs and benefits associated with one's racial and cultural identity cite. Combined, unconscious racism and colorblindness leads to deficit thinking in schools, where students and their families are labeled as disadvantaged, at-risk for failure, and uninvolved (Johnson, 1994).

Five subthemes related to unconscious racism emerged in this study. First, White participants believed that African American parents were not involved in their child's education. Secondly, teachers and administrators believed that education was not valued in African American homes. Third, teachers and administrators attributed gaps in achievement between African American and White students to socioeconomic status. Fourth, tracking was connected with lower student performance, but not viewed as something within teacher or administrator locus of control; thus, this reinforced teachers'

deficit attitudes. Finally, behavioral stereotyping of African American student participants was evident; thus, White teachers and administrators saw the behavior of African American participants as negatively impacting students' school success. Two subthemes emerged from this topic: first, teachers believed that African American students' goals were focused on becoming sports stars in lieu of attending college or working in other professional fields. Secondly, African Americans were viewed as having deviant behavior.

Parents are Not Involved

Research has shown that students whose parents are involved in their education demonstrate superior achievement in mathematics and reading, have higher grade point averages and better performance on standardized tests, and have more positive attitudes (Fan, Williams, and Wolters, 2012). Undoubtedly, parent involvement would be desirable goal in any classroom across America. It could, however, look very different depending upon the cultural context of the student body (Lopez, 2001). In this study, Keller Middle School staff members compared their perceptions of what parent involvement should be to their own experiences with African American parents. Staff members at Keller MS considered African American parents to be "involved" or "connected" when they attended school functions, had materials at home for students to practice skills, or communicated with teachers. For example, Ms. Murphy indicated that "some" African American parents will never contact the school, but listed "being visible in their child's school, coming to things when they can, or having contact with the

teacher" as important. Furthermore, Ms. Morgan hinted that parents who stay home are more involved than those who do not:

> Their family involvement is huge part, because even if the parents don't have enough money, the parents that are willing to go out and buy books, or willing to bring their kids in for tutoring, or willing to make time for the phone call or the email to communicate with me about certain things, that makes a huge difference -versus the child that the parents are either working all the time and they can't devote that to their education.

Referring to the "home to school communication" as critical, Ms. Spencer found that parent involvement was not common, adding "I've tried to get them involved in things like Muhammad Ali, which helps a little bit, but the fact that they are not reading and not writing out of school on a short term basis disconnects them from school." In fact, Ms. Spencer alleged that opportunity gaps are created when reading and writing is not done at home. Thus, "from the beginning, students enter kindergarten already behind, and the parents don't realize there's anything missing." Later remarks focused on her expectations for African Americans as a group:

> Achieving goals, making effort, hearing praise, I was just reading Teaching with Poverty in Mind, and I don't think they hear praise enough. In the grocery store, so much of what I hear being passed around is negative. They don't get praise, they don't get celebrations. But I think in their home lives, they just haven't had goals that they looked towards, and seen that if they just keep trying, they can get there. I think that's a lot of it.

These comments exemplify what Delpit (2012) describes as a stereotype of "less than" and are used as an excuse for poor performance (p. 6). Ms. Garcia admitted that African American parents aren't involved at Keller MS, adding "maybe they don't feel welcome and we need to figure out a way to involve them despite their limitations." She also agreed with Mrs. Spencer that African American students begin formal schooling at a disadvantage:

> Whereas their life experiences have been, their first exposure to a book is when they reached kindergarten. So when they say it takes about 7 years to develop a language, so when our kids enter kindergarten at age 5, they've had all these experiences, they've read books, where some of these kids we are getting, those of the kids that haven't had those experiences. They missed those 5 years of brain development, conceptual development, and language development. And not just that, not we have to backtrack and how to do that?

Two staff members posited that parent involvement is "just really easy to pick up on". First, Mrs. Morgan felt that she could just" look" at her students to know that their parents spent a lot of time with them, and she could also "hear it" in the students' writing. Mrs. Garcia also commented on the ways she believed African American parents showed support for their student:

> "I think that you can see right away in a student if their parents are really encouraging of them in general. If there the kind of parents when their child comes home, they're asking about school, if they bring home that bad progress

report, they're on them a little bit more. I always say if they're in their corner or not, kind of cheering them on. That home support that plays a huge role."

In totality, staff comments form the foundation of a deficit model of family functioning, which has been criticized by Williams (2006) as operating from a European American, middle-class value orientation. Conceptualizing African American families as at risk and functioning at a deficit was consistent with teachers and administrators (Cain & Combs-Orme, 2005).

Education is Not Valued

Moynahan (1965) was one of several researchers whose work characterized African Americans as lazy, unmotivated, and uninterested in acquiring an education. Subsequent studies have shown that African American parents actually place great value on education and have high expectations for their child's academic success (Cross, 1981; Slaughter, 1987; Rosier & Corsaroi, 1993). Nevertheless, teachers and administrators perceived that education was not a priority for African American families at Keller Middle School. For example, during Mrs. Spencer's interview, she made four separate comments to emphasize her belief that African Americans do not value education. First, she said, "I, quite honestly, I'm not sure that the African American community values education as much as other things that go with low SES like luck, or who you know. Later, she stated "they tend not to value education." On a third occasion, Mrs. Spencer linked a student's reading behavior with parent attitudes and behaviors at home:

> If they could instill in their child more of the value of education and if they could model more… M k.'s mother sells books for scholastic, yet M does not read much. I don't think there's a lot of modeling going on.

Finally, she summed up the conversation with, "And again, I wish the culture valued education more, but unfortunately right now, that's not the case."

Although Mrs. Cross had, in general, a more favorable view of African American parents, her use of the word "if" indicates some doubt still exists about the value of education:

> If education and doing well in school and success is important, if there's love in the family, if it's stable, if the kids have expectations from when they are little, I think it starts from day one, how the kids are treated, what they do with their time, what they are taught, who they're around, and I think that stable people… two parents are ideal…

The perception that African American parents don't care about their child's success was mentioned by Mrs. Murphy as well:

> It's so important that we have a relationship with the parents, so we can talk to them. Well, sometimes that's hard, because some parents will never contact the school, but that doesn't mean they don't have high expectations for their children.

Clearly, unconscious and socially reproduced beliefs that African Americans do not value education surfaced in this study. According to Duster (2008), this serves to marginalize students of color rather than promote their success.

Teacher Expectations Influence Student Performance

When asked to identify factors contributing to the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites, teachers and administrators at Keller Middle School focused predominately on what students and their families were lacking. Prior research on African American culture has conceptualized families as at risk, in a state of turmoil, lacking consistent and cohesive structure, and functioning at a deficit (Cain & Combs-Orme, 2005). These beliefs stem from differences between cultural styles and worldviews, and can have a profound influence on people's interactions with and expectations for each other (Delpit, 2002, Zeichner, 1996). Consistent with Merton's (1968) "self-fulfilling prophecy", a cycle of lowered teacher expectations, decline in student performance, and validation of lowered teacher expectations perpetuates the achievement gap.

The existence of low expectations at Keller Middle School was confirmed during teacher interviews. Mrs. Spencer believed that expectations for African American students were "unrealistic" and "set too high." Additionally, Mrs. Murphy held that "expectations are not set high right now for our African American kids because teachers don't feel like they are going to be met." Mr. Douglas felt that when teachers find out certain things about African American student's life style or home life, they feel sorry for them…"which leads to lowered expectations." Evidence of this was apparent in participants' stories. For example, Mrs. Spencer shared that in order to get one of her African American students to complete assignments independently, "It would take so much, he can't do this, he would fail the TAKS, and he's so stupid. And we would talk,

and I would show him that when he would try, he would be successful." Mrs. Murphy noticed that teacher expectations influenced instructional decision-making:

> Anytime that we were going to do a lab or a situation where the kids were going to have work, teachers would say they won't be able to do it, or they are slower, the expectations that the on level kids are slower, not necessarily the African American, just the on level.

While tracking is a more blatant sign of low expectations, Mrs. Cross points out how subtle cues send the same message to students:

> I think most teachers would never tell you, oh they can't learn, but it's those little tiny comments or actions or things that are made on the side that teach kids that, or that they kind of feel…

Delpit (2012) characterizes the behavior of teachers with low expectations as "non-teaching." In other words, students spend their time doing busywork or taking naps instead of providing a rigorous and engaging curriculum (p. 74). The participants in this study shared how low expectations can be difficult to change, for both teachers and students: From an adult perspective, Mrs. Murphy stated:

> …it's almost like the child is doomed. I feel like it is really hard for that impression to change if someone is really not willing to help; it hinders creating an environment where the child can learn and grow. When I taught 6th grade science, I definitely saw a teacher where, if you were smart and White, you were treated that way. And if you weren't smart and White, you definitely weren't given the same opportunities

Mrs. Morgan contended that low expectations led to apathy in her students:

> And looking at it long term, once they've already experienced that gap, I would think it would be a mental thing, kind of like, it is what it is, I'm going to give up on that, this is as smart as I'll ever be. Like I had one student that said I know I'm not going to do any more than bus tables, miss, so why am I going to try? It's kind of a mental shutdown. That to me is the most damaging effect… because if they don't have the willingness and mentality to succeed, then they're not going to. Because the kids that want to close that gap and wants to learn, than that kid has a huge advantage over the one who doesn't… because they're willing to put in the work to do it.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Morgan description of apathy as a "mental thing" is consistent with the literature on disidentification or a coping strategy that helps students save face after repeated episodes of failure (Delpit, 2012). Both Mr. Douglas and Mrs. Garcia described how teachers at Keller MS justified and defended their low expectations for African American students. Mr. Douglas stated:

> Because they feel, well, Johnny has to go home and take care of his brother and sister, so I'm not going to make a big deal about him turning in his homework. Or I'm not going to require him to turn in his homework. Or I know he can't come to morning tutorials or stay after school, whatever excuse they come up with. And it's tied in to them feeling sorry for the kid versus kind of empowering the kid and not taking any excuses.

Mrs. Garcia likewise viewed her teammates as rationalizing low expectations for African American students, saying "I hear a lot of blaming the kids. It's never 'what am I doing wrong'."

Interestingly, participants who believed expectations for African American students were "unrealistic" also stressed the importance of having high expectations. For instance, Mr. Douglas said, "If students are placed in situations where teachers have high expectations for them and act like they care about them, they're going to rise to that level". Mrs. Spencer argued that "if you put a kid in a situation, eventually, and they go and have high expectations for them, they act like you care about them; they're going to rise to that level". The contradictory nature of their comments demonstrates the complexity of unconscious racism.

Socioeconomic Status is the Root of the Problem

In its purest form, economic capital refers to a family's monetary resources that ultimately enables or hinders access to other resources. Some researchers have promoted the idea that African American achievement is related to socioeconomic status (Payne, 2005). However, other researchers note that socioeconomics are merely used to deflect the true cause of the achievement gap (Kunjufu, 2002). Consistent with the former, socioeconomic status was frequently cited as a deterrent to African American student success at Keller MS. The perception of being poor was linked to students' neighborhoods, values, lifestyle, and employment.

Although Keller Middle School was situated in a traditionally designated middle class neighborhood, students from other surrounding subdivisions and apartment

complexes were zoned to the campus. Mrs. Garcia indicated that African American students differed based on the location and value of homes in the community:

> And so we're not really, when you say African American, I'm not thinking about all African American kids. Because we have some that have had the same socioeconomic opportunities as other kids - so I'm thinking about the kids who live in the trailer park and in the apartments.

Similarly, Mrs. Morgan discussed her experiences with African American students relocated to the campus in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Again, geographic location was linked to socioeconomic status and achievement:

> I think a lot of the socioeconomic status plays a factor in that. Because when I think of my African American kids specifically, I think of one or two who came from New Orleans because of Katrina. He probably read on a 4th or 5th grade reading level because he had just missed so much from between the new Orleans schools and moving and going to different spots here. He just missed a whole lot. And then I think about kids on the other end of the spectrum, whose moms or dads are doctors. They have stable jobs, and parents are really involved, it's a huge difference. It's like apples and oranges. You think about those two kids and what they can do because of what they've been provided in their lives.

Both Ms. Cross and Mrs. Spencer saw their students' socioeconomic status linked with family values and lifestyle. For example, Ms. Cross commented:

> But the kids who need us are the ones who don't have somebody at home, or home is not stable, and that's like, we talk about African Americans, and a lot of

> times we make assumptions, but I think that goes along with socioeconomics, because when I think you see middle class African Americans or upper middle class, you don't always see as much of the gap, so I think its cultural/socioeconomic that they fall into.

Mentioning the impact of socioeconomics multiple times during the interview, Mrs. Spencer reflected on one conversation with a parent who worked two or three jobs, saying "So much of it is socioeconomic status. But I think they want so much for their children. It's just that so many times, it's just that they're not being as effective as they might be." Consistent with deficit views, she saw children from poverty as unable to see the tie between effort and achievement. While Mr. Douglas agreed that socioeconomic status impacts African American students, he believed it is because "those kids learn differently." Delpit (2012) suggests that linking African Americans to "a culture of poverty" lays blame *on the people within* that culture; instead, she contends that "True culture supports its people; it doesn't destroy them." (p. 7). Citing studies that indicate that African American and White children begin school at age four or five with equal abilities, Delpit (2012) believes the scientific "law of parsimony" is at play. In other words, it is easier to accept simple explanations than acknowledge more complicated alternatives.

Tracking is a Barrier

Tracking practices operate within schools to promote the success of White students and impede the progress of African Americans (Braddock, 1995; Collins, 1988). Once tracking occurs, a cycle of over-representation of African American

students in lower tracks and under-representation in upper tracks continues, leading to lowered academic success cite. Thus, success is natural for Whites and failure becomes the norm for students of color. Valencia (1997) refers this as the "description-explanation-prediction-prescription" cycle. In the context of this study, the cycle begins when African American family structure, income, language, or cultural values are used to explain student's deficits. Then, teachers and administrators (who are mostly White) spend countless hours determining which track to place students in based on culturally biased curriculum and assessment. Next, when African American students begin to fail, interventions are designed to remediate their deficits. The overarching effect of the cycle is that "actual practices and programs" in schools "are suffused with deficit views of the educability of children of color and children from low-income homes (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001, p. 236).

At Keller MS, students were tracked into four levels: Special Education, On Level, Level 1, and Gifted. Campus data showed that the majority of students in Level 1 and Gifted classes were White or Asian, while On-Level and Special Education tracks were had higher percentages of African American and Hispanic students. During the interviews, most staff members expressed negative views about tracking, but did not make the connection between student groups and tracking placement. Fine (1997) who separates achievement of racial groups from achievement produced by a racialized system. In other words, when societal or institutional racism is not recognized as the underlying factor in the success or failure of students, the blame falls on the individuals within that racial group. Instead, they focused on more "superficial" topics. Mrs.

Morgan, for example, described how "leveling" limited opportunities for her African American students to access electives:

> The one thing I thing about with extracurricular stuff, is that when the kids are in "on level" classes, and maybe they are in an extra reading class, they have a mindset of 'I can't succeed'. And they miss out on opportunities for electives and they're not really enjoying all of what middle school could be. I think that's a shame and it breaks my heart, because some of the kids are talking about their choir trips or band trips, and I'll have one or two students who say, I'll never get to do that because I'll never get out of reading or those extra classes I have to take.

As another example, Mrs. Spencer blamed the elementary schools for reducing opportunities for African American students, saying:

> I think it's mostly opportunity, and the level of expectations. I think they go hand in hand. If you put a kid in a situation, eventually, and they go and have high expectations for them, they act like you care about them; they're going to rise to that lend I think it starts in elementary school. But definitely we start losing them in middle school, from what I see, because you have the different levels.

Mrs. Murphy appeared to have a greater awareness about tracking practices than other teachers. She acknowledged that the majority of students in her "level one" classes were White or Asian, while her "on level" classes were mostly African American and Hispanic. She also maintained that "if kids are on a higher track, they have different opportunities to learn."

Both administrators at Keller Middle School are in agreement that tracking starts in elementary school. More importantly, they alluded to the absence of a support system through which students could advance. Mr. Douglas explained that schools start losing students in middle school "as a result of the different levels:

> They need a little more support of different support than the White kids. Because White kids, they know how to sit down, or they're taught to sit down, be quiet, don't act up in class, pay attention. The whole be seen and not heard type of deal. Where African American kids and even Hispanic kids, they are more vocal and they act out more…that impulse control.

Mrs. Cross mimicked those concerns, saying, "I think going into high school, with tracking even becoming more serious, if their gaps haven't been filled, I don't know that there's a support system for that."

Stereotypes are Used to Explain Gaps

Coding and stereotyping are two colorblind strategies used in tandem to perpetuate unconscious racism. Coding is the practice of negatively portraying people of color without explicitly naming race (Gordon, 2005). Stereotyping, on the other hand, occurs when implicit or automatic biases disadvantage targeted individuals or groups (Devine, 2001). African Americans may be stigmatized from a historical stance as maids or slaves, or, more recently, as "gangsters", "dumb jocks", "rappers", or "players" (Edwards, 1984; Czopp and Margo, 2006). Bondy and Ross (1998) found that teacher candidates believed that poor African American students fail because their parents do not care about their education, they are unmotivated and uncooperative, and they have

few literacy experiences growing up. Furthermore, Nadler and Clark (2001) found that student awareness of these stereotypes can lead to decreased performance on tasks. Stereotypical behaviors, according to White teacher and administrator participants at Keller Middle School, significantly contributed to the failure of African American students. Two subthemes emerged from this topic: first, teachers believed that African American students' goals were focused on becoming sports stars in lieu of attending college or working in other professional fields. Secondly, African Americans were viewed as having deviant behavior.

African Americans as Athletes

A common perception exists that young African Americans aspire to become sports stars (Kane, 1971). Studies have found that Black athletes are considered unintelligent, flashy, less academically prepared, and more temperamental than White athletes (Devine and Baker, 1991; Sailes, 1996). According to Hamilton, Sherman, and Ruvolo (1990), judgments about the characteristics of particular groups act as expectancies for members of the group. In this study, Mrs. Spencer clearly saw a link between the athlete stereotype and intelligence, saying:

> You know, I haven't mentioned the really big issue, ongoing, is the fact that so many of them think they're going to be professional sports stars. And the chances of that, as we all know, are so slim. But they tend to set their sights on something like that because they don't feel like they can be successful over here and they think they're stupid. And they're not, but they think they're stupid.

Furthermore, Mrs. Murphy stated that African Americans have few role models in society beyond sports or music stars:

> I think some of the other factors, role models, if you look in society, you don't typically see, I mean, president Obama has changed that, but a lot of times its you make your money by entertaining or through sports, and it's not that focused on school, because you don't necessarily need that, there's that disconnect.

Again, that viewpoint was echoed by Mrs. Cross:

> I think that we don't teach career opportunities, so their plan is a lot of times, is entertainment or professional sports, or there is no plan. And so if there's no plan, there's really no purpose to any of this.

African Americans and Deviant Behavior

African American students receive discipline consequences, suspensions, or removals to discipline alternative educational settings at a disproportionate rate compared to Whites (Webb-Johnson, 2002). Some believe that students of color experience this behavioral stereotyping by White teachers in response to differences in behavior and cultural styles (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007). Thus, cultural differences are often manifested in classroom behaviors and teacher responses to those behaviors. For Mrs. Morgan, the fact that her 2nd period class was mostly African American boys was a concern:

> It was probably my rowdiest, most difficult class. Not because they were African American, but because it was boys. There were so many of them and they really didn't care about reading or writing because they just want to be boys, and I

> think that if that class had been broken up and spread out more. Because a lot of them had really great things to say, it was just the fact that there was this big group and they were all with their friends. I wonder if they had been spread out more, mixed with some of my other classes and some of my other kids, if they could have contributed to the other classes, and if the general environment of that class had been more conducive to learning. They would have been more focused, or willing to listen.

Mrs. Morgan's description of her African American boys and "just boys" is consistent with the tendency for white teachers to name factors other than race as the reason for poor performance in schools (Delpit, 2012). Pedro Noguera's (2008) research on African American males also documents this phenomenon of negative stereoptyping in the classroom; he found that only 20% of the Black males in his study "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their teacher cared about their success.

Mrs. Spencer perceived African American students as having trouble starting and maintaining focus in school. In addition, she expressed concern about how parents disciplined their children:

> Quite honestly, when I contact African American parents, there's a very high probability that they'll have a very strong reaction and not necessarily with me, but with their child. You know, you hate to call a parent when you know a child is going to be whipped with a hangar. And maybe it's just that those students from that subpopulation did more sharing about what happened to them than other students. But one mom, bless her heart, would tend to have a real extreme

> reaction and take away privileges when I didn't think they should be, but who am I to say. I would give the student a very hard TAKS passage and he would do badly on it and she would ground him and then she would email me to quickly enter some grades so she could get rid of the grounding. Mom was very reactive.

Deviant stereotypes can alter teacher behaviors in a classroom, as evidenced by Mrs. Cross' experience with a female student:

> … this one girl I had, she was smart. So her gap, it really was choice. And she would fail some classes, she had some behaviors that were challenging, and the teachers treated her differently. And they would get into arguments with her, discussions with her, or when she walked into the room, like it really was different, she really was treated differently… like teachers would tell me in the hall, I don't like that girl, and you could tell when they were in the room, like they would never say that to her, but they weren't, like when she walked in the room, it wasn't like, good morning. Every time she walked in the room, it wasn't a new day.

Mrs. Garcia affirmed that students are aware when teachers perceive them in a negative light:

> Kids say it's boring, she doesn't want me in her classroom, she's picking on me, I can't do anything right. She doesn't see that I'm trying and she makes me feel stupid when I ask a question. And I'll even ask the question when I see kids who act up in other classrooms and they can be perfect angels in my classroom, I'll ask why.

Consistent with the literature, Ms. Cross acknowledged that African American students "have to try to fit in" while "White middle class students always know how to pay attention". The idea of "fitting in" occurs with both communication and behavior. For example, Mrs. Spencer saw her students as more successful when they used Standard American English and emphasized the ways in which she always "corrected" her students in class to "help them". Kinloch's (2010) research on youth's perception of language rights confirms this tendency for Whites to position Black English negatively in comparison with Standard of Academic English. With regard to behavior, cultural differences often account for discourse between African American students and White teachers (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 2004). When clear boundaries and expectations are not communicated, frustration can occur with both teachers and students. This perspective was echoed by Ms. Cross:

> I think we also, I don't know that we do a great job of teaching the expectations in the classroom and in the school. I think that we, just speaking very generally, I think we tend to deal with the consequences, or we tend to deal with the behaviors if kids are not meeting our expectations, so instead of teaching them from the beginning, and then when they don't meet our expectations, using that as another opportunity to remind them of how we do things.

Acknowledging that cultural differences exist and account for conflict between African American students and White teachers, Mr. Douglas cited specific behaviors that teachers often perceive as deviant:

> African American kids, they like to get up, they like to move, they like to sing, dance, and it's a cultural deal. And a lot of it is cultural. If a kid is smart, he's acting White. And really kids, they sometimes dumb down to fit in. and that's a short term so they're not social outcasts among their peers.

This behavior is consistent with what Delpit (2012) calls the "perfect catch-22"; negative societal stereotypes lead to negative teacher reactions (p.15). In turn, African American boys act out to protect themselves, reinforcing negative adult perceptions. Overall, these social stereotypes not only influenced the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of teachers and administrators at Keller Middle School, but were used to justify adult conduct and explain cognitive underperform.

In summary, multiple studies have confirmed the capability and potential of African American students (Geber & Dean, 1957; Frankenburg & Dodds, 1967; Frankenburg, Dick, & Carland, 1975). Delpit (2012) makes two compelling points related to this topic. First, she questions why the differences between African American and White students' scores are used as a measure of the "achievement gap" when White students' performance "can be considered only mediocre on an international scale" (p. 5). Secondly, Delpit (2012) stresses that "in many schools where children are not performing, a larger number of teachers are not really teaching" (p.5). These deficit beliefs are continuously reproduced and cycled within our schools, and result in the continued failure of African American students.

African American Deficit Beliefs about Other African Americans

Deficit thinking theory depicts African American students and their families as lacking competence, intelligence, and self-motivation compared to those in the dominant White culture (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Hence, when African American students fail to meet academic or behavioral standards, blame is often placed on students' backgrounds, language, lifestyle, and family values (Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1991). In this study, African American parent and student participants evidenced deficit beliefs towards other African Americans. While participants spoke highly about themselves and their families, they characterized other African Americans (even those in the Keller Middle School community) in a more negative light.

These findings are reflective of a society that has stigmatized Blacks, causing them to internalize negative stereotypes (Delpit, 2012). Steele (1997) uses the term "stereotype threat" to describe the tendency for African Americans to feel anxiety or concern in situations in which their performance might confirm a negative stereotype. For the African Americans in this study, pervasive racism and reproduction of the status quo resulted in overarching assumptions by White teachers and administrators of Black inferiority. Thus, coping strategies, such as defensive othering (where members of a subordinated group assign a stereotypical label to other members of that group, but not to themselves (Ezzel, 2009). In this study, defensive othering was used in three ways: 1) to voice disapproval of African American family structure and values; 2) to show that education was not valued by African Americans, and; 3) to reinforce the stereotype of African Americans as deviant. Participants' use of defensive othering, an outgrowth of

institutional racism, basically legitimized the negative perceptions of African Americans imposed by the White middle class (Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, and Wolkomir, 2000).

Family Structure and Values

Four out of eight participants (Mrs. Barnett, Mrs. Powell, Mrs. Jones, and Jordan) believed that family structure and values contributed to the achievement gap between African American and White students. Of the four, all three parents perceived that many African American families were run by single parents. This perception was then linked to a number of other factors that they said, in essence, prevented other African American students from performing at the same levels as White students. Interestingly, all three parents are employed outside the home. Mrs. Barnett, for example, believed that African American single parent families or families where both parents work were at a disadvantage. She stated "… there are the ones who are single parents, and they work two jobs. So they don't have the time to dedicate and focus and get to their children the way that they need to. Even though she worked part-time, Mrs. Barnett saw herself as a member of the "other class … where the moms have always been stay at home moms, always involved, there for them in their studies, tutorials, practice groups, everything like that." Mrs. Powell, likewise, viewed other African American families with single parents as deficient. Despite the fact that she was raising Kayla by herself, she felt that many "other" single African American parents in the community didn't have time to help their children with studying. During this part of the interview, Mrs. Powell's eyes filled with tears and she could not speak for a few

moments. I stopped recording the interview to get her some tissues and water. When she appeared to relax again, I asked her if she was okay to continue. She nodded and said, “It’s just been hard.” I turned the recorder back on and we continued the interview. At face value, Mrs. Powell’s reaction might just indicate frustration with raising a teenager as a single parent. However, her acknowledgement that African American children “have to know about culture” and her own involvement on the Diversity Committee at work led me to believe it was not quite that simple.

Mrs. Jones, an attorney who works full time, discussed the difficult nature of raising a family as a single mom. Based on her experiences, she believed there was a moral and socioeconomic impact on students that carried over to the school:

> I don’t see what they can do to close it when the child is coming from a home where there is a single mom, single mom has a different boyfriend changing, and I don’t know, maybe every three months, um, instability, job today, no job tomorrow. How is the school going to change that? It’s not possible.

Mrs. Jones continued, acknowledging the importance of the home environment:

> It’s more of, if you put a Black child and a White child from baby, in the same environment, I can bet you they will, you know. They will achieve the same, you know, given genetics; because there are some children that are naturally brighter even with the Whites and even with the Blacks, but its environmental. It’s not that the Black child is less, it’s just the culture, the environment, and it’s just everything.

At first glance, Mrs. Jones seemed to have an awareness of some common deficit thinking "pitfalls;" she acknowledges and dispels the argument that genetics account for differences in student achievement. She also believes that variations occur within different races. Upon closer investigation, the deficit nature of her statement emerges from her comparison of environments. In other words, Mrs. Jones' comment about putting a Black child and a White child "in the same environment" really meant raising them in a White environment. Later, she reinforced this deficit belief when she stated that the Black child (himself or herself) is not less, but becomes less as a result of the "negative influences of the African American culture and home environment" (i.e. "no father figure", an "aggressive spirit", "the internet", "skipping school", no "family mentality", less educated, "single mom [with] a different boyfriend changing … every 3 months", " instability" with jobs). These descriptions are clearly aligned with deficit perspectives of Whites.

Jordan was the only student who described his parents as strong role models. Consistent with defensive othering, Jordan perceived his parents to be "pretty strict compared to my friends' parents …" but believed his friends "don't have a lot of good influences in their life." As a result, Jordan attributed his success to his parent's positive influences (i.e. being strict, expecting high grades) and other African American students' failure to more negative influences. In other words, Jordan believed that other African American parents don't care about their children, and "if someone's parents doesn't care about , like, how well their kids do, they won't even [do well]...cause they take after their parents.". As mentioned earlier, it is important to keep in mind that issues of hegemony

and social reproduction may be at play with Jordan and Mrs. Jones due to their background as Nigerian Americans. In general, however, there was a clear delineation between them and "other" African American families. Deeply entrenched in our society, this stereotype supports the notion that African American family structure and values do not meet the same standard as the dominant group. In this case, deficit beliefs of African American students and parents about other African American families reinforced the artificial "ceiling" already in place by middle class Whites.

Education is Not Valued

All eight participants espoused the common stereotype that African Americans do not value education is some form or fashion. Consistent with defensive othering, however, they believed just the opposite. Both parents and students had clear opinions about why they felt education was important and what "others" did to create the perception they did not care. Perhaps the most diverse perspective came from Mrs. Jones, who came to the United States to earn her MBA at the age of 24 after completing her basic education in Nigeria and England. As a Nigerian American, she discussed issues of slavery but saw herself as separate from those whose ancestors were caught in its throes. Thus, many of Mrs. Jones comments were more characteristic of Whites. For example, Mrs. Jones expressed her dismay about the negative attitude African American's had about education:

> Did you go to school in America? What these Americans, that shocks me. Because where I come from in Africa, everybody wants to be educated, not just educated, everybody wants to get a college education, from the poorest to the,

> it's, you know, a mom can sell everything she had to send her child to the university.

Mrs. Jones also felt there was a certain "mentality that stops them from achieving, from going any higher." Jordan, her son, agreed that differences exist between African American and White parents, saying "Most I think African American parents and White parents are different. Most African American parents, they don't really care, like about their grades, about their kid's grades … but mine do." Like his mother, Jordan viewed other African American students and parents in a different light. He stated that "most of my friends that are Black, they don't really care about school, especially like their grades." As discussed previously, Jordan's delineation of his parents as "good" and other African American parents as "bad" may be representative of social reproductive factors that influenced him as a Nigerian American rather than an African American.

Similarly, Kayla, Ciara, and Markus saw themselves as valuing education while "other" African American students did not. They attributed this, in part, to the others wanting to have fun and not taking school seriously. Markus believed that some of his African American friends "didn't care about school period." He listed several reasons why this was the case; teachers did not like students, students did not want to do their work, or "they was just worried about fun and friends and the wrong stuff."

Kayla was very direct in voicing her opinion about education, saying "I think that school is really important." She also perceived other African American students and parents as not caring about school, and attributed this to parent expectations:

> They didn't care about school period. So whether their teacher liked them or not they just didn't want to do their work. They was just worried about fun and friends and the wrong stuff. And they didn't care about having to bring good grades home because their parents probably didn't care.

Ciara agreed that none of her African American friends "really cares anymore." explained:

> I think that nobody really takes the time to focus on what they need to focus on. They don't really care. Cause everybody just wants to have fun. Thinking that their teachers are going to hold their hand through the whole way, which is really not true … cause they think, well, she'll just help me, and that's not right.

Mrs. Barnett derived her opinion about the lack of importance in African American families from personal experience and from watching how African American kids are being raised. Although Mrs. Barnett admitted that not all African Americans "take studying secondary," she clearly renounced her membership with those who do:

> And I think Anglo American children, they study a lot. And they take school seriously. It's important to them. It's the number one thing that's driven in to their brains … school, school, school, school, school.

Negative attitudes of African Americans towards education, according to Mrs. Barnett, are at the root of the achievement gap:

> And when you see a gap again, you just have that percentile of kids that just don't, they're here because they have to be here. They don't put forth an effort because they just don't want to. And there's no excuse why they do it, no one

> knows why they do it, they just do. And then everybody else is here because they want an education. Its embedded in their brains, school is important, school is important.

Overall, defensive othering was discernible as participants discussed how African Americans do not value education, but excluded themselves from belonging to that group. Simply put, evidence from this study shows that African Americans at Keller Middle School embraced a deficit ideology about members of their own race.

Deficit Stereotype - Deviant Behavior

Behavioral stereotyping of African American students was voiced by six out of eight African American participants. Considerable research (cite two or three) show that a disproportionally higher number of behavior referrals, suspensions, and expulsions occur for African American students compared to Whites (Ogbu, 1982; Townsend, 2000; Webb-Johnson, 1999). According to Birrele (1995), teachers often perceive African American students as challenging their authority and expectations. Furthermore, variances in the ways African American students communicate often exacerbates the negative perception teachers have of them (Boykin, 1983). For the most part, students and parents in this study recognized behavior as impacting other students' academic achievement, but did not perceive it as a factor in their own life. For example, when asked to elaborate on factors that contributed to African American students' failure, Ciara talked about how some of her African American friends' emphasis on having fun instead of focusing on school work led to multiple placements in the Discipline Management Class:

> Well, I had some friends who were always in DMC. They were always in the office. And when you're in the office or DMC, you don't get the same, you don't learn in class, that's going to be different than class. Because you have to be in the class to know what it is.

Considering Ciara's view of other African American students, it was no surprise that Mrs. Barnett, her mom, had a similar perspective. When describing characteristics of students who are academically successful, Mrs. Barnett drew from her own "personal experiences" and "from watching how African American kids are being raised." She clearly viewed Ciara as different (i.e. better) than most African American students:

> You have a small group that is focused, and they're study driven and school driven, and every else comes second, school comes first. Like they don't care about what they wear, they don't care about their hair. They just want to come to school, get their education, and be straight A students. They don't care what anybody thinks.

It was clear, however, that Mrs. Barnett saw other African American girls just the opposite:

> Then you have another group who wants to be in the popular crowd, they want to dress cute, they want to wear the name brand clothes. And then they think about school. They don't study like they need to. They just come home, do you have homework, oh no, I don't have any homework. And then when you see the grades it reflects that you did have homework, you didn't study ….

During Kayla's interview, she addressed the negative impact on learning when her African American friends chose to skip school. She stated, " … not coming to school and being absent … you can't learn if you're not in school - just because you don't want to come to school …" She admitted that some of her friends did things to get attention because they were not getting any attention at home. When pressed to analyze why more African American students "got in trouble" in school, Kayla made a chilling comment, saying "Its kinda like based on society and our race … it's just our race. They're mostly bad. It's the behavior and what we see." Interestingly, Markus made a comment, similar to Kayla's, about African Americans in general, saying, "They follow other people, the Black people. We follow other Black people, so if somebody acts bad, they gonna follow." I noticed that Markus used "we" and "they" in his explanations, almost as if he couldn't decide which group he belonged to. With Markus and the other participants, the deficit belief that African Americans fail to meet societal standards was pervasive.

In summary, this theme centered on the deficit thinking of African American student participants about other African American students at Keller Middle School. Essentially, African American students and parents internalized deficit White stereotypes (Taylor and Grundy, 1996). Defensive othering was used to characterize other African Americans as having inadequate home lives and values, not caring about education, and displaying deviant behavior. Furthermore, it allowed participants (for the most part) to deny their own membership to that group and align themselves with the dominant group.

Motivation to Achieve

Thinking about the future in a positive way is the final theme in this study. Clearly, many societal and institutional barriers exist for African American students. Motivation to recognize, challenge, and move beyond those barriers can play a critical role in African American students' academic success or failure. Nurmi (1991, 2005) contends that future orientation, or the capacity for adolescents to envision dreams and hopes, guides their motivation and attainment of goals. In addition, McCabe and Barnett (2000) suggest that future orientation can be a ''protective factor'' for students of color. However, a number of influences can contribute to African American students' perspectives on future orientation. For example, Kerpelman, Eryigit and Stephens (2008) suggested that the strongest predictors of future education orientation were self-efficacy, ethnic identity and maternal support. Yosso (2005) maintained that navigational capital, or the ability of African American students to maneuver through "White" institutions in order to achieve makes a difference in educational outcomes. O'Neill (2010) believes that student ownership leads to increased motivation, participation, and engagement in learning. Other studies have found motivation of students in marginalized groups to be influenced by parent involvement (Lopez, 2001), caring teachers (Tosolt, 2010), school attachment (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999), self-perceptions (Oyserman and Harrison, 1998), self-esteem (Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003), and racial identity (Graham, 2004).

Four subthemes emerged from the theme of motivation to achieve. The first subtheme, parent involvement, had two subthemes: parent-child communication about

school and parent-student high expectations. Three subthemes were considered for the subtheme of caring teachers; 1) White teachers helped African American students with academics, 2) White teachers helped African American students with behavior, and 3) positive home-school communication created the perception that the White teachers at Keller Middle School cared about African American students. The final subthemes related to motivation to achieve were ownership and effort.

Parent Involvement

In general, students whose parents are involved in their education are more successful in reading and math, and on standardized tests (Desimone, 1999; Powell-Smith, Stoner, Shinn, and Good, 2000; Sirvani, 2007). Parental involvement has also been found to have a powerful influence on school behaviors, perceived self-efficacy, and motivation (Fan, Williams, and Wolters, 2012). In fact, a number of studies (e.g Bong, 2008; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997; Wentzel, 1998) have documented the role of interpersonal relationships in motivating students. According to Bandura (1997), when strong parent-child bonds exist, there is a greater likelihood that children will develop a strong sense of self-efficacy or optimistic judgment about their ability to learn and perform. However, parent involvement is multi-faceted including strategies such as: parent-child communication, parent–teacher communication, learning at home, volunteering at school, building community connections, supervision, and discussion about educational aspirations (Epstein, 1995; Fan, 2001; Fan, Williams, and Wolters, 2012).

While many of these parenting approaches have proven effective for all families, differences in race and class have also been established (Fan, 2001; Kohn, 1963, 1969; Yan & Lin, 2005). For example, Kohn (1963, 1969) found that parents at lower socioeconomic levels (with highly routinized jobs) stress obedience and conformity with their children. On the other hand, middle and upper-middle class parents (with more autonomous job roles) teach their children to be self-directed. Rosier and Corsaro (1993) found that African American mothers emphasized autonomy and self-reliance as important values for their children. African American parents have also been found to do more of the following: have contact with their children's schools and participate in school activities (Fan, 2001; Yan & Lin, 2005), engage in discussions about educational topics (Wong & Hughes, 2006), provide advice (Fan, Williams &Wolters, 2012), and express high aspirations for their children's postsecondary education (Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012). Furthermore, African American parents who exhibited those behaviors tended to have children who were more self-confident, intrinsically motivated, and behaviorally engaged in school (Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012). Under this theme, the subthemes are: a) communication, and b) high expectations.

Parent-Teacher Communication

All four African American parent participants reported being involved in their child's education by communicating with their child or with the school. In general, parents routinely checked on their child's progress, and discussed the importance of working hard and getting a college degree. Mrs. Neale, for example, believed that asking Markus what he did at school every day made a big difference. She commented:

> And you know, every day he come and tell me what he did today and he just lovin' it. Because to me if you don't ask your kid what they do at school, that's showing you don't care. It's like you go to school and come home and do whatever, but not in this household.

Mrs. Jones was also very vocal in expressing her aspirations for (and to) her children:

> Because where I come from in Africa, everybody wants to be educated, not just educated, everybody wants to get a college education, from the poorest to the, it's, you know, a mom can sell everything she had to send her child to the university.

Mrs. Neale, Mrs. Powell, and Mrs. Barnett, likewise, expressed hopes for their child's future. Seeing Markus graduate from high school and move on to college was important for Mrs. Neale. She told Markus he would "probably need a degree to get somewhere up there" and felt that without a degree, Markus would have a difficult time competing with others. Similarly, Mrs. Powell stressed to Kayla that she would "need a degree in order to make it because it's just gonna get worse." She reminds Kayla that even though she considers herself "sort of kind of successful" as a high school graduate, "kids today [have] to keep going, it's a must. Education is important." Mrs. Powell adds:

> I just stay on her because I want her to have better than I have … because I have opportunities still now, and I'm still going for my opportunities. So I just tell her, look at me. But I want you to be better than me. I want you to succeed more.

Mrs. Barnett was perhaps the most vocal about expressing her aspirations for Ciara, saying, "I tell my daughter, school is important. You have to get focused … because she now knows that high school is very important in taking the next step."

When communicating with the school, African American parent participants were focused on getting information to help their child at home. Since Ciara struggled with math in the 8th grade, Mrs. Barnett shared how she called Ciara's math teacher to ask how she could help her at home. She also sought out resources to practice math skills during the summer:

> [Ciara] was 2.5% away from passing her math test. So we went out, we bought study tools, we study, even though its summer, she still studies her math booklet. I think Anglo American children, they study a lot. And they take school seriously. It's important to them. It's the number one thing that's driven into their brains … school, school, school, school, school.

In addition, Mrs. Jones shared how she and her husband communicated with Jordan's teacher to make sure he was keeping up with his school work. She said, "His dad was with his teachers a number of times - His dad had stay on top of him - Actually we both had to stay on top of him, but most especially my husband." For these African American parents, involvement in their child's education was of utmost importance.

High Expectations

Altogether, six African American participants (two parents and four students) revealed how high expectations for school success were woven into the fabric of their daily lives. Markus, for example, talked about the daily conversations he and his mom

had about school. He perceived that his academic success was “big” to his parents. In other words, the constant feedback Markus received from his parents about their academic and behavior expectations heightened the importance of education. Markus confided that, “When I do bad, they get mad. When I do good, they still tell me I could do better. If they get mad, I’m gonna get grounded. I gotta do better.” Mrs. Neale confirmed Markus’ insight, telling him “you must do your best at all times no matter what.” In a similar fashion, Mrs. Jones and Jordan discussed how high expectations for school success were communicated in their family. Mrs. Jones remembered a time when Jordan brought home a report card with “some B’s and A’s.” She and her husband made it clear to Jordan that “B’s” were not acceptable:

> We wanted things to be in the A's … so he could do better, he knows that. Because I feel at that stage he should know better, we should be encouraging our kids to do more, push them to not just be happy, to us, we just expect them. A “B” is not good enough; we just expect them to do their best.

Jordan agreed that his parents were a driving force in his school success, saying, “Well, my parents, like my dad, he has, he makes a lot of money, so that’s why I get good grades and he pushes me.” As I discussed in Chapter 3, Jordan’s comment may reflect his socialization experiences as Nigerian American, not an “African American”. Specifically, Jordan’s connection of wealth to school success is more characteristic of those who have white privilege (i.e. assuming a higher income is a result of talent and merit rather than “structural favouritism”) (Heller, 2010).

Both Kayla and Ciara maintained that their parents' high expectations for them were extremely powerful forces in their lives. Though Kayla lived with her mom most of the time, she visited her dad in the Midwest during holidays and summer vacation. She verbalized how both parents had high expectations for her academic success:

> Like … you look up to your parents and they tell you - not tell you everything what to do, but they enforce your thoughts big. Like whatever my parents tell me, or I know they real hard on be about school so that makes me want to get good grades, you know? So they play a big part [role in her motivation.]

Similarly, Ciara professed her desire to live up to her mom and step-dad's expectations, divulging that she didn't want to "play the role of the person who doesn't do anything right, because I really do want to make my parents happy and I want to graduate." Ciara also conveyed the way in which Mrs. Barnett reinforces her high expectations in this comment:

> She's always pushing me to strive better. Not just to get an education. Not just lack around and do it when I feel like it. She's always pushing me to do [math practice] at home in different books so I don't just sit around and lose all my education. She does a lot of that.

Clearly, these African American parents were highly involved and influential in their child's education. In this study, parent involvement was evidenced in two main ways. First, parent-child and parent-school communication occurred about the importance of school. Secondly, parents had high expectations for their children. Together, these

factors appeared to have positively influenced their children's own educational standards and work ethic.

Caring Teachers

Student perceptions of caring vary dependent upon their race; therefore, teachers must understand what particular behaviors students view as caring to develop positive student-teacher relationships (Tosolt, 2010). Ladson-Billings and Henry (1990), for instance, found that teachers who treat students with respect but maintain high expectations and discipline are also perceived as caring. Similarly, when Dempsey and Noblit (1993), Morris and Morris (2002), and Siddle Walker (1993) studied African American learners prior to desegregation, they found that caring teachers were perceived to ensure fairness. Cassidy and Bates (2005) established that African American students prefer teachers who interact with them like extended family and create a family atmosphere. More recent research has shown that African American students are more likely to value academic caring (providing feedback on academic performance and urging students to continue to work hard) over interpersonal caring (hugging, giving compliments, or offering protection) (Tosolt, 2010). Three subthemes emerged under this theme; African American students viewed teachers as caring when they a) helped with academics, b) helped with behavior, and c) positively communicated with parents.

Teachers Helped with Academics

All four student participants and two parent participants associated academic support with teacher caring. During the interviews, I asked both students and parents about the role teachers played in middle school. It was apparent that Jordan had an

extremely positive relationship with his teachers; he was recognized as the "Best Football Player" and "Best Male Student" at the 8th Grade Awards Ceremony at the end of the school year. For instance, Jordan saw "every day tutorials" as something his teachers provided to ensure his success. In fact, Jordan contended that "if you had a teacher who didn't like you, then you might not get as good of grades." Kayla's school experience, however, was a bit different. Her initial struggles with middle school math were frustrating. Looking back, Kayla reflected on the role teacher assistance had in overcoming academic difficulties. Kayla explained:

> … because like anytime I needed help they would come and they would give me time and if I didn't feel like doing stuff they would push me to do it. And now I'm glad because it helped me with math.

Ciara, too, agreed that the most rewarding thing in middle school was her teachers. She felt that many of her teachers "actually helped … not just with their subject, but with anything." Ciara added, "[Teachers] take their time out of the day every single day to help you… so you can learn." Like the other students, Markus also connected teacher help with caring, saying "All my teachers they care about me. They give me work, extra work, extra time." Finally, from a parent's perspective, Mrs. Barnett observed that Ciara's teachers at Keller Middle School truly cared about her daughter. This was evidenced when they provided tutoring before or after school:

> Some teachers, I can honestly say, care more than other teachers. And that's just from personal experience. Just with my own child before, she wasn't doing very well, one of the teachers called and said I can give her extra help; you just get her

> here on these days. I don't do tutoring on these day, I'm only here on these days, but I'm committed to something else, but I will commit myself to her because I see that she's trying and wants to get that grade and wants to be on that level.

Overall, these student and parent participants felt teacher academic caring contributed to their positive middle school experience.

Teachers Helped with Behavior

Two parent-child pairs (Markus and Mrs. Neale and Kayla and Mrs. Powell) emphasized that caring teachers played a major role in addressing behavioral challenges in the middle school environment. First, Markus spoke fondly of a teacher who provided additional support to him in his core content classes and also helped to keep his behavior in check:

> He was my mentor in 6th grade. At first I didn't like him until I got to know him. Then I was the favorite. He was my favorite… he had my back. He watched out for me. He told me when I was gonna mess up. He told me I'm messing up, get on track.

Markus revealed that this teacher also counseled him about his attitude, saying "He sat me down and told me I might not go to college if I have these attitudes, cause high school don't like these attitudes." Like Markus, Mrs. Neale confirmed the perception that teachers cared when they noticed and addressed behavioral or attitude changes in him at school. She stated:

> All of his teachers called if he was doing something wrong and they always gave him a second chance and that was good. And they knew. Like for example,

> Markus was hanging around with the wrong person and they saw an attitude change and he was getting in a lot of trouble and one teacher called and said, hey, we feel like Markus is hanging around with the wrong person.

Kayla and her mom also believed that when teachers communicated with them about behavioral concerns, the teacher genuinely cared. Kayla remembered some of her middle school teachers in a more positive light because they “would call for behavior issues or if you’re failing”. On the other hand, teachers who “won’t call for your whole year” were viewed more negatively. Mrs. Powell concurred, saying, “Here and in high school now, teachers take her on as being a very nice person, and when they see her around a crowd where she doesn’t belong they say something about it.” Ciara’s experiences in middle school were similar when it came to behavior; caring was expressed when teachers “ helped with not hanging with the wrong people and hanging with the right people and staying out of trouble and staying focused on school.” Collectively, teachers’ interest in and communication about behavioral concerns made a positive and lasting impression for these students and parents.

Teachers Encouraged Students and Parents

Three out of four parent participants recognized the benefits of teacher-encouragement with both their children and themselves. This strategy is considered to have a powerful influence on student motivation (Bandura, 1977; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Epstein, 1995). More specifically, supportive or positive interactions increases students’ desire to put forth effort; this was true for all demographic groups (Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012). Negative communication between teachers and parents, however,

reduces motivation - for African American students in particular (Wu & Qi, 2006; Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012). Researchers have also discovered that the delivery of information from parental to child may impact student motivation. In other words, parent communication styles that are more controlling tends to reduce student motivation, while more informative styles of communication does just the opposite (Deci &Ryan, 1985). Evidence of the impact of home-school communication was shared by Mrs. Powell, Mrs. Neale, and Mrs. Barnett. For example, when Kayla was struggling with math, Mrs. Powell dreaded getting teacher phone calls. She was surprised, however, when some of Kayla's teachers made positive phone calls:

> Well, I was like, what is she doing now? He's like, no, I'm calling with good news, and she's a joy to have in my class … very intelligent. I was like, well thanks. You know it's good to hear that, opposed to the goofing off or the not putting forth any effort.

Mrs. Neale also felt surprised and pleased when teachers called home with good news:

> When [teachers] call their parents and tell them what's going on… some don't have to but they do. And when you get the phone call, you say this teacher is trying to help my kid instead of saying he has to stay after school or waiting until he's failing to do something … I was like, wow, this teacher really cared about my son.

Mrs. Barnett repeatedly emphasized the positive influences of teachers at Keller Middle School. She appeared to initiate communication with teachers more than the other parent participants and felt that some teachers "care[d] more than other teachers".

However, she “was always able to communicate anything with any teachers, with the principal. Everything was good, everybody was helpful.” Positive home-school communication was, overall, viewed as advantageous to these African American parents at Keller Middle School.

Decidedly, caring teachers were viewed by both African American students and African American parents as a vital part of middle school success. Teachers were perceived as caring when they helped students with academics, supported behavior, and positively communicated with parents. According to study participants, these actions served to create an environment that promoted student motivation and self-efficacy.

Ownership

A sense of ownership is derived from a myriad of complex social and emotional interactions that occur within the environment. First, self-efficacy beliefs develop through vicarious learning experiences with caregivers and peers (Bandura, 1997). Agency, or the means to use one’s own capacity, as a human being, to act and impose actions onto the world and not just accept what happens, is developed as well (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 2001). When agency is enacted, students seek to create situations that allow them to take part in activities or actions that redefine their identities. According to Bandura (1997), motivation, effort, confidence, and persistence is influenced by one’s sense of self-efficacy.

Relating this to African American and Hispanic students, Tara O’Neill, in her 2012 study, investigated the ways in which these two groups of students developed self-efficacy and ownership in science. Since ownership is typically defined by the context

in which it is used, varying definitions of ownership exist. By removing the narrow focus of the content, O'Neill's remarks define ownership and highlight the broader implications for its development with African American students. According to O'Neill:

> Student ownership has been recognized as a powerful means for students' to affect change in their lives, increase levels of … engagement, and promote authentic participation. Student ownership in the context of school … is partly about what students know and believe …, as well as how they view themselves ….. For my students, having ownership was about more than a feeling. It was about being able to use ownership of one or more dimensions of … class in order to affect positive change in their lives. The more the students were able to use their ownership, the more they expanded their agency. With expansion of agency came students' positive re-positioning of their … experiences, an expanded understanding of the place of science in their lives, productive changes to their views of themselves in relation to their peers and their teacher, and a more positive perception of self.

Two out of four student participants and two out of four parent participants voiced their beliefs about the importance of working hard and taking ownership for their future. Both Kayla and Ciara referred to the future as being "in their control" regardless of the circumstances within which they are functioning. Kayla acknowledged that external forces, particularly other people, would always be present, but said, "… it's always up to me for what to do. Like when it comes down to it, it's up to me how hard I want to work." Ciara agreed, explaining how keeping an eye on the future will benefit her:

> So everything I do, I think about how it will affect me in the future. So if I do what I need to do to get an education, then I'll graduate. If I don't do it, then [there's] going to be consequences. So I do what I do so I'll have good things coming out of it in the end.

Both Mrs. Powell and Mrs. Jones credited their impetus to take ownership for their futures. Mrs. Jones focused on her motivation to "go for it" as an immigrant:

> We value, we coming here, were not looking at the racism. We're not looking at who hates us, who doesn't hate us. We have our goal, we are focused and we just want it and we go for it, and I guess that's how most immigrants are, not just Africans, most immigrants.

Mrs. Powell asserted that taking ownership in her job and having a positive outlook played a critical role in her success:

> I just took ownership of what was going on so, that way, when an opening came up, [I thought], 'Hey, I know how to do this....' It's up to me to do what I want to do. So I just took ownership, got involved … I've always been a people person. So yeah, I got involved. I didn't look for things not to work. Like the move here … everybody was like 'You goin' down there?" I didn't look for things not to work.

For all four participants, intrinsic motivation was evident. Based on their interviews, it was clear that agency and self-efficacy contributed to their sense of ownership for current and future goals and dreams.

Effort

In general, research has shown that the amount of effort students put into their schooling affects their academic outcomes (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001;Marks, 2000; Natriello & McDill, 1986). Looking specifically at African American students, conflicting viewpoints exist; Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) found evidence that African American students believe education will positively impact their future, while Fordham and Ogbu 1986) argued that the fear of being labeled as "acting White" discourages them from pursuing academic success. Matthew (2011) takes a slightly different approach through the lens of self-determined intergenerational mobility and effort optimism. In other words, African Americans believe they are able to improve their position in society through hard work and dedication, but also recognize the influence of social structures that inhibit their success. Three mother-daughter pairs cited effort optimism as important to future success.

Mrs. Powell and Kayla both expressed the opinion that effort and motivation played a significant role in their lives. Kayla actually mirrored her mother's comment about making the effort to get involved in activities, saying "you have to get involved in some type of activity, because you can't just go to school." Mrs. Powell also talked about effort, professing her belief in Kayla's ability to tackle low grades, and continually referenced the importance of Kayla putting forth effort to make that happen:

> Well, one thing that I noticed about Kayla… when something is a challenge she's ready to say 'Well, I don't want to do this.' Like I told you, her grades are good right now but because of the Spanish being low, she's [saying] 'I shouldn't have

> taken this.' … when it takes putting more effort into it, she's ready to kick it and give up, and that's not what you should do. You should just get more involved and try to better… try to do some extra credit or whatever it takes… go to tutorials. I mean, you're gonna have obstacles but you have to know how to overcome them, to achieve them and just give it your best shot. You might work hard at getting a "C", but that still can be not so bad because you put forth effort to get the "C". It's not gonna be easy.

Ciara and Mrs. Barnett's remarks about effort included a common theme; focusing on what you want is essential to success. Mrs. Barnett, for instance, stated that Kayla's "role in her success is when she wants something, she will get so focused on it, and that's what she will focus on until she gets it." In other words, success was a direct result of Kayla's effort. Kayla saw a focused effort on studying as important because "once your 8th grade year is over, that's it. Ninth grade, nobody's going to help you anymore. If you don't pass, you don't pass. So your eighth grade year, really your seventh and eighth grade year, is the time to get focused. Likewise, Jordan and Mrs. Jones perceived that there was no excuse for not exerting effort in life. Jordan explained that "you have to be able to push yourself, like without your parents there or other people, because if you think don't want it, nobody else can help you. You have to want to help yourself." Mrs. Jones agreed, adding that African American students have to show effort and "play a part in moving themselves off, breaking out of the mold, because it's no excuse, all those things they use as excuses, people have done it, people have, you know."

This final theme, intrinsic motivation to achieve, revealed that African American student and parent participants at Keller Middle School contributed their success to three main factors. First, parent involvement was viewed as a motivating factor in students' school success. For these families, parent-school communication and parental high expectations were the main ways parents showed involvement. Secondly, the presence of caring teachers was considered a significant motivating factor in school success. Teachers were perceived to be caring when they helped with academics and behavior, and facilitated positive home-school communication. Finally, ownership and effort was found to positively impact intrinsic motivation.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The intent of this final chapter is to discuss conclusions based on the data gathered, and provide recommendations for future policy development, instructional practices and research. As a reminder, this "problem of practice" research was conducted on a campus where the principal, as the researcher, hoped to examine the existing achievement gap between African American and White students through the lens of current teachers and administrators, and of former students and parents. As educational practitioners, the "problem of practice" model primarily allows campus instructional leaders to "focus on a specific problem with a specific content in a specific district [or school]" (Scheurich, 2009). Moreover, the model provides the foundation upon which campus teams can develop and implement action plans that 1) address the research findings and 2) are tailored to meet the unique needs of individual schools and students.

Review of Study

This study examined perceptions about the existing achievement gap between African American and White students at a middle school in the southwestern part of the United States. The campus was located in a traditionally designated "middle class" neighborhood that had recently (within the last ten years) experienced large demographic shifts; thus, the campus operated under middle class norms. Using a naturalistic inquiry

approach, a purposeful sample of teachers, administrators, students, and parents participated in semi-structured interviews that were audiotaped and later transcribed. A constant comparison data analysis method was used to compare and revise categories until theoretical saturation was achieved (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, thick description, and peer debriefing.

Three fundamental themes were revealed in this "problem of practice." These themes were: White deficit thinking, African American deficit thinking about other African Americans, and motivation to achieve. The first theme, White deficit thinking, described how White teachers and administrators believed that African American students at Keller Middle School were not successful in school because they (or their families) have internal defects that impede learning, the classical definition of deficit thinking (Valencia & Black, 2002). Five subthemes emerged related to White deficit thinking. First, teachers and administrators believed that African American parents were not involved in their child's education. Second, teachers had lower expectations for students of color. Third, teachers and administrators attributed gaps in achievement between African American and White students to socioeconomic status. Fourth, tracking was connected with lower student performance, but not viewed as something within teacher or administrator locus of control; thus, this reinforced teachers' deficit attitudes. Finally, teacher and administrator behavioral stereotyping of African American student participants was used to explain student failure.

The second theme in this study showed evidence that African American parent and student participants had deficit beliefs about other African Americans. Hence, defensive othering was a coping strategy participants used to assign a stereotypical label to *other* African Americans, but not to themselves (Ezzel, 2009). Three subthemes related to defensive othering were noted. First, African American parent and student participants voiced disapproval about *other* African American family structures and values, but believed theirs were strong and intact. Secondly, African American participants stated that education was not valued by *other* African Americans (but it was valued in their own homes). In the third subtheme, African American parents and students confirmed they saw *othe*r African Americans as deviant, but again, did not place themselves in that deviant group. The final theme in this study was motivation to achieve. Four subthemes emerged related to motivation to achieve: 1) student participants were motivated to reach their goals as a result of parent involvement; 2) African American student and parent participants saw caring teachers as playing a significant role in African American students' school success; 3) African American student and parent participants believed they must take ownership for their future: and 4) African American students and parents believed that strong effort to achieve goals was essential to success.

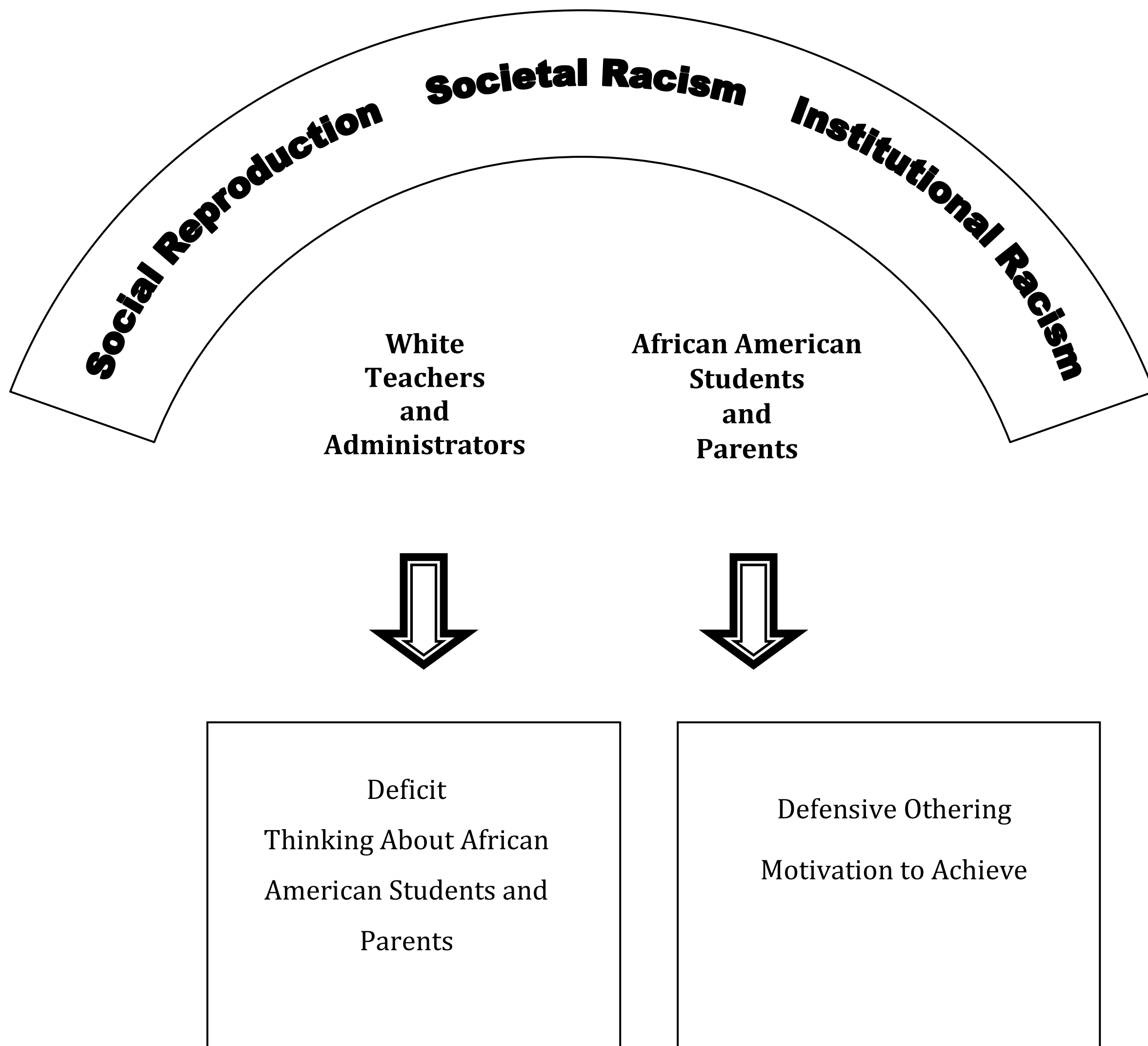
Ironically, African American student and parent beliefs that their motivation to achieve leveled the playing field and accounted for their success clearly conflicted with both campus and district data for some of the interviewees. In essence, immersion of these African American families in a middle class normed neighborhood and school

created “middle class blinders” – an altered perception of the context in which they live and work. Just as sunglasses shield one’s eyes and reduce the glare so one can navigate through roadblocks, “middle class blinders” protected these participants from the harsh realities of racism and enabled them to maneuver through barriers as people of color.

Discussion of Results: The Impossible Dilemma of African Americans in a White Middle Class School

African American students and parents at Keller Middle School were faced with two seemingly impossible dilemmas in their desire to achieve academic success: 1) How would African American students maneuver through the inescapable maze of deficit beliefs held by White teachers and administrators and; 2) How would African American students and parents navigate in a system that (automatically and unconsciously) reproduced systems that devalued them (individually and as a cultural group) and limited their access to equitable opportunities. As a result, goals that White families (at the same school and in the same neighborhood) were able to attain with ease, were significantly more difficult for these African American student and parent participants. Figure 1 highlights the main findings in this study and shows the complex dynamics occurring between the study participants in this middle school.

Figure 1 - Dynamics Between Study Participants



As depicted in Figure 1, both White teachers and administrators *and* African American students and parents were impacted by societal racism, institutional racism, and social reproduction. For African American students and parents, functioning within a system that reinforced deficit thinking about the African American culture was difficult. Furthermore, the importance of merit and hard work was offered by White

teachers as a way for them to achieve success, while the systems and practices on the campus perpetuated deficit thinking and served to maintain the status quo. African American students and parents responded through the processes of adaptation and coping by separating themselves from, or othering, other African Americans whom they perceived to be exhibiting stereotypically deficit behaviors and focused on an intense motivation to achieve.

For White teachers and administrators, the invisibility of their own "Whiteness" and privilege reinforced inequities in the social structure and cultural order of the school. In turn, beliefs that African American students are less competent, less intelligent, less capable, and less self-motivating were perpetuated (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Dealing With A Newer Racism

An abundance of research has documented the prevalence of common, and often ambiguous, forms of racism towards Blacks (Klonoff & Landrine, 1999; Kessler, Mickelson & Williams, 1999; Phinney & Chavir, 1995). Such racism can be defined as "discrimination against a group of people based on a perceived notion of their inferiority, both intellectual and cultural" (Lomotey & Aboh, 2009). However, this kind of definition of racism has been problematized from several perspectives. For instance, Jones (2000) developed a framework for understanding racism on three levels: institutional, personally mediated, and internalized. Institutional racism began with the system of slavery, and includes the development of structural barriers and norms which are supported through societal policies and practices. Personally mediated racism may be intentional or unintentional; it condones the inequitable societal norms and maintains the

institutional structural barriers already in place. Lastly, internalized racism is defined as acceptance, by people of color, of negative societal perceptions (Jones, 2000). More contemporary views of racism suggest that, over time, a shift from blatant or overt acts of discrimination to more subtle or covert forms of prejudice has occurred (see Henry & Sears, 2002; Katz & Hass, 1988; McConahay,1986; Sears, 1988). For the purposes of this study, Gaertner and Dovidio's (2005) aversive racism framework will be used to discuss how the deficit beliefs of teacher and administrator participants at Keller Middle School converge with institutionalized societal practices to promote and sustain the oppression of African American students and parents.

Aversive racism posits that Whites, who outwardly and consciously support principles of equity, also harbor unconscious negative feelings and deficit beliefs about Blacks and other marginalized groups. Thus, aversive racists are motivated to endorse the fair treatment of all groups. Tatum (1992) refers to this as the "ignorance is bliss;" for Whites, acknowledging racism as a system of advantage challenges deep-seated beliefs that rewards are earned on the basis of merit. Clearly, the perception of being fair was important to the teachers and administrators in the study. However, even when teachers and administrators emphasized a desire for their African American students to be just as successful as their White students, a caveat existed. In other words, teachers and administrators believed African American students *could* be successful *if* their parents valued education and had high expectations, *if* parents spent time with their children, or *if* children came from a loving and stable family – the hidden message being "*if* they grew up in a White middle class family". In addition, a "caring" comment, such

as " it breaks my heart," was frequently paired with these statements, as if to soften the negative meaning of the message.

Aversive Racism and White Resistance

Aversive racism has been shown to create anxiety and discomfort for Whites, causing them to interact and react in a variety of ways. Tatum (1992), for example, found that race is considered a taboo topic for discussion, especially in racially mixed settings. Similarly, Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) found that aversive racists avoid interracial interaction s altogether (like Mrs. Spencer, for example, who hated to call African American parents because they would be whipped with a hangar) or they would disengage from conversations as quickly as possible.

White resistance to recognizing this racism can occur in other ways. First, Whites may ignore or refute thoughts or indications that they might be racist to protect their self-esteem, even, according to Tatum (1992), claiming "I'm not racist myself, but I know people who are …" Second, Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, and Rivera (2009) cite the use of micro-invalidations, or behaviors that exclude or nullify the feelings or experiences of people of color. Devaluing the skills, resources, and culture African American students and parents brought to Keller Middle School was evidenced from Mrs. Spencer's comment that students enter kindergarten "already behind" because reading and writing experiences are not encouraged at home . Both Ms. Cross and Mr. Douglas acknowledged that African American students who exhibited cultural characteristics that were different from Whites (moving, dancing, singing) had a more difficult time "fitting in" with White teachers. Of great concern is Stanton-Salazar's

(1997) finding that, when teachers devalue African American students' culture, they are less likely to invest in members of this group. A third resistance strategy Whites employ is expressing negative feelings toward Blacks in subtle or indirect ways (i.e. Mrs. Spencer's comment that African Americans have few role models in society beyond sports or music stars). Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, and Rivera (2009) refer to these "subtle snubs" which marginalize the contributions of African Americans as micro-insults. Rationalization is another response commonly used to camouflage aversive racism. In other words, a negative response towards African Americans is attributed to a factor other than race. For example, Mrs. Morgan justified calling her fourth period class (which had a large number of African American boys in it) as the " rowdiest, most difficult class," but explained that it was "not because they were African American, but because it was boys."

Vulnerability of People of Color

No matter what form it takes, overwhelming and persistent discrimination permeates every aspect of African Americans' lives. As a result, the physical and psychological functioning of Black children and adults is significantly and negatively impacted (Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000; Halpern, 1993; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). For example, research investigating daily exposure to racial stress shows that people of color experience increased anxiety (Klonoff, Landrine, &Ullman,1999); higher blood pressure (Armstead, Lawler, Gorden, Cross, & Gibbons, 1989; Thompson, 1996); depression (Klonoff, et al. (1999); anger (Armstead et al.,1989); lower self-esteem (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), and greater perceived stress (Berry, Phinney,

Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996). Social exclusion or rejection from social interactions (because of race) can also have a major impact on the academic success of African American students). According to Von Robertson, Mitra, and Van Delinder (2005), social support can be defined as the extent to which a person's basic social needs for assistance are gratified through interaction with others. In a school environment, perceived social support also fosters the identity development of African American students by creating spaces where students feel safe, loved, and respected (Schweitzer, Kim, & Mackin, 1999). Finally, stereotype threat, or the awareness that negative labels are arbitrarily assigned to others based on skin color or ethnic origin, has also been documented as stressful for people of color (Steele & Aranson,1995).

For African American youth, middle school is undoubtedly a time when one's sense of belonging and self-identity is constantly confirmed or rejected through interactions with close family and friends. In this study, then, we might expect to find African American student participants express insecurities and trepidation about themselves, relationships with peers, or academic performance. Interestingly, this did not happen. Two adult participants in the study, however, confirmed the presence of social isolation based on race. First, Ms. Cross witnessed a White teacher blatantly treating an African American student differently, even going so far as to tell other teachers "I don't like that girl." Second, Mrs. Jones shared a story about how her daughter (in kindergarten at the time) was told by a White friend that they could not play together because "her grandparents were slaves." The limited data documenting African

American student and parent participants' stories of vulnerability, however, must be evaluated cautiously.

Given that greatest damage to self-esteem and identity occurs when individuals care about or are invested in the environments in which prejudice occurs (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998), it would make sense that a cycle of perceived threat would exist *at school and with peers* for African American student participants. A parallel connection can be made with African American parent participants; the prevalence of racism within Keller Middle School community required protection for themselves and their children. What, then, accounted for the disconnect between the theory of perceived threat and the positive self-images described by African American student and parent participants? Most likely, a series of complex (unconscious and conscious) behaviors, were used by African American student and parent participants to adapt to and deflect the deleterious effects of racism, in other words, to cope with racism.

Coping with Racism: Social Reproduction and Cultural Reproduction

The need for strategies to deal with the harmful effects of racism and social and cultural reproduction is not new. Logue (2003) highlights the numerous ways Blacks navigated and survived bondage, persecution, and degradation in the days of slavery. For example, Blacks used music and a unique African American language to communicate, thus circumventing slave owners' threats of harsh punishment. "Clever dialogues", or purposeful manipulation disguised as suggestions, were also used to influence the behavior of White slave owners. Furthermore, African Americans dealt with White oppression by routinely testing situations for signs of danger, searching for

opportunities to widen their sphere of influence, and discerning which members of White families could be bribed or persuaded to allow them privileges they were otherwise denied.

Just as Black slaves were cognizant of the presence and prevalence of racism, Sanders (1997) found that a similar awareness and response to racial discrimination, particularly educational and occupational discrimination, exists among African American adolescents today. Noguera (2008) These responses, also known as coping strategies, are used by African American adults as well. Given the insidious nature of racism in our society and the intense physiological and emotional changes that occur during adolescence, it is reasonable to conclude that people of color face significant challenges operating, not only in a dominant White society, but in an institutionalized system of White power.

Coping strategies have been described as (often internalized) characteristics used to manage emotional reactions to life events (Horowitz & Bordens,1995) or ways to limit damage to one's self-concept and social identity (Mellor, 2004). The value of coping behaviors, according to Brondolo, ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada (2009), is that they buffer the effects of race-related stress, thus reducing the opportunities for people of color to experience negative outcomes. A range of coping strategies have been documented in the literature. For instance, Mellor (2004) found that three main coping skills were used by African Americans when faced with racism: 1) to defend the self, 2) to control or contain the reaction, and 3) to confront the racism. Coping may also take the form of adaptation (Von Robertson, Mitra, and Van Delinder,

2005). Additionally, African American parents expose their children to a variety of coping mechanisms through the process of cultural socialization (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Cross, 1987; Tatum,1987). This strategy appeared to be used most often by African American students and parents as a way to counter the day-to-day barriers of racism.(Hughes, Smith, Stevenson, Rodriguez, Johnson, & Spicer, 2006).

Socialization : Coping with Social and Cultural Reproduction

Socialization frameworks are used to illustrate the processes through which information, values, and perspectives are transmitted in particular environments (Schein, 1968). Furthermore, these frameworks can provide insight into the coping methods used by group members to function effectively in society (Hughes et al., 2006). An abundance of frameworks and processes related to the socialization of African Americans exist. Boykin and Toms (1985), for instance, identified three specific socialization forces that operate on African American youth: 1) African American cultural experiences; 2) White middle class cultural norms; and 3) minority experiences (aversive and institutional racism). Boykin's (1986) triple quandary theory is an adaptation to his "socialization forces" idea. Namely, three social identities are used by traditionally marginalized groups (in this case African American) to negotiate the environment: 1) African American identity (focused on African American community values; 2) "minority" identity (the role one plays as a member of an historically marginalized group; and 3) American identity (values of the middle White class). Cultural ecological theory is yet another socialization framework explaining that Black students "act White", or assume the social expectations of White society, as a way to cope with racism (Fordham &

Ogbu, 1986). Linked to this theory is the idea that Blacks who adopt an "oppositional cultural identity" may view "acting White" as a betrayal of their culture. A final coping process to consider is cultural socialization, or the practices used by African American parents to facilitate the development of coping skills with their children (Hughes et al., 2006). In this study, cultural socialization strategies, and specifically biculturalism, accounted for the majority of behaviors used by African American student and parent participants to cope with the stressors of racism. Biculturalism.

Cultural socialization practices are commonly used by African American parents to create a strong sense of identity and belonging to better prepare children to confront the reality of racism. Three main cultural socialization strategies have been documented in the literature: teaching African American children to value their own culture, teaching bicultural values, and creating an awareness of racism. While there was no data in this study to substantiate the existence of the first two strategies (valuing the African American culture – i.e. teaching children about the meaning of important historical or cultural figures, artifacts, music, holidays, foods and stories (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Coard, Wallace, Stevenson & Brotman, 2004) and awareness of racism (Hughes et al., 2006), it is difficult to rule out the possibility of their use as a coping mechanism. However, multiple examples of biculturalism were shared by African American study participants. According to Boykin and Toms (1985), knowing how to work collaboratively with those in the dominant culture, either at school or in society, is a bicultural socialization technique frequently used by Black parents. As a coping strategy, biculturalism supported the African American student and parent participants

in this study by offering alternative behavioral choices. In other words, students and parents adapted to racial oppression by esteeming White cultural values, articulating the value of working hard, and taking on the meritocratic belief of individualism – all tenets of biculturalism.

Reproducing "White Culture Values"

Researchers have found that when African American parents teach their children to use behaviors typically respected by the White culture, their children are better able to cope with racism (Cross, 1987). Miller (1976) calls this "imitation of the dominants". In Kitayama , Markus, and Lieberman's (1995) research comparing and contrasting European American and African American cultural values, they found that individualism, autonomy, and freedom of expression were more prominent in the White culture, while interconnectedness, communalism, relating with others, and extended family connections took precedence in the Black culture. Consistent with that research, African American parent participants in this study emphasized using, and discussing the importance of, "traditional White behaviors" with their children as a coping method. Specifically, behaviors such as communicating with the school, accentuating the importance of a college education, staying out of trouble, and helping children to study were mentioned. Additionally, African American parents promoted the concept of "individualism," a trait highly valued in the White mainstream culture. As a result, African American student participants echoed that same value, adding it to their existing repertoire of coping strategies.

Work Hard, Do Well

African American parents who encourage their children to work hard and do well in general are, in actuality, developing the coping skill of biculturalism (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Thornton., Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Phinney and Chavir (1995) also found that African American parents emphasize working harder and doing better in response to discriminatory experiences (i.e. societal and institutional racism) their children will likely face. In this study, evidence of the "work hard, do well" strategy was apparent in statements from African American study participants. For example, African American parent and student participants conveyed messages such as "give it your best shot," "you have to put forth effort," and "she's always pushing me to strive better,", thus confirming that hard work and success is an important and valued tool to resist race-related stress.

It's Up to Me

At Keller Middle School, African American student and parent beliefs that they, as individuals, must take responsibility for their future was reflected in the theme of ownership, and represents the third way biculturalism was used to cope with racism. Comments such as "it's up to me how hard I want to work" and "… we have our goal, we are focused, and we just want it and go for it … " illustrate what Bowman and Howard (1985) call a purposeful message focused on self-development and individual achievement. This strategy is also consistent with Tyler, Broome, and Williams (1991) active coping orientation, whereby an individual takes proactive agency and initiative in

their lives. Active coping, like biculturalism, appears to function as an protective factor in the context of experiencing racial micro-aggressions (Torres et al., 2010).

It is important to note that the practices used by the African American parents at Keller Middle school regarding socialization were molded by their individual (ethnic-racial) identities and the context (in this case, neighborhood) in which they were operating (Hughes et al., 2006). Other factors that influence the use of socialization practices are children's age and gender, parents' socioeconomic and immigration status, and prior racial discrimination experiences (Hughes et al., 2006). In general, and consistent with the findings in this study, middle and upper class African American parents are more likely to engage in cultural socialization practices (Hughes et al. 2006). Furthermore, cultural socialization strategies are more likely to be used by families who believe their group is negatively valued by others (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Given their awareness of how deficit White mindsets can impact current and future success, cultural socialization strategies have become a significant part of the lives of the African American students and parents in this study.

Coping by Othering

African American students and parents in this study were inundated with conflicting social messages. On one hand, White teachers and administrators held deficit assumptions that Blacks were not, and never would be, as good as them. On the other hand, they voiced the popular (White middle class) belief in meritocracy (if one works hard, they can "pull themselves up by their boot straps" to achieve the same goals). In other words, white privilege and power unconsciously masked awareness of

their own deficit beliefs or of systems and practices on the campus that devalued African Americans . Rather than using resistance or rejection, African American student and parent participants developed a propensity to engage in defensive othering to manage subordination in this school and neighborhood operating under White, middle class norms. Defensive othering occurred when African American students and parents described other African Americans in a deficit manner, but denied having those same deficit characteristics themselves. According to Ezzell (2009), while defensive othering enables those in marginalized groups to deal with oppression by distancing themselves, it also "reinforce[es] the legitimacy of a devalued identity in the process (p. 111)." Defensive othering is manifested in a number of behaviors, among which include identifying with the dominants group and normative identification (Ezzell, 2009). As previously addressed, the "othering" observed in comments from Mrs. Jones and Jordan (as Nigerian Americans) should be considered within the unique context of their ancestry (i.e. as voluntary, English speaking immigrants who were more readily accepted into the dominant culture).

"Othering" within the totality of America's foreign black population has been discussed by a number of scholars (Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996). According to Johnson (2008), the experiences of immigrants of African descent are not all the same. She contends that social and cultural reproduction plays a significant role in the way people of African descent perceive themselves and are perceived by others:

> Exploring vital settlement experiences, especially the immigrants' understanding of and reactions to race and racism in different American epochs, it demonstrates two salient points: that cultural production and reproduction are at the center of the development and articulation of counter identities, and that ultimately, rather ironically, the diasporic transnational identities created are situated in the master status and, in apparent or subtle but significant ways, are shaped and reshaped by it (p. 78).

Evidence of this identity separation was observed with Mrs. Jones, the participant born in Nigeria. Her entry into the United States was much easier as English-speaking black foreigners were touted as a model minority (Jones, 2008). Certainly, this status did not shield her from experiencing racism. In fact, Mrs. Jones shared multiple experiences when her children were excluded, ostracized, or would potentially be in danger because of their skin color.

It is clear, however, that in the post-civil rights era, Afro-Caribbean immigrants were positioned much more favorably in the United States than other Blacks;. Not only was the impact and complexity of race was diminished for Afro-Caribbean immigrants, but their own sense of identity was strengthened as a result of their “roots” (Jones, 2008). For example, Grant (2005) describes the tendency for Afro-Caribbeans to come to America "with their eyes wide shut” because they are “convinced of their ability to tap into their own social and cultural capital” (p. 87). Immigrant scholar Cheikh T. Sylla believes that "the African American experience cannot be held as justification for one's

inability to succeed" (Reddick, 1998). Furthermore, the familiar "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" theory was echoed by D'Souza (2002):

> The West Indians, Haitians, the Nigerians, All are darker than Afncan-Americans, yet white racism does not stop them. The immigrants know that racism today is not systematic, it is episodic, and they are able to navigate around its obstacles. Even immigrants who start at the very bottom are making rapid gains, surging ahead of African-Americans and claiming the American dream for themselves (p. 129).

In this study, a clear distinction between the identity of Mrs. Jones (as a person of Afro-Caribbean descent) and other African American parents was evident. However, Jones (2008) stresses that, regardless of background, the identity development of Afro-Caribbean immigrants is still impacted their experiences as blacks in America.

Identifying with the Dominant Groups

Realizing how identities work to influence thoughts and behaviors is critical to our understanding of defensive othering as a coping strategy in this study. According to Ezzell (2009), identities are malleable actions that give meaning to one's own self or to others. Investigations of how members of subordinated groups challenge power groups, but seek approval from them at the same time, show that defensive othering promotes a sense of self-worth and affirmation., and , at the same time, "reinforces the stigmatizing power of the devalued identities [the participants] sought to deflect" (Ezzell, 2009, p. 114). In this study, Mrs. Jones' comments should be carefully conceptualized through her cultural lens as a Nigerian American, as her perceptions may

differ from other parent participants who consider themselves to be "African American". Was cultural hegemony, or the tendency for prevailing cultural norms to be considered natural, at play (Decker, 2009, p. 49)? Does Mrs. Jones' identity as a Nigerian American represent a pre-existing power imbalance between herself and the other parent participants? While these ideas were not probed during interviews, they should be considered in analyzing the context of these findings. Nevertheless, identifying with the dominant White group was evident at Keller Middle School when African American student and parent participants acknowledged the behaviors and traits of the middle White class in a positive light (i.e. Mrs. Barnett's comments about how Anglo American children study a lot and take school seriously), justifying their use as necessary to get ahead. At the same time, however, Mrs. Barnett clearly positioned her family morals as "different" from other African Americans in the Keller community; while this act heightened her status or self-identity, it also served to reinforce the notion that other families of color devalue the importance of education.

Normative Identification.

Through studies on social influence, researchers have documented a tendency for individuals to identify with those who are liked and respected as a way to cope with situations in which they are uncertain about the "correct" conclusion (Kelman, 1958). Christiansen, Rothgerber, Wood and Matz (2004) characterize normative behavior as either injunctive or descriptive. Injunctive norms, or "the self-standards that specify whom people ideally would like to be or whom they ought to be," are typically used when perceived sanctions are associated with conformity or violation of norms, whereas

descriptive norms are thought of as "what most people are doing is probably the correct thing to do" (Christiansen et al., 2004, p. 1297). Deutsch and Gerard (1955) found that normative behavior increases positive emotions and leads to the experience of solidarity rather than alienation. Conversely, feelings of guilt or anxiety can occur when injunctive norms are not matched (Christiansen et al., 2004). Evidence of normative identification occurred in this study when African American student and parent participants aligned themselves with the behaviors and values of Whites - similar to the bicultural strategy of "esteeming White cultural values." However, a major discrepancy exists between the two coping strategies. To the extent that African American students and parents normalized White cultural values, they also positioned themselves as "better" than other people of color by detaching themselves from and devaluing the behaviors of other African Americans in the Keller Middle School community. Given the research citing benefits of normative identification (i.e. positive emotions and reduced feelings of alienation) and intense racial prejudice pressures from teachers and administrators, it makes sense that participants would employ this coping mechanism. A second example of normative identification occurred when African American student and parent participants attributed their success, in large part, to parent involvement, hard work, effort, and motivation. In other words, their self-comparison (as Blacks in a middle class neighborhood with a high school education (at minimum) to other Blacks with fewer social, cultural, and economic resources), reinforced the deficit status of African Americans in society.

The existing achievement gap between African American and White students at Keller Middle School, according to this study, was a primary result of White power, deficit thinking, and racism. The school's long history of serving White, economically advantaged students in a middle class neighborhood, *and* the fact that the majority of the staff was White, firmly entrenched teacher beliefs about, and expectations for, African American students and their parents. Furthermore, by taking on a colorblind ideology, cultural differences were invisible to staff members – especially to those who were there prior to the large shifts in demographics and poverty. The end result was a sustained gap in achievement between African American and White students, explained and excused through deficit eyes. In response to this, how does one mitigate this cycle of inequity? Mounting research suggests that culturally responsive leadership positively influences academic achievement and engagement of students of color with the school environment (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Juettner, 2003; Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, ... Riley, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Riehl, 2000; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2006). The role of a culturally responsive leader, then, is to establish an organizational culture that promotes understanding of diversity and facilitates the use of relevant strategies to support students of color (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). Culturally responsive leaders can apply their efforts to influence a number of areas including, but not limited to, reforming curriculum, integration of content, multicultural teaching practices, and staff development focused on cultural awareness, thus helping teachers to be better prepared to work positively and appreciatively with diverse learners and their families (Taylor &

Whittaker, 2003). Furthermore, this literature confirms that culturally responsive environments attuned to the needs of diverse learners are more likely to result in success for students of color (Gay, 2000). Thus, cultivating cultural responsiveness will only be achieved with concerted efforts on campus and district leadership teams.

Recommendations for This Study's Middle School

The following recommendations are offered to promote what I will call "cultural proficiency," or the knowledge, understanding, and sense of urgency necessary to transform policies and practices in this middle school so that equitable opportunities for African American students become *the new norm* at Keller Middle School: 1) conduct an equity audit to identify underlying customs and assumptions that reinforce inequitable practices; 2) build the capacity of campus level leaders to discern between practices that promote equity and those that maintain the inequitable status quo; 3) build the capacity of classroom teachers to understand, recognize, and implement culturally responsive pedagogy; and 4) create a campus mission statement focused on celebrating and honoring diversity. Together, these strategic steps will, in essence, develop a critical mass to make change possible.

Build Campus Leadership Capacity

In 1993, Scheurich urged White academics to critically assess how Whiteness impacts their work in the social justice arena:

> … we need to study how being White affects our thinking, our behaviors, our attitudes, and our decisions from the micro, personal level to the macro, social level. We need to make White racism a central, self-reflective topic of inquiry

> within the academy. We need to become aware of our racial positionality as it affects our intellectual products and then infuse this reflexivity into those products. Second, we need to undertake this effort in a way that does not attempt to separate "good" Whites, willing to con-front White racism, from "bad" Whites, unwilling to con-front White racism. While this nondivisive approach makes good, practical, political sense, it is even more important to understand that as long as the discourse on White racism divides "good" Whites from "bad" Whites, it misses the central argument advanced in this essay. That is, in our society everyone is racially located and experiences the in-equitable distribution of resources and power by racial group, even though a belief in individualism conceals this in-equitable distribution. It does not matter whether we are a "good" or a "bad" White; all Whites are socially positioned as Whites and receive social advantages because of this positionality. No individual White gets to be an exception because of his or her antiracism (p. 9).

While this argument (from my perspective) was made to influence those we might categorize as “researchers,” I believe it is fully applicable, first, to those who are practitioners, but especially, to those of us who meddle in both worlds. Clearly the argument has been made that self-reflection, as White leaders, is imperative. Consideration of the Scheurich’s second point, however, is almost more critical from a practitioners standpoint. Because racial beliefs are embedded in complex and disguised ways, or as Morrison (1992) puts it, “… [disguised] forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body

politic than biological race ever was ....," discussions about race must be broached thoughtfully and respectfully. Chances of alienation, denial, anger, guilt, and excuse making are already high for those on campus leaderships teams who are White. And, administrators of color are likely to see through, and even disregard or challenge, efforts of White administrators who portray themselves as "good" Whites. Approaching issues of race and inequities at the campus level, then, must be done in consultation with those who are experienced, grounded in their racial identity, and who understand, and can help campus leaders to avoid, the common pitfalls that are part and parcel of addressing issues of social justice.

Build Teacher Leadership Capacity

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is designed to reflect the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and learning styles of ethnically diverse students, ultimately increasing their opportunities for success (Gay, 2000). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy is comprised of three basic tenets: 1) students must experience academic success; 2) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and 3) students must develop critical consciousness to competently challenge the status quo. In general, Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) found that culturally responsive teachers established norms, procedures, and structures for the following conditions: 1) establishing inclusion or creating a learning environment in which teachers and students feel respected and connected; 2) developing positive attitudes or favorable dispositions toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice; 3) enhance meaning or create challenging, thoughtful learning

experiences that include student perspectives and values; and 4) engendering competence by understanding that students are effective in learning something they value.

Investigations purposed in documenting more specific characteristics of culturally responsive teachers show that, first and foremost, culturally responsive teachers are caring (Gay, 2002; Dalton, 1998; Nieto, 2004) and empathetic (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006). Tosolt's (2009) research, however, cautions that students often have different perceptions about the behaviors that constitute teacher caring, making it necessary for teachers to engage in conversations with their students about what caring looks like to them. Cooper (2003) also studied perceptions of caring, and found that White teachers (identified by African American students and parents) who exhibited characteristics of "warm demanders" were perceived as responsive to students of color; these teachers had high expectations for African American students but also functioned in a mothering role. Furthermore, culturally responsive teachers set expectations for behavior between children and adults (Gay, 2002), use communication that it is active, engaging, and participatory (Risko &Walker–Dalhouse; 2007; Allison & Rehm, 2007; Dalton,1998). Finally, Villegas and Lucas' (2002) found that culturally responsive teachers affirm students with diverse backgrounds, build on students' prior knowledge, embrace constructivist views of teaching and learning, and are conscious advocates for educational change.

Campus leadership teams play a significant part in building teacher capacity as well. According to Grant and Asimeng–Boahene (2006), culturally responsive teachers

must come to terms with their preconceived notions about students of color if they are to see past their stereotypical underachievement. Similarly, Nieto (2004) asserts that the ability to identify one's own cultural frame of reference is critical. Thus, one responsibility of campus leaders is to promote teacher self-reflection through ongoing staff development opportunities focused on race-related issues. Magno and Schiff (2010) also found that assisting teachers in integrating diverse experiences into their classes and lessons are helpful in mitigating the effects of cultural mismatch, as opposed to simplifying culturally responsive pedagogy with activities like cultural celebrations (Sleeter, 2012).

Equity Audits as Evaluations of Cultural Responsiveness

Reflecting on data related to student achievement is commonplace for school administrators. Rarely, however do school leaders review policies, practices, and organizational structures to identify and remove barriers that disadvantage people on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and other characteristics (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Skrla et al. (2004) proposed a re-conceptualized form of equity audits for school leaders to use as way to systematically examine these areas using three dimensions: teacher quality equity, programmatic equity, and achievement equity. Teacher quality equity is focused on analyzing data related to the experience, education, professional development, content-area expertise, and credentials of teachers who teach certain groups. The programmatic equity is designed to critique the quality of the programs in which students are placed or omitted (i.e. special education and gifted programs). Finally, an achievement equity analysis consists of disaggregating existing

data (discipline, achievement, and program placement) to identify inequities by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class.

Culture audits provide another avenue for campus leadership teams to evaluate issues of equity. Bustamante, Nelson, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) developed and investigated the use of a School-Wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist with 151 school leaders (only 20% of whom were principals). Four primary themes emerged from the data: (a) policies, such as identification of gifted students, were found to be both an impetus to building cultural competence and a means for justifying inequitable practices, (b) programs (i.e. periodic intercultural integration initiatives) were viewed as instrumental in carrying out culturally competent practices, (c) school culture (embedded shared values) and climate (a more temporary measurement of feelings on a campus) were seen as synonymous, and (d) multiple barriers were cited as blocking implementation of culturally responsive practices. For instance, school leaders were unclear as to whose job it was to direct school wide cultural competence initiatives. In addition, resource constraints (i.e., time, money, and materials), lack of awareness of the influence of cultural competence (i.e., socially just practices, equity, inclusion, cultural responsiveness, etc.), and strong personal cultural biases were found to further deter the use of culturally responsive strategies.

Create a Campus Mission Statement

John Goodlad (1979) intended, in *What Schools Are For*, to spark dialogue about the roles and purposes of schools in educating a democratic citizenry, and reflected on three questions: What *are* schools expected to do? What *do* schools do? and What

should schools do? For those who are campus leaders, routine familiarity with these questions comes from annual requirements to update school improvement plans. However, the normative nature of these plans rarely promotes deep reflection to address the true sources of the gaps in achievement between African American and White students. According to Evans (2007), "to deny that race matters is to ignore the histories and perspectives of people of color in general and to downplay unique ways of knowing and being as a means to avoid addressing a diversity of instructional, academic, and social needs in schools (p. 182). To that end, a mission statement, collaboratively developed by all stakeholders, is a critical step in establishing a culturally responsive school environment. Similar to a roadmap, mission statements pinpoint a campus' purpose or destination, and highlight alternative routes or paths to guide the decision making, actions, and use of resources throughout the campus' journey. The final destination, of course, is student success.

A wide range of school effectiveness research has consistently shown that commitment to a shared mission statement is one of the leading factors differentiating more effective schools from less effective schools (Claus & Chamaine, 1985; Druian & Butler, 1987; Renchler, 1991; Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Purposefulness in words and actions are essential when designing a mission statement. For example, the content of a campus mission statement intended to be focused on equity must clearly convey that staff members value diversity and support opportunities for diverse learners (Meacham and Barrett, 2003). In other words, alignment must occur between the content of the statement and the core values, culture, and goals of a school

(Ireland and Hitt,1992). Once completed, mission statements must be frequently articulated for two reasons; first, and most importantly, repeated communication supports development of a shared purpose. Second, discussions surrounding the vision for equity enable staff members to continually reflect on and distinguish between activities that conform to the campus imperatives and those that do not. (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Thus, as culturally responsive school leaders and advocates for social change, facilitating the creation of a mission statement with diversity at its heart is a critical measure in efforts to achieve equity for students of color.

Recommendations for General Middle School Practice

Culturally competent middle schools are inclusive in that they honor, respect, and value diversity in theory and in practice (Klotz, 2006). In addition, they ensure teaching and learning are relevant and meaningful to adolescents of various cultures. Using Keller Middle School as an example, the majority of middle schools across the country are steeped in White, middle class traditions and expectations. Thus, the promises of campus leaders to reduce the gap in achievement between Whites and students of color are virtually impossible. It will only be through collaboration with others who are similarly inclined to "take on" or challenge the status quo, that campus and district leaders can begin to forge a path towards equity. Therefore, it is this researchers recommendation that educational advocates join together, not only for moral support, but to share practices proven effective in developing culturally responsive and relevant schools. While a good number of such quality, researched based programs and practices can be found in the literature, several worthy of consideration include: adopting a

learning orientation, accessing C.A.R.E. resources, using culturally competent checklist, and "No Place for Hate".

Adopt a Learning Orientation

Ely, Meyerson, and Davidson (2006) liken political correctness to a double-edged sword; while it can promote inclusiveness for traditionally marginalized staff members, it can also hinder the development of cross-cultural relationship on a school campus. Therefore, campus and district leaders must actively promote a philosophy of inclusion and search for structures through which diversity can be celebrated, knowledge about culturally responsive and relevant practices can be shared, and systemic inequities that devalue students of color can be explored. They offer five principles to adopt "a learning orientation in cross-cultural interactions" (p. 80):

- *Pause* to short-circuit the emotion and reflect.
- *Connect* with others in ways that affirm the importance of relationships.
- *Question yourself* to help identify your blind spots and discover what makes you defensive.
- *Get genuine support* that doesn't necessarily validate your point of view but, rather, helps you gain a broader perspective.
- *Shift your mind-set* from "*You* need to change" to "What can *I* change?"

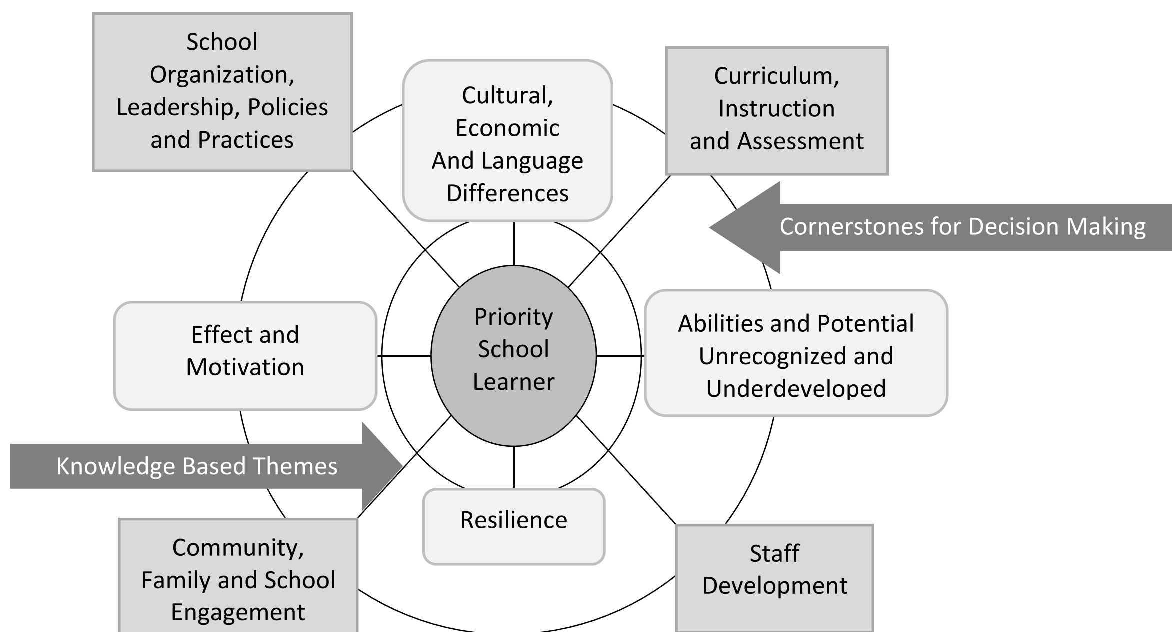
According to the authors, when campus leaders model these principles of resilience, they can inspire others to do the same. Of utmost importance, though, is the ability of leaders to: create safe environments for candid conversations; be continually

self-reflective; seek out the experience of others who have a deeper understanding of race-related issues; and foster people's investment in relationships.

Using C.A.R.E. to Re-Culture

"Re-culturing" as opposed to "re-structuring" is proffered by Williams (2003) as necessary to focus on closing the gap in achievement between Whites and students of color. Thus, C.A.R.E: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gap (2011), was developed by the National Education Association to help educators improve their practices with culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students.. C.A.R.E. stands for the themes of culture, abilities, resilience, and effort. A Priority Learner Framework (see Figure 2) integrates four "cornerstones" for decision making with the four C.A.R.E. themes to understand the cause of low student achievement for students of color.

Figure 2 - Priority School Learner Framework



A number of useful resources are included in the C.A.R.E. guide to assist with evaluating For example, an “Educator Check-In on Culture: How am I doing?” checklist encourages teachers to reflect on their level of cultural proficiency. Teachers can also connect with experts in culturally responsive pedagogy through video links and use reflection guides to facilitate new learning (i.e. Dr. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine’s video on the role of culture in learning). Ready-to-use classroom activities, such as creating community agreements, setting procedural expectations, assess student and parent perceptions, and creating awareness of racial identity support the development of culturally responsive schools.

Culturally Competent Checklist for Success

Klotz (2006), in Culturally Competent Schools: Guidelines for Secondary School Principals, examines how school leaders encourage understanding and respect for culturally diverse student populations in middle and high school. She offers four key areas for leaders to assess their cultural competence as school leaders: 1) staff development; 2) early intervention and assessment; 3) selection of curriculum and instruction; and 4) degree and quality of community and parent involvement. This approach views multicultural backgrounds as an advantage, rather than as a problem, thus shaping thinking, expectations, and efforts to collaborate.

No Place for Hate

No Place for Hate® (Anti-Defamation League, 2012) was launched in 2001 as a model for schools to integrate anti-bias and diversity education into the curriculum. No Place for Hate® helps teachers and administrators to create and sustain inclusive school

environments where all students feel valued and respected; most importantly, it provides students with tools to challenge bigotry and prejudice. A variety of resources are listed on the No Place for Hate® website; these include important terms necessary to develop a common language, a Pyramid of Hate – which allows students to see how prejudiced behaviors become "normalized", and a Resolution of Respect or promise for students and staff to combat hate and ignorance.

Certainly, this is not an exhaustive list of resources for middle school leaders. However, it represents some of the many research-based options available to middle school leaders as they develop deep understandings and respect for diverse student groups, and ultimately, reduce or eliminate disparities in achievement between African American and White students.

Recommendations for General District and State Policies

Gooden (2009) states that "institutional racism is more related to members of the dominant culture's perceived correct way to do things in American" (p, 238). Thus, a powerful cycle of exclusivity occurs. First, cultural norms privileging White teachers, administrators, parents are in place. Next, when outcries for equity are desired *or* mandated, legislators (who are elected by dominants) create new laws; typically these are purposed and masked in addressing the needs of *all* students, but essentially continue to manipulate school environments in favor of Whites. Finally, justification of that manipulation occurs based on cultural norms and expectations, further institutionalizing racist practices. In order to break that oppressive cycle, state policies focusing on increasing cultural competence should be developed. These may include Cultural

Competence Action Plans, ensuring teacher education programs (undergraduate and graduate) include cultural competence in the curriculum, and requirements for textbook companies to include multicultural viewpoints in publications.

Cultural Competence Action Plans

A Cultural Competence Action Plan (CCAP) is intended to build capacity within a school district to assess, understand, and use equitable practices that promote the success of students of color. Specific components in the plan should include begin with Development of School District/University Partnerships. In this step, experts in cultural competence from Tier I research universities will partner with schools districts to provide guidance in all phases of the Cultural Competence Action Plan and build school district staff members' capacity as culturally responsive leaders. Development of a Cultural Competence Steering Committee is the second step. This committee would take a leadership role by serving as liaisons to individual campuses and the community, and could be considered as a future "trainer of trainers" cadre. Third, designation of tools to measure cultural equity would occur. Tools will be selected or created to assess equity issues in areas such as staffing, programs, curriculum, and funding. The fourth step is the implementation and evaluation of an equity audit whereby processes will be designed for implementation and evaluation of equity audits. The assessment would include areas such as staffing, programs, curriculum, discipline, staff development, and parent involvement, among others. Step five is the goal selection process. Based on data from equity audits, a goal selection and prioritization process would be facilitated by the steering committee, and goals would be integrated into both district and campus

improvement plans. Next, in step six, a staff development plan, based on data from equity audits, staff development topics and timelines would be drafted and implemented. Moving on to step seven, a Plan to Promote Understanding of Racial Identity is created. Saunders, Davis, Williams, and Williams (2001) found that the way African American youth think about themselves plays a role in their academic intentions and performance. To diminish the likelihood that these youth will have a negative orientation toward schooling and academic achievement, educators and policy makers must ensure Black students have an positive racial socialization experiences. In other words, by creating an awareness of both racial discrimination *and* the history of the African American achievement orientation, academic, behavioral, and emotional attitudes can be nurtured from an early age. Thus, this component of the CCAP would be integrated with a multicultural curriculum. Step eight provides communities with a Parent and Community Engagement Plan, designed to take advantage of the fact that parents of academically successful children of color are especially effective at being advocates for their children at school, monitoring their child's progress, and maintaining ongoing communication with teachers (Jarrett 1995). Therefore, efforts to create solid ties between African American families and school personnel are essential. Strategies to help teachers and administrators understand cultural differences and challenge common stereotypes related to African American parent involvement should be included in this plan. Furthermore, adopting strategies to seek ongoing input from African American students, parents, and community members would provide valuable data to district and campus staff members. The final step is a plan for Ongoing Evaluation and

Revision; thus, ongoing feedback and evaluation would be solicited from all stakeholders to make revisions as deemed necessary.

Increase Cultural Competence of Pre-Service Teachers

Investigations of culturally responsive teacher induction programs have found several issues that perpetuate cultural incompetence. Ullman and Hesch (2012), for example, assert that most teachers in pre-service programs have a limited understanding of cultural and structural inequities that serve as barriers for students of color. Ladson-Billings' (1999) perspective on multicultural teacher education programs is similar; she contends that pre-service programs "[continue] to suffer from a thin, poorly developed fragmented literature that provides an inaccurate picture of the kind of preparation teachers receive to teach in culturally diverse classrooms" (p. 114). Leaders in the field of multicultural education suggest that we must raise the consciousness of pre-service teachers about their own personal biases, issues of privilege, and beliefs about others who are culturally different as a way to challenge inherent inequities (Sleeter, 2012). Additionally, teacher induction programs should be purposeful and comprehensive in design, integrating opportunities for self-reflection and engaging in cross-cultural experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1999). In fact, Rychly and Graves (2012) suggest that centering pre-service teachers' work in communities who serve students of color is ideal.

Incentive Programs

Studies have found that good teaching in historically underserved classrooms has been effective in reducing gaps in achievement between African American and White students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Therefore, local districts or states should provide

funding incentives for selected educators to work on culturally diverse campuses that have, historically, produced gaps in achievement between White students and students of color. Staff members could be recruited from a variety of sources (i.e. those already serving in teacher and administrator roles, pre-service teachers, and future administrators enrolled in educational leadership programs), and should be philosophically rooted in the principles and values of multiculturalism. One possible resource to guide selection of staff members is The Cultural Awareness and Beliefs Inventory or CABI (Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2005). The CABI was designed "to measure the perceptions and attitudes of teachers' cultural awareness and beliefs," through eight factors: teacher beliefs, school climate, culturally responsive classroom management, home and community support, cultural awareness, curriculum and instruction, cultural sensitivity, and teacher efficacy (Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007, p. 88). Another resource comes from McLeod and Tanner (2007), who investigated teacher behaviors that either promote or deny equity for African American students. They developed the Teacher Dependence/Independence framework to compare and describe teacher leadership roles in diverse classrooms. In general, McLeod and Tanner (2007) found that teachers who operate from a dependent frame rely on school districts for staff development and resources, use data provided by others to improve instructional practices, use traditional methods of communication with parents, and use existing and familiar teaching strategies. In contrast, teachers whose behaviors are consistent with the "independent" model engage in professional development activities "within and outside of" the school district to meet the individual needs of students, develope tools to measure and analyze

student needs, have high teacher efficacy, establish strong connections with parents and community, and use more "customized" strategies for individual learners. Certainly, a number of resources similar to these exist. The point here is that we must take advantage of some type of research-based tool to identify the best candidates for our work in creating equitable classrooms for *all* children.

Create Culturally Relevant and Responsive Model Classrooms

The notion of model classrooms has been used in this author's current district as an alternative way to provide teacher and administrator literacy training in a relevant and meaningful context. Keeping this model in mind, I suggest the implementation of Culturally Competent Model Classrooms. Campus and district based leaders would collaborate to create the vision, goals, and guidelines for the program. Once the plan was formulated, campus principals would identify "culturally relevant and responsive classrooms" or classrooms where teachers had a strong understanding of cultural differences, demonstrated respect for students of color, and in which students were highly engaged and successful. Both model and visiting teachers would benefit from the program; model teachers would receive ongoing multicultural training and, as "teachers of teachers", continuously reflect on their instructional practices. Visiting teachers would be provided with various note-taking and self-reflection forms to use before, during, and after observations. The scale of the program would obviously be quite small to begin with (depending on the level of cultural proficiency within districts and schools). However, expansion over time could produce substantial growth in achievement for African American students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The responsibility of educators to serve all students well is overwhelming; so much so, one could effortlessly dream up hundreds, if not thousands of various directions for future research. However, as a practitioner working in the throes of resistance, seeing adversity surface for students of color in in so many ways, my first recommendation for future research is that it occurs in the natural context of schools, led by practitioners whose sights are set on bringing the voices of African American students to the surface; thus, White teachers and administrators can gain clarity and a perspective other than their own about the gap in achievement between their own Black and White students. Knowing that most White teachers have limited knowledge of African American culture, my second recommendation is for individual schools to conduct action research on the impact of ongoing staff development focused on developing culturally relevant and responsive teachers and administrators. Finally, action research investigating the impact of positive racial socialization strategies with African American youth in middle schools is recommended. Since these strategies have been found to promote the value of academic achievement while simultaneously helping young Black men and women to perceive the structural disadvantages they will likely encounter in life, middle schools must not only be aware, but must purposefully provide opportunities for positive racial socialization to take place.

Personal Researcher Statement

The focus of this section will be toads.

I know… you are wondering how toads could possibly be related to the work of an educational practitioner and doctoral student. There are two stories I will share… about toads. I learned of each story at a different point in my dissertation writing process, so while they are connected, they also hold slightly different meanings for me. The first story was told by Mrs. Jones, the Nigerian parent in this study, as she talked about the impact of oppression over time.

> I don't know if you know the story of the toad and the hot water. There was a toad that was put in this bowl and some hot water was put inside. And he tried to jump off, and I think there was a ceiling, something covering it, and he kept on trying, but he couldn't. After a while, they removed the cover and he could. And he just didn't. He just assumed the cover was just there.

Those words reverberated in my head for a very long time… and he could… and he just didn't. I've seen this happen. In fact, I can picture the faces of some of my favorite African American students whom I knew quite well because, of course, they were "frequent flyers" to the office. And the question that continued to run through my mind was… how many toads did I help to place in a bowl of hot water and then, hold the lid tightly on top so he or she wouldn't jump out? Even worse, how many toads were chastised after the lid was removed for not trying to jump out??? Sometimes we call them "lazy toads" or "toads whose parents don't care" or "ghetto toads." Sometimes we don't call them anything at all because we dismiss them as valuable, viable human

beings, throwing them back into the deep dark swamps of illiteracy and discipline management classes.

So, for me, toads represent the chance to make a difference. And in a *perfect* world, that *could* be a moderately simple task. Let me clarify the meaning of perfect. Perfect does not mean initiating change without conflict, for discourse is a necessary part of thinking and learning. And, perfect does not mean that everyone understands why we must change and how to go about it - that would be impossible. My definition of perfection (for today at least) is simply "absence of paradox". Paradoxical contradictions come in all shapes and sizes in our educational system; the absurdity of paradoxes, however, is that they are overshadowed by truth. Perhaps George Orwell's (1945) infamous paradox from *Animal Farm* - "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others"- best illustrates the "truth" in our current educational system. For example, we have laws that are designed to "level the playing field"; we write district and campus plans to help all children achieve at the same level; we sell the story of equity to teachers, parents, and school board members. The truth is… some *are* more equal than others. This inequality is manifested in… you guessed it – more paradoxes. The paradox of tracking… holding students back to help them get ahead. The paradox of expectations … that *all* students demonstrate success within the confines of a system that that inherently values certain groups over others. The paradox of evaluation… weighing the perceptions of those who fight to maintain the status quo as more important than the progress of students of color and poverty. The paradox of decision making… professing freedom to make site-based decisions, but placing restrictions on hiring and

managing resources. And possibly the worst paradox in education - asking the toad to jump out of a bowl after it has learned that it cannot. So the question is… why do those paradoxes exist? This leads me to the second story about toads. According to Paul Coelho (2007):

> Various biological studies have shown that if a toad is placed in a container along with water from his own pond, he will remain there, utterly still, while the water is heated, even when the water reaches boiling point. The toad does not react to the gradual increase in temperature and dies when the water boils. Fat and happy. On the other hand, if a toad is thrown into that container when the water is already boiling, he will jump straight out again, scalded, but alive!

Sometimes we, as educators, behave like the boiled toads. We rarely notice changes. We ignore symptoms that point to systemic issues, or we attribute problems to others. We wait for those who challenge our "toadlike" behavior to move on, hoping that it's just a matter of time before they go away or become distracted with another new idea. As Coelho (2007) writes, "We are close to death, but still we sit, unchanging and apathetic, while the water around us gets hotter by the minute. We end up dying, fat and happy, without having noticed the changes going on around us." While this is certainly a viable explanation, I believe an alternative idea should be considered for the toad's behavior. That is, whether change occurs naturally or is thrust in our face, we often resist. Perhaps the toad stayed in the boiling water because he didn't know how what else to do. Or, perhaps he stayed because change meant risking and losing that which was familiar and

comfortable. Such is the reality of change. We fight to maintain power and control, or to advantage ourselves politically under the pretense of maintaining harmony.

Years ago, I attempted to work “on the cutting edge.” I searched for programs and schools outside of my district whose data defied the odds. I worked with teachers and other administrators to implement some of those practices. What I know now, however, is that those were just baby steps taken within an acceptable boundary. In other words, we were just tweaking the existing system, not transforming it. How do I know? Because there was minimal resistance… from teachers, from parents, and from district personnel. Compare this minimal resistance, a sign of incremental change, to the massive resistance that occurs with transformational change, or changing an existing culture. Changing culture requires a shifting of power. It forces individuals to reflect on and alter the way they think and behave. It causes individuals to, consciously or unconsciously, fight to maintain traditional values and rituals, whether they are working or not. For those of us who are practitioners and advocates for social justice, effecting change also means dealing with the ambiguity of paradox. Like the toad in boiling water, we have choices and decisions to make. Do we find solace in sparkling the blue ponds we’ve been raised in since we were tadpoles or as Coelho (2007) said, fat and happy? Or, do we venture out to other ponds whose murky waters test our courage and tenacity? This journey, then, ends with hope; hope that I am better able to use resistance and conflict as opportunities for growth on my campus; hope that I am able to objectively acknowledge and filter resistance to make good decisions; and finally, hope

that the cultural norm becomes such that lids for boiling pots of water are never an option for students of color.

Conclusion

Stakeholders, according to Freeman (1984), can be any group or individual who affects or is affected by achievements in an organization. Unquestionably, the stakeholders in this study included not only the participants, but all those at the campus, district, and society level who bore, and will bear in the future, the impact of an underachieving group of students. What are the responsibilities of those who manage organizations? According to Donaldson and Preston (1995), stakeholders have a moral obligation to identify and use shared values and principles in decision making and to optimize "profit managing stakeholder" relationships (p. 15). In other words, Donaldson and Preston (1995) consider ethics to be of utmost importance:

> One pillar of the normative stakeholder theory is that company decisions affect stakeholder outcomes and have to be ethical … decisions made without any consideration of their impact are usually thought to be unethical … stakeholder interests [have] an intrinsic worth not indirectly linked to the company interests. A firm should not ignore claims of stakeholders simply because honoring them does not serve its strategic interests. The firm should build principles or "rules of the game" on how the company should operate building contracts with stakeholders (p. 15).

As stakeholders in education, gaps in achievement between African American students and White students must be explored to the depth that all underlying ethics are exposed

and examined. The findings in this investigation of achievement disparities between African American and White students in this traditionally " White middle class" community, operating under White middle class values and norms, supports the work of others whose works lies in the social justice arena; namely, White power, deficit thinking, and racism served to elevate the dominant culture and maintain the status quo for students of color. Furthermore, as stakeholders in education, we must recognize that waiting for those who resist change to be ready for change inevitably leads to failure. Yes, sometimes, many times, waiting makes things worse. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr:

> It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually time is neutral. It can be used either destructively or constructively. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.

REFERENCES

Agliata, A. K., Tantleff-Dunn, S., & Renk, K. (2007). Interpretation of teasing during early adolescence. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 63*(1), 23-30.

Ainsworth-Darnell, J. & Downey, D. (1998). Assessing the oppositional culture explanation for racial/ethnic differences in school performance. *American Sociological Review, 63*(4), 536-553.

Akbar, N. I. (1981). Cultural expressions of the African American child. *Black Child Journal, 2*(2), 6-16.

Allison, B. & Rehm, M. (2007). Teaching strategies for diverse learners in FCS classrooms. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, 99*(2), 8-10.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115, 516 (Feb. 19, 2009).

Anderman, L. H. (2003). Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle school students' sense of school belonging. *Journal of Experimental Education, 72*(1), 5-22.

Anderman, L. H., & Freeman, T. M. (2004). Students' sense of belonging in school. In M. Maehr & P. Pintrich (Eds.), *Advances in motivation and achievement: Vol. 13. Motivating students, improving schools: The legacy of Carol Midgley* (pp. 27–63). Oxford: Elsevier.

Anderson, J. D. (2007). The historical context for understanding the test score gap. *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice, 1*(1), 1-21.

Anti-Defamation League. (2012). *No place for hate*. Retrieved from http://regions.adl.org/southwest/programs/no-place-for-hate.html.

Armstead, C., Lawler, K., Gorden, G., Cross, J., & Gibbons, J. (1989). Relationship of racial stressors to blood pressure responses and anger expression in Black college students. *Journal of Health Psychology, 8*(5), 541-556.

Aud, S., Hussar, W., Johnson, F., Kena, G., Roth, E., Manning, E., … & Zhang, J. (2012). *The condition of education 2012.* Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2012045

Balfanz, R., & MacIver, D. (2000). Transforming high-poverty urban middle schools into strong learning institutions: Lessons from the first five years of the talent development middle school. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 5*(1), 137–158.

Bamberg, M. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History, 7*, 335-342.

Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V.S. Ramachaudran (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of human behaviour* (Vol. 4, pp. 71-81). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.

Banks, J. A., & McGee Banks, C. A. (2005). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Kim, D., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1995). Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and students' attitudes, motives, and performance: A multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 627-658.

Bean, R. A, Bush, K. R., McKenry, P. C., & Wilson, S. M. (2003). The impact of parental support, behavioral control, and psychological control on the academic achievement and self-esteem of African American and European American adolescents. *Journal Of Adolescent Research, 18*(5), 523-541.

Berlin, I. (2009). *The making of African America: The four great migrations.* New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Berry, J., Phinney, J., Sam, D., & Vedder, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Immigrant youth in cultural transition : Acculturation, identity, and adaptation across national contexts*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Birrele, J. (1995). Learning how the game is played: An ethnically encapsulated beginning teacher's struggle to prepare black youth for a white world. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 11*(2), 137-147.

Blanton, H. & Jaccard, J. (2008). Representing versus generalizing: Two approaches to external validity and their implications for the study of prejudice. *Psychological Inquiry, 19*(2), 99-105.

Bondy, E. & Ross, D. (1998). Confronting myths about teaching Black children: A challenge for teacher educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 21*(4), 241-254.

Bong, M. (2008). Effects of parent-child relationships and classroom goal structures on motivation, help-seeking avoidance, and cheating. *Journal of Experimental Education, 76*(2), 191-217.

Borum, V. (2007). Why we can't wait! An afrocentric approach in working with African American families. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 15*(2/3), 117-135.

Bourdieu, P. (1971). Systems of education and systems of thought. In M. F. D. Young (Ed.), *Knowledge and Control* (pp. 189–207). London: Macmillan.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and Ideology in education* (pp. 487-511). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept. *Qualitative Research, 8*(1), 137-152.

Bowman, P. J., & Howard, C. (1985). Race-related socialization, motivation, and academic achievement: A study of black youths in three-generation families. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 24*(2), 134-141.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Boykin, A. W. (1983). The academic performance of Afro-American children. In U. R. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives*. Boston, MA: W. H. Freeman & Co.

Boykin, A. W. (1986). The triple quandary and the schooling of Afro-American children. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The school achievement of minority children* (pp. 57–92). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Boykin, A. W., & Toms, F. (1985). Black child socialization: A conceptual framework. In H. P. McAdoo & J. L. McAdoo (Eds.*), Black children: Social, educational, and parental environments* (pp. 33–51). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Braddock II, J.H., (1995). Tracking and school achievement: Implications for literacy development. In V.L.Gadsden & D.A.Wagner (Eds.), *Literacy among African American youth: Issues in learning, teaching and schooling (*pp. 153-176). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Branscombe, N., Schmitt, M., & Harvey, R. D. (1999). Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(1), 135-149.

Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self-representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 83-93.

Brickson, S. (2000). The impact of identity orientation on individual and organizational outcomes in demographically diverse settings. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 82-101.

Brondolo, E., Brady ver Halen, N., Pencille, M., Beatty, D., & Contrada, R. (2009). Coping with racism: A selective review of the literature and a theoretical and methodological critique. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 32*(1), 64-88.

Burris, C. C., & Garrity, D. T. (2008). *Detracking for excellence and equity*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Bustamante, N., Nelson, J., & Onwuegbuzie, A. (2009). Assessing schoolwide cultural competence: Implications for school leadership preparation . *Educational Administration Quarterly, 45*(5), 793–827.

Cain, D., & Combs-Orme, T. (2005). Family structure effects on parenting stress and practices in the African American family. *Journal of sociology and social welfare, 32*(2), 19-40.

Carter, R. T. (August, 2004). Deconstructing racial discrimination: The intersection of psychology and the law. Symposium conducted at the American Psychological Association. Honolulu, Hawaii.

Carter, R. T. (2007). Racism and psychological and emotional injury: Recognizing and assessing race-based traumatic stress. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(1), 13-105.

Cassidy, W. & Bates, A. (2005). Drop outs and push outs: Finding hope at a school that actualizes the ethic of care. *American Journal of Education, 112*(1), 66-102.

Chambers, T.V. (2009). The "receivement gap": School tracking policies and the fallacy of the "achievement gap". *The Journal of Negro Education, 78*(4), 417-431.

Charmaz, K. (2008). Advancing social justice research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 203-242). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 651-679). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, Inc.

Chavez, A. F., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1999). Racial and ethnic identity and development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 84(4), 39-47.

Chen, C. (2011). Numbers and types of public elementary and secondary schools from the common core of data: School year 2009–10. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Christiansen, P., Rothgerber, H., Wood, W., & Matz, D. (2004). Social norms and identity relevance: A motivational approach to normative behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 30*(10), 1295-1309.

Chubbuck, S. (2004). Whiteness enacted, whiteness disrupted. *American Educational Research Journal, 41*(2), 301–333.

Clark, K. B., & Clark, M. K. (1940). The development of consciousness of self and the emergence of racial identification in Negro preschool children. *Journal of Social Psychology,10*, 591-599.

Claus, R., & Charmaine, J. (October, 1985). An assessment of the Saginaw Successful Schools project: A look at the data. Joint meeting of the Evaluation Research Society and the Evaluation Society. Toronto, Canada.

Coard, S.I., Wallace, S.A., Stevenson, Jr., H.C., & Brotman, L.M. (2004). Towards culturally relevant preventive interventions: The consideration of racial socialization in parent training with African American families. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 13*(3), 277-293.

Coelho, P. (2007). The toad and the hot water. Retrieved from http://paulocoelhoblog.com/2007/12/07/the-toad-and-the-hot-water/

Collins, J. (1988). Language and class in minority education. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 19*(4), 299–326.

Comer, J. P. (2002). My view. In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American students A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 5-11). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas LTD.

Cooper, P.M. (2003). Effective white teachers of black children: Teaching within a community. *Journal of Teacher Education, 54*(5), 413-427.

Corbett, C., Hill, C., & St. Rose, A. (2008). Where the girls are: The facts about gender equity in education. Retrieved from http://www.aauw.org/learn/research/WhereGirlsAre.cfm

Cox, T. (1993). *Cultural diversity in organizations: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Kohler.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice, 39*(3), 124-131.

Crocker, J., Major, B., & Steele, C. (1998). Social stigma. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske, et al. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology,* (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 504-553). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Cross, W. E. (1971). The negro-to-black conversion experience. *Black World, 20*(9), 13-27.

Cross, W. E. (1987). Black identity: Rediscovering the distinction between personal identity and reference group orientation. In M. Spencer, G. Brookins & W. Allen (Eds.). *Beginnings: The social and affective development of black children* (pp. 155-171). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cross, C. & Roza, M. (2007). *How the federal government shapes and distorts the financing of K-12 schools.* School Finance Redesign Project Working Paper 1, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington.

Czopp, A. & Margo, M. (2006). Thinking well of African Americans: Measuring complimentary stereotypes and negative prejudice. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 28*(3), 233-250.

Dalton, S. (1998). Pedagogy matters: Standards for effective teaching practice research reports. Retrieved from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence at http://gse.berkeley.edu/research/credearchive/pdf/evidence_g1.pdf

Dantley, M. & Tillman, L. (2006). Social justice and moral transformative leadership. In C. Marshall & M. Oliva (Eds.). *Leadership for social justice: Making revolutions in education* (pp. 19-34). Boston: Pearson Publishing.

Darboe, F. & Agorshah, E. (2006-2008). Africans and African Americans: Conflicts, stereotypes and grudges. Retreived from http://www.mcnairprogram.pdx.edu

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Race, inequality and educational accountability: The irony of 'No Child Left Behind'. *Race Ethnicity and Education,10*(3), 245–260.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* New York, NY: Plenum Publishing Co.

Decker, E. (2009). Hegemony of the west and the librarian's role in the struggle against HIV/AIDS in Africa. *Collaborative Librarianship,1*(2), 48-59.

Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review, 58*(3), 280-298.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: New Press.

Delpit, L. (2002). The skin that we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom. New York, NY: The New Press.

Delpit, L. (2012). Multiplication is for White people: Raising expectations for other people's children. New York, NY: The New Press.

Dempsey,V., & Noblit, C. (1993). The demise of caring in an African American community: One consequence of school desegregation. *Urban Review, 5*(1), 47-61.

Denbo, S. (2002a). Institutional practices that support African American student achievement. In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 55-70). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd.

Denbo, S. (2002b). Why can't we close the achievement gap? In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 13-18). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd.

Denbo, S., & Beaulieu, L. (Eds.), (2002). *Improving schools for African American students: A reader for educational leaders*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd.

Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, Inc.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2008). Strategies of qualitative inquiry (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, Inc.

Desimone, L. (1999). Linking parent involvement with student achievement: Do race and income matter? *The Journal of Educational Research, 93*(1), 11-30.

Deutsch, M. & Gerard, H B. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment. *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, 51*(3), 629-36.

Devine, P. (2001) Implicit prejudice and stereotyping: How automatic are they? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81*(5), 757-759.

Devine, P. G., & Baker, S. M. (1991). Measurement of racial stereotype subtyping. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17*(1), 44–50.

Dodd, S. L., & Irving, M. A. (2006). Incorporation of multiculturalism into art education. In J. Landsman & C. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism* (pp. 234-249). Sterling, VA: Styling Publishing, LLC.

Donaldson, T. & Preston, L. (1995). The stakeholder theory of the modern corporation: Concepts, evidence and implications. *Academy of Management Review, 20*(1), 65-91.

Dornbusch, S. M., Ritter, P., & Steinberg, L. (1991). Community influences on the relation of family statuses to adolescent school performance: Differences between African Americans and non-Hispanic whites. *American Journal of Education, 99*(4), 543-567.

Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (2005). Color blind or just plain blind. *The Nonprofit Quarterly, 12,* 40-46.

Druian, G., & Butler, J. A. (1987). *Effective schooling practices and at-risk youth: What the research shows.* Retrieved from the The School Improvement Program of the

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory website at http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/825

D'Souza, D. (2002). *What's so great about America.* Washington, DC: Regnery.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1961). *The souls of Black folk*. New York, NY: Fawcett Publications.

Duster, T. (2008). Introduction to unconscious racism debate. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 71*(1), 6-11.

Edwards, H. (1984). The Black ‘dumb jock’: An American sports tragedy. *College Board Review,131*, 8-13.

Ely, R. J., Meyerson, D. A., & Davidson, M. N. (2006). Rethinking political correctness. *Harvard Business Review, 84*(9), 78-87.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan,76* (9), 701-12.

Evans, A. E. (2007). Changing faces: Suburban school response to demographic change. *Education and Urban Society, 39*(3), 315-348.

Evans, L., & Feagin, J. (2012). Middle-class African American pilots: The continuing significance of racism. *American Behavioral Scientist, 56*(5), 650–665.

Ezzel, M.B. (2009). ‘Barbie dolls’ on the pitch: Identity work, defensive othering, and inequality in women’s rugby. *Social Problems, 56*(1), 111-131.

Fan, X. (2001). Parental involvement and students’ academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. *Journal of Experimental Education, 70*(1), 27–61.

Fan, W., Williams, C., & Wolters, C. (2012). Parental involvement in predicting school motivation: Similar and differential effects across ethnic groups. *The Journal of Educational Research, 105*(1), 21-35.

Farquhar, S. A., Michael, Y. L., & Wiggins, N. (2005). Building on leadership and social capital to create change in 2 urban communities. *American Journal of Public Health, 95*(4), 596-601.

Ferguson, R. F. (2002). *What doesn't meet the eye: Understanding and addressing racial disparities in high-achieving suburban schools.* Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Lab.

Figlio, D. N. & Page, M. E. (2002). School choice and the distributional effects of ability tracking: Does separation increase equality? *Journal of Urban Economics, 51*(3), 497-514.

Fine, M. (1997). Witnessing whiteness. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. C. Powell, L. M. Wong (Eds.), *Off-white: Readings on race, power, and society* (pp. 57–65). New York, NY: Routledge.

Fisher, C. B., Wallace, S. A., & Fenton, R. E. (2000). Discrimination distress during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 29*(6), 679-695.

Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of 'acting white'. *The Urban Review, 18*(3), 176-206.

Frankel, R. M., & Devers, K. J. (2000). Study design in qualitative research: Developing questions and assessing resource needs. *Education for Health, 13*(2), 251-261.

Frankenburg, W. K, Dick, N. P, & Carland, J. (1975). Development of preschool-aged children of different social and ethnic groups: Implications for developmental screening. *Journal of Pediatrics, 87*(1), 125-32.

Frankenburg, W.K. & Dodds, J.B. (1967). The Denver developmental screening test. *Journal of Pediatrics, 71*(2), 181-191.

Freeman, R.E. (2004). A stakeholder theory of modern corporations. *Ethical Theory and Business, 7th ed.*

Frey, W. (2011). America's diverse future: Initial glimpses of the U.S. child population from the 2010 census. Brookings Institution Report: Washington, DC.

Fullen, M. (2005). Turnaround leadership. *Educational Forum , 69*(2), 174-181.

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagment and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*(1), 148-162.

Gaertner, S. & Dovidio, J. (2005). Understanding and addressing contemporary racism: From aversive racism to the common ingroup identity model. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(3), 615-639.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Gallagher, C. (2003). Color-blind privilege: The social and political functions of erasing the color line in post race America. *Race, Gender & Class, 10*(4), 22-37.

Garcia, S. B., & Guerra, P. L. (2004). Deconstructing deficit thinking: Working with educators to create more equitable learning environments. *Education and Urban Society, 32*(2), 150-168.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gay, G., & Howard, T. (2000). Multicultural teacher education for the 21st century. *The Teacher Educator, 36*(1), 1-16.

Geber, M. & Dean, R. F. A. (1957). Gesell tests on African children. *Pediatrics*, *20*(6), 1055-1065.

Gecas, V., & Schwalbe, M. (1983). Beyond the looking-glass self: Social structure and efficacy-based self-esteem. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 46*(2), 77-88.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. (2000). Collective teacher efficacy: Its meaning, measure, and impact on student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 37*(2), 479-507.

Gooden, A.M. (October, 2009). *To protect and empower: Unionism in higher education.* Proceedings of APSCUF/PSE Conference on Labor in Higher Education, Harrisburg, PA.

Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 13*(1), 21-43.

Goodlad, J. (1979). *What schools are for*. Los Angeles, CA: Phi Delta Kappan.

Gordon, J. (2005). White on white: Researcher reflexivity and the logics of privilege in white schools in undertaking reform. *The Urban Review, 37*(4), 279-302.

Gosa, T. L., & Alexander, K. L. (2007). Family (dis)advantage and the educational prospects of better off African American youth: How race still matters. *Teachers College Record, 109*(2), 285-321.

Graham, H. (2004). Social determinants and their unequal distribution: Clarifying policy understandings. *Milbank Quarterly, 82*(1), 101–124.

Grant, P. (2005). Coming to America with eyes wide shut. In Obiakor, F. & and Grant, P. (Eds.), *Foreign-born African Americans: Silenced voices in the discourse of race* (pp. 15-28), New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Grant, R. A. & Asimeng-Boahene, L. (2006). Culturally responsive pedagogy in citizenship education: Using African proverbs as tools for teaching in urban schools. *Multicultural Perspectives, 8*(4), 17-24.

Guba, E., & Lincoln,Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of qualitative reseach* (pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Guild, P. B. (2002). An educational leader's guide to culture and learning style. In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 103-114), Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Gurin, P., Dey, E. L., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review, 72*(3), 330-366.

Haberman, M. (1995). Selecting star teachers for children and youth in urban poverty. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(10), 777-781.

Halpern, R. (1993). Poverty and infant development. In Zeanah, C.H. (Ed.), Handbook of infant mental health (pp. 73-86), New York, NY: Guilford.

Hamilton, D. L., Sherman, S. J., & Ruvolo, C. M. (1990). Stereotype-based expectancies: Effects on information processing and social behavior. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*(2), 35-60.

Harrell, S. P. (2000). A multidimensional conceptualization of racism related stress: Implications for the well-being of people of color. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 70*(1), 42-57.

Heller, J. (2010). Emerging themes on aspects of social class and the discourse of White privilege. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 31*(1), 111-120.

Helms, J. E. (1984). Toward a theoretical explanation of the effects of race on counseling: A black and white model. *Counseling Psychologist, 12*(4), 153-165.

Helms, J. E. (1990). *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Greenwood.

Helms, J. E. (1993). I also said, “white racial identity influences white researchers.” *Counseling Psychologist, 21*(2), 240-243.

Helms, J. E. (1994). How multiculturalism obscures racial factors in the therapy process. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 41*(2), 162-165.

Helms, J. (1995). An update of Helms's white and people of color racial identity models. In J. Ponterotto, J. Casas, L. Suzuki, & C. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc.

Henry, P. J., & Sears, D. O. (2002). The symbolic racism 2000 scale. *Political Psychology, 23*(2), 253–283.

Herzberg, F. (1966). *Work and the nature of man. Cleveland*, OH. Holland.

Hilliard A. (1989). Teachers and cultural styles in a pluralistic society. *NEA Today, 7*(6), 65-69.

Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (2001). Identity and agency in cultural worlds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hopson, R. (2003). The problem of the language line: Cultural and social reproduction of hegemonic linguistic structures for learners of African descent. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 6*(3), 227-245.

Horowitz, I. A., & Bordens, K. S. (1995). *Social psychology*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co.

Horton, J. O. & Horton, L. E.(Eds.). (2006). *Slavery and public history: The tough stuff of American memory*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Horvat, E., Weininger, E., & Lareau, A. (2003). From social ties to social capital: Class differences in the relations between schools and parent networks. *American Educational Research Journal, 40*(2), 319-351.

House, E. R. (1999). Race and policy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 7*(16), 1-15.

Hoy, A.W. (2004). What do teachers need to know about self-efficacy? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Eduational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Hughes, D. & Chen, L. (1997). When and what parents tell children about race: An examination of race-related socialization among African American families. *Applied Developrnental Science, (1)*4. 200-211.

Hughes D., Rodriguez J., Smith E. P., Johnson D. J., Stevenson H. C., & Spicer P. (2006). Parents' ethnic–racial socialization practices: A review of research and directions for future study. *Developmental Psychology, 42*(5), 747–770.

Huseyin, H. (2009). Questionnaires and interviews in educational researches. *Journal of. Graduate School of Social Sciences-Ataturk University, 13*(1), 201-216.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(3), 499–534.

Ireland, R.D. & Hitt, M.A. (1992). Mission statements: Importance, challenge, and recommendations for development. *Business Horizons, 35*, 34–42.

Irvine, J.J. (1991). *Black students and school failure: Policies, practices, and prescriptions*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Irvine, J.J. (2003). Educating teachers for diversity: *Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Irvine, J.J., & Fraser, J.W. (1998). Warm demanders. *Education Week, 17*(56), 42.

Jackson, J. V., Cothran, M. E. (2003). Black versus Black: The relationships among African, African American, and African Caribbean persons. *Journal of Black Studies, 33*, 576-604.

Jaret, C., Williams Reid, L., & Adelman, R. M. (2003). Black-White income inequality and metropolitan socioeconomic structure. *Journal of Urban Affairs, 25*(3), 305-334.

Jarrett, R. L. (1995). Growing up poor: The family experiences of socially mobile youth in low-income African American neighborhoods. *Journal of Adolescent Research,10*(1), 111–135.

Jencks, C. & Phillips, M. (1998). The black-white test score gap: An introduction. In C. Jencks and M. Phillips (Eds.) *The black-white test score gap* (pp. 1-54). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Johnson, M. K, Crosnoe, R., & Elder, G. H. (2001). Students' attachment and academic engagement: The role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education, 74*(4), 318–40.

Johnson, S. (1994). A response to Professor Choper: Laying down another ladder. *Cornell Law Review, 79,* 522-526. Retrieved from http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/research/cornell-law-review/upload/Johnson-3.pdf

Johnson, A. G. (2008). Privilege as paradox. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (117-121). New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

Jones, C. (2000) Levels of racism: A theoretic framework and a gardener's tale. *American Journal of Public Health, 90*(8), 1212-1215.

Jones, V. (2008). What, then, is the African American? African and Afro-Caribbean identities in black America. *Journal of American Ethnic History, 28*(1), 77-103.

Juettner, V. (2003). Culturally responsive schools: Leadership, language, and literacy development. *Talking Points, 14*(2), 11-16.

Kalmijn, M. & Kraaykamp, G. (1996). Race, cultural capital, and schooling: An analysis of trends in the United States. *Sociology of Education, 69*(1), 22–34.

Kane, M. (1971). An assessment of "black is best." *Sports Illustrated*, 34, 72-83.

Katz, I. & Hass, R. (1988). Racial ambivalence and American value conflict: Correlational and priming studies of dual cognitive structures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 55*(6), 893-905.

Katz, J. H. (1989). The challenge of diversity. In C. Woolbright (Ed.), *College unions at work, monograph No. 11* (pp.1–17). Bloomington, IN: Association of College Unions-International.

Kelman, H.C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization: Three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2*(1), 51–60.

Kerpelman, J., Eryigit, S., & Stephens, C. (2008). African American adolescents' future education orientation: Associations with self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and perceived parental support. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*(8), 997–1008.

Kessler, R. C., Mickelson, K. D., & Williams, D. R. (1999). The prevalence, distribution and mental health correlates of perceived discrimination in the United States. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 40*(3), 208–230.

King, J. (1991). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *The Journal of Negro Education, 60*(2), 133-146.

Kinloch, V. (2010). To not be a traitor of Black English: Youth perceptions of language rights in an urban context. *Teachers College Record*, *112*(1), 103–141.

Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., & Lieberman, C. (1995). The collective construction of self-esteem: Implications for culture, self, and emotion. In J. Russell, J. Wellenkamp, T. Manstead, & J. M. F. Dols (Eds.), *Everyday conceptions of emotion.* Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Press.

Klingner, J. K., Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E., Harry, B., Zion, S., Tate, W., … & Riley, D. (2005). Addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education through culturally responsive educational systems. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13*(38), 1-38.

Klonoff, E. A., & Landrine, H. (1999). Cross validation of the Schedule of Racist Events. *Journal of Black Psychology, 25(2)*, 231-254.

Klonoff, E.A., Landrine, H., & Ullman, J.B. (1999). Racial discrimination and psychiatric symptoms among Blacks. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 5*(4), 329-339.

Klotz, M. B. (2006). Culturally competent schools: Guidelines for secondary school principals. Retrieved from www.naspcenter.org/periodicals.

Kohn, M. L. (1963). Social class and parent-child relationships: An interpretation. *American Journal of Sociology, 68*(4), 471–480.

Kohn M. L. (1969). *Class and conformity: A study in values.* Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Kolbe, T. & Rice, J. K. (2012). And they're off: Tracking "Race to the Top" investments from the starting gate. *Educational Policy, 26*(1), 185-209.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Harper Perrenial.

Kunfuju, J. (2002). *Black students. Middle class teachers.* Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Kunfuju, J. (2006). *An African centered response to Ruby Payne's poverty theory*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.

Lacy, K. (2004). Black spaces, black places: Strategic assimilation and identity construction in middle-class suburbia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 27*(6), 908-930.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teacher for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. In A. Iran-Nejad & P. David Pearson (Eds.), *Review of research in education, 24, (pp.211-247). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.*

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-13.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Henry, A. (1990). Blurring the borders: Voices of African liberatory pedagogy in the United States and Canada. *Journal of Education, 172*(2), 72-88.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, B. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-67.

Landry, B. & Marsh, K. (2011). The evolution of the new black middle class. *Annual Review of Sociology, 37,* 373-394.

Landsman, J., & Lewis, C. (2006). *White teachers/diverse classrooms*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Lemoine, N. (2010). *Educating African American students.* Paper presented at Keller ISD General Leadership Training, Houston, TX.

Leventhal, T., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). The neighborhoods they live in: The effects of neighborhood residence on child and adolescent outcomes. *Psychological Bulletin, 126*(2), 309-337.

Lewis, A. E. (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all-white school. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 781-811.

Lewis, A., Chesler, M., & Forman, T. (2000). The impact of “colorblind" ideologies on students of color: Intergroup relations at a predominantly white university. *The Journal of Negro Education, 69*(1/2), 74-91.

Lewis, J. (2009). Redefining qualitative methods: Believability in the fifth moment. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(2), 1-14.

Lewis, O. (1998). The culture of poverty. *Society, 35*(2), 7-9.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Cannella, G. S. (2004). Qualitative research, power, and the radical right. *Qualitative Inquiry, 10*(2), 175-201.

Lipman, P. (1998). *Race, class, and power in school restructuring*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey. *American Psychologist, 57*(9), 705-717.

Logue, C. (1981). Transcending coercion: The communicative strategies of Black slaves on antebellum plantations. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 67*(1), 31-46.

Lomotey, K. & Aboh, F. (2009). Historically black colleges and universities: Catalysts to liberation in African Americans in higher education. In Tillman, L. (Ed.) *The*

SAGE handbook of African American education, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Lopez, G. (2001). The value of hard work: Lessons on parent involvement from an (im)migrant household. *Harvard Educational Review, 71*(3), 416-437.

Lynch, M., & Cicchette, D. (1997). Children's relationships with adults and peers: An examination of elementary and junior high school students. *Journal of School Psychology, 35*(1), 81-99.

Madsen, J., & Mabokela, R. (2005). *Culturally relevant schools: Creating positive workplace relationships and preventing intergroup differences*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group.

Magno, C., & Schiff, M. (2010). Culturally responsive leadership: Best practice in integrating immigrant students. *Intercultural Education, 21*(1), 87-91.

Marks, H.M. (2000). Student engagement in instructional activity: Patterns in the elementary, middle, and high school years. *American Education Research Journal, 37*(1), 153-184.

Markus, H. R., Steele, C. M., & Steele, D. M. (2000). Colorblindness as a barrier to inclusion: Assimilation and nonimmigrant minorities. *Daedalus, 129*(4), 233-257.

Martin, L. (2010). Strategic assimilation or creation of symbolic blackness: Middle-class blacks in suburban contexts. *Journal of African American Studies, 14*(2), 234-246.

Martin, P. & Midgley, E. (2003). Immigration: shaping and reshaping America. *Population Bulletin, 58*(2), 1-44.

Marzano, R. (2005). *School leadership that works*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Matthew, E. (2011) Effort optimism in the classroom: Attitudes of Black and White students on education, social structure, and causes of life opportunities. *Sociology of Education, 84*(3), 225–245.

Maxwell, J. A. (2004). Reemergent scientism, postmodernism, and dialogue across differences. *Qualitative Inquiry, 10*(1), 35-41.

McCabe, K.M., & Barnett, D. (2000). First comes work, then comes marriage: Future orientation toward career and relationships among inner city early adolescents. *Family Relations, 49*, 63-70.

McConahay, J. B. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the modern racism scale. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 91–125). Salt Lake City, UT: Academic Press.

McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. Reprinted in *Beyond heroes and holidays: A practical guide to K-12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development.* Washington DC: Network of Educators on the Americas.

McIntosh, P. (1992). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. In M. Andersen & P. H. Collins (Eds.), *White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through the work in women's studies*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

McIntyre, A. (1997). *Making meaning of whiteness: Exploring racial identities with white teachers.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

McKenzie, K. & Scheurich, J. J. (2004). Equity traps: a construct for departments of educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(5), 601–632.

McLeod, K., & Tanner, T. (2007). Transitioning diverse classrooms toward educational equity: A new model of teacher dependence and independence. *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice, 1*(1), 99-110.

Meacham, J., & C. Barrett. 2003. Commitment to diversity in institutional mission statements. *Diversity Web, 7*(1-2), 1-6. 1–6. Retrieved from http://www.diversityweb.org/Digest/vol7no1-2/meacham-barrett.cfm.

Mellor, D. (2004). Responses to racism: A taxonomy of coping styles used by aboriginal Australians. *Australian Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 74*(1), 56-71.

Merton, R K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Midgley, C., & Edelin, K. C. (1998). Middle school reform and early adolescent well-being: The good news and the bad. *Educational Psychologist, 33*(4), 195-206.

Miller, J. B. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Milner, R. (2009). Preparing teachers of African American students in urban schools. In L. C. Tillman (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of African American education* (pp. 123-140). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pulications, Inc.

Monkman, K., Ronald, M., & Theramene, F. D. (2005). Social and cultural capital in an urban Latino school community. *Urban Education, 40*(1), 4-33.

Morphew, C. C. & Hartley, M. (2006). Mission statements: A thematic analysis of rhetoric across international type. *Journal of Higher Education, 77,* 456-471.

Morris, V. G., & Morris, C. L. (2002). Caring - the missing C in teacher education: Lessons learned from a segregated African American school. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(2), 120-122.

Morrison, T. (1992) Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination. New York, NY: Vintage.

Moule, J. (2009). Understanding unconscious bias and unintentional racism. *Phi Delta Kappan, 90*(5), 320-326.

Moynihan, D. P. (1965). *The negro family: The case for national action*. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Labor website at http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm.

Murnane, R. (2007). Improving the education of children living in poverty. *The Future of Children, 17*(2), 161-182.

Murnane, R., & Steele, J. (2007). What is the problem? The challenge of providing effective teachers for all children. *The Future of Children, 17*(1), 15-42.

Murrell, P. C. (1994). In search of responsive teaching for African American males: An investigation of students'. *Journal of Negro Education, 63*(4), 556.

Murrell, P. C. (2009). Identity, agency, and culture: Black achievement and educational attainment. In L. C. Tillman (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of African American Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Nadler, J. T., & Clark, M. H. (2011). Stereotype threat: A meta-analysis comparing African Americans to Hispanic Americans. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 41*(4), 872-890.

Nash, R. (1990). Bourdieu on education and social and cultural reproduction. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 11*(4), 431-447.

National Center for Children in Poverty. (2010). *Child poverty*. Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html

National Education Association (2005). C.A.R.E: Strategies for closing the achievement gaps (4th ed.). Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/care-guide

National Middle School Association. (1995). *This we believe: Developmentally responsive middle level schools*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

Natriello, G., & McDill, E. L. (1986). Performance standards, student effort on homework, and academic achievement. *Sociology of Educatio*n, *59*(1), 18-31.

Nieto, S. (2004). *Critical multicultural education and students' perspectives*. In D. Gillborn & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in multicultural education, (pp. 179-200). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425.

Noguera, P. A. (2008). The trouble with Black boys: And other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nurmi, J. (1991). How do adolescents see their future? A review of the development of future orientation and planning. *Developmental Review, 11*, 1-59.

Nurmi, J. (2005). Thinking about and acting upon the future. In A. Strathman & J. Joireman (Eds.), *Understanding behavior in the context of time* (pp. 31-57). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

O'Connor, C., Lewis, A., & Mueller, J. (2007). Researching Black educational experiences and outcomes: Theoretical and methodological considerations. *Educational Researcher, 36*(9), 541-552.

Ogbu, J. (1978). Minority education and caste: the American system in cross-cultural perspective. New York, NY: Academic Press.

Ogbu, J. (1982). Cultural discontinuities and schooling. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 13*(4), 290–307.

Ogbu, J. (2003). *Black students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ogbu, J. U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of "acting White" in Black history, community, and education. *Urban Review, 36*(1), 1-35.

O'Hearn, C.C. (1998). Half and half: Writers on growing up biracial and bicultural. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

O'Neill, T. (2010). Fostering spaces of student ownership in middle school science. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 43*(1), 6-20.

Ortman, P. E., & Thandiwe, N. (2002). Making schools work for African American students. In B. J. Love (Ed.), *Brown plus 50 counter-storytelling: A critical race theory analysis of the "majoritarian achievement gap". Equity & Excellence,* (pp. 227–246). Amherst, MA: Taylor and Francis, Inc.

Orwell, G. (1945). *Animal farm*. London, England: Secker & Warburg.

Osterman, K. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70* (3), 323-367.

Ott, S. (1989). *The organizational culture perspective*. Chicago: The Dorsey Press.

Oyserman, D. and Harrison, K. (1998). Implications of ethnic identity: African American identity and possible selves. In *Prejudice: The target's perspective* (pp. 281–300). Swim, J. K. and Stangor, C. (Eds). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Paige, R., & Witty, E. (2010). *The Black-White achievement gap: Why closing it is the greatest civil rights issue of our time*. New York, NY: Amacon.

Parham, T. (1989). Cycles of psychological nigrescence. *The Counseling Psychologist, 17*(2), 187–226.

Patten, M. (2005). Proposing empirical research: A guide to the fundamentals (3rd ed.). Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.

Payne, R. (2005). *Framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.

Perie, M. & Moran, R.. (2005). *Trends in academic progress: Three decades of student performance in reading and mathematics*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/2005/2005464.asp

Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A.(2003). Young, gifted and Black; Promoting high achievement among African American students. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Phinney, J. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of the research. *Psychological Bulletin, 108*, 499–514.

Phinney, J. & Chavira,V. (1995). Parental ethnic socialization and adolescent coping with problems related to ethnicity. *Journal of Research Adolescence, 5*(1), 31-53.

Ponterotto, J. G., Utsey, S. O., & Pedersen, P. B. (2006). *Preventing prejudice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Porter, A. (2008). Rethinking the achievement gap. Retrieved 6-7-12 from the University of Pennsylvania website at http://www.gse.upenn.edu/node/269

Powell-Smith, K., Shinn, M., Stoner, G., & Good, R. (2000). Parent tutoring in reading using literature and curriculum materials: Impact on student reading achievement. *School Psychology Review, 29*(1), 5-27.

Princiotta, D., Denton Flanagan, K., & Germino Hausken, E. (2006). *Fifth grade: Findings from the fifth-grade follow-up of the early childhood longitudinal study, kindergarten class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K)*. Retrieved from National Center of Education Statistics at http://0-nces.ed.gov.opac.acc.msmc.edu/pubs2006/2006038.pdf

Rains, F. (1998). Is the benign really harmless? In J. L. Kincheloe, S. R. Steinberg, N. M. Rodriguez & M. N. Chennaut (Eds.), *White reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*. New York, NY: Palgrave.

Reddick, T. (1998, May 15). Africans vs. African Americans: A shared complexion does not guarantee racial solidarity. *Tampa Tribune.* Retrieived from

http://africanbeats.tumblr.com/post/30004381663/african-vs-african-american-a-shared-complexion-does

Renchler, R. (1991). Leadership with a vision: How principals develop and implement their visions for school success. *Oregon School Study Council Bulletin, 34*(5).

Riehl, C.J. (2000). The principal's role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students. A review of normative, empirical, and critical literature on the practice of educational administration. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(1), 55-81.

Risko, V., & Walker-Dalhouse, D. (2007). Tapping students' cultural funds of knowledge to address the achievement gap. *The Reading Teacher, 61*(1), 98-100.

Robins, K.N., Lindsey, R.B., Lindsey, D.B., & Terrell, R.D. (2006). *Culturally proficient instruction: A guide for people who teach (2nd Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Rolfe G. (2006). Validity, trustworthiness and rigor: Quality and the idea of qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 53*(3), 304–310.

Roscigno, V. & Ainsworth-Darnell, J. (1999). Race, cultural capital, and educational resources: Persistent inequalities and achievement returns. *Sociology of Education, 72*(3), 158-178.

Rosier, K. & Corsaro, W. (1993). Competent parents, complex lives: Managing parenthood in poverty. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 22*, 171-204.

Rothenberg, P. S. (2005). *White privilege*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

Rothstein, R. & Wilder, T. (2005). *The many dimensions of racial inequality*. New York, NY: Columbia University.

Roza, M., Guin, K., & Davis, T. (2007). *What is the sum of the parts? How federal, state, and district funding streams confound efforts to address different student types.* Seattle, WA: Washington University.

Rudmin, F. W. (2003). Review of acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 34*, 751-753.

Rutter, M., & Maughan, B. (2002). School effectiveness findings 1979-2002. *Journal of School Psychology, 40,* 451-475.

Ryan, W. (1971). Blaming the victim. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Rychly, L. & Graves, E. (2012). Teacher characteristics for culturally responsive pedagogy. *Multicultural Perspectives, 14*:1, 44-49.

Sailes, G. A. (1996). An investigation of campus stereotypes: The myth of Black athletic superiority and the dumb jock stereotype. In R. E. Lapchick (Ed.) *Sport in society: Equal opportunity or business as usual?* (pp. 193-202). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Sanders, M. (1997). Overcoming obstacles: Academic achievement as a response to racism and discrimination. *Journal of Negro Education, 66*, 83-93.

Saunders, J., Davis, L., Williams, T., and Williams, J. (2004). Gender differences in self-perceptions and academic outcomes: A study of African American high school students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33*, (1), 81–90.

Schein, E. (1968). Organizational socialization and the profession of management. *Industrial Management Review, 9*, 1-15.

Scheurich, J. J. (1993). Toward a white discourse on white racism. *Educational Researcher, 22(*8), 5-10.

Scheurich, J. J. (2009). *Record of study as a problem of practice*. Department of Educational Administration and Human Resources. Texas A&M University.

Scheurich, J. J., Gonzalez, M. L., Dantley, M. E., Huggins, K. S., Ozel, S. (2009, Apr.) *Systemic institutional racism in U.S. schools and society*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Schwalbe, M., Godwin, S., Holden, D., Schrock, D., Thompson, S., & Wolkomir, M. (2000). Generic processes in the reproduction of inequality: An interactionist analysis. *Social Forces, 79*, 419-452.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing.

Schweitzer, J.H., Kim, J.W., & Mackin, J.R. (1999). The impact of the built environment on crime and fear of crime. *Journal of Urban Technology, 6*, 59-73.

Sears, D.O. (1988). Symbolic racism. In P. Katz & D. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 53–84). New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Seyfried, S. F. (1998). Academic achievement of African American preadolescents: The influence of teacher perceptions. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 26*(3), 381.

Shaffer, S., Ortman, P. E., & Denbo, S. (2002). The effects of racism, socioeconomic class, and gender on the academic achievement of African American students. In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American*

students: A reader for educational leaders, (pp. 19-29), Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas LTD.

Sharkey, P. (2009). *Neighborhoods and the Black-White mobility gap*. Retrieved from Economic Mobility Project : An Initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts at http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Economic_Mobility/PEW_SHARKEY_v12.pdf

Sirvani, H. (2007). The effect of teacher communication with parents on students' mathematics achievement. *American Secondary Education, 36*(1), 31-46.

Stanfield, J. H. (1991). Racism in America and in other race-centered nation-states: Synchronic considerations. *International Joumal of Comparative Sociology, 32*, 243-260.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youth. *Harvard Educational Review, 67*(1), 1-40.

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist, 52*, 613–629.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 797–811.

Simms, M. (2011). *Persistent childhood poverty's double whammy*. Retrieved from The Urban Institute at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412427-Todays-Children-Tomorrows-America.pdf.

Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J. J. (2001). Displacing deficit thinking in school leadership. *Education and Urban Society, 33*(3), 235-259.

Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. J., Garcia, J., & Nolly, G. (2006). Equity audits: A practical leadership tool for developing equitable and excellent schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40,* 135-163.

Slaughter, D. T. (1987). The home environment and academic achievement of Black American children and youth: An overview. *Journal of Negro Education, 56*, 3-20.

Sleeter, C. (1994). White racism. *Multicultural Education, 1,* 5-8.

Sleeter, C. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Urban Education, 47*(3), 562-584.

Smith, W. A. (2009). Campuswide climate: Implications for African American students. In L. C. Tillman (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of African American education* (pp. 297-309). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Sobel, J. (2002). Can we trust social capital. *Journal of Economic Literature, 40*(1), 139-154.

Stake, R. E. (2008). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed., pp. 119-149). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stillwell, R. (2009*). Public school graduates and dropouts from the common core of data: School year 2006–07.* Retrieved 7-14-11 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010313.

Sue, D.W., Lin, A.I., Torino, G.C., Capodilupo, C.M., & Rivera, D.P. (2009). Racial microaggressions and difficult dialogues on race in the classroom. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 15*(2), 183-190.

Tatum, B. (1987). *Assimilation blues: Black families in a white community*. Hartford, CT: Greenwood Press.

Tatum, B. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review 62,* 1 -24.

Tatum, B. (1997). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Taylor, J., & Grundy, C. (1996). Measuring Black internalization of White stereotypes about African Americans: The nationalization scale. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Handbook of tests and measurements of Black populations* (pp. 217–226). Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry.

Teddlie, C., & Reynolds, D. (2000). *International handbook of school effectiveness research: An international survey of research on school effectiveness*. London: Falmer Press.

Texas Education Agency. (2009). *Welcome to the Texas education agency.* Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/.

Texas Education Agency. (2010). *January 2009 state of Texas education summary*. Austin, TX. Retrieved from www.LonestarReports.com.

Texas Education Agency. (2011a). *Texas education today*, 24(4), 1-11. Retrieved from http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=276

Texas Education Agency. (2011b). *Enrollment in Texas public schools*, 2010-11. (Document No. GE12 601 01). Austin TX: Author.

Thandiwe, N. (2002). Middle schools: African American children at the crossroads. In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 219-234), Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

The Charles A. Dana Center. (1999). *Urgency, responsibility, efficacy: Preliminary findings of a study of high-performing texas school districts*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas.

Thompson, A. (2003). Tiffany, friend of people of color: White investments in antiracism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(1), 7-29.

Thompson, B. (1996). Rejoinder: Editorial policies regarding statistical significance tests: *Educational Researcher, 26*(5), 29-32.

Thompson, G. (2004). *Through ebony eyes: What teachers need to know but are afraid to ask about African American students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Thornton, M. C., Chatters, L. M., Taylor, R. J., & Allen, W. R. (1990). Sociodemographic and environmental correlates of racial socialization by Black parents. *Child Development, 61*, 401–409.

Torres, L., Driscoll, M.W., & Burrow, A.L. (2010). Racial microaggressions and psychological functioning among highly achieving African-Americans:A mixed-methods approach. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 29*(10), 1074-1099.

Tosolt, B. (2010). Middle school students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors: Differences by minority status. *The Journal of Negro Education, 78*(4), 405-416.

Townsend, B. L. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of African American learners: Reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children, 66*(3), 381–391.

Trumbull, E., Marks Greenfield, P.M., & Raeff, C. (2003). Cultural values in learning. In B. Williams (Ed.), *Closing the achievment gap; A vison for changing beliefs and practices*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Tschannen-Moran, M. & Hoy, W.K. (2006). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*, 944–956.

Tyler, F. B., Brome, D. R., & Williams, J. E. (1991). *Ethnic validity, ecology, and psychotherapy: A psychological competence model*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.

United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk : the imperative for educational reform : a report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education*, United States Department of Education. Washington, D.C. : The Commission : [Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O. distributor]

U.S. Department of Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform.* Retrieved from The National Commission on Excellence in Education at http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/titlei/fy11/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *Race to the top program executive summary*. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2011). *State education data profiles.* Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/stateprofiles/sresult.asp?mode=full&displaycat=7&s1=48

U.S. Department of Education. (2012a). *Digest of educational statistics 2011*. Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_hct.asp.

U.S. Department of Education. (2012b). *Back to school statistics.* Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education .Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp

U.S. Department of Education. (2012c). *Mathematics.* Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=514.

U.S. Department of Education. (2012d). *Reading.* Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=147.

U.S. Department of Education. (2012e). *Writing 2007 state snapshot report*. Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2007/2008470TX8.pdf.

U.S. Department of Education. (2012f). *Science.* Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics at http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=515

U.S. Department of Education. (2012g). *ESEA title I LEA allocations—FY 2011*. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/titlei/fy11/index.html.

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2000). *Better targeting of passengers for personal searches could produce better results*. Retrieved from the GAO website at http://www.gao.gov/products/GGD-00-38

Utsey, S. O., & Ponterotto, J. G. (1996). Development and validation of the index of race-related stress (IRRS). *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43*, 490–501.

Valencia, R. (1991). The plight of Chicano students: An overview of schooling conditions and outcomes. In R. Valencia (Ed.), Chicano school failure and success: Research and policy agendas for the 1990s (pp. 3-51). New York, NY: Farmers Press.

Valencia, R. (1997). The evolution of deficit thinking. London: The Falmer Press.

Valencia, R. & Black, M. (2002). “Mexican Americans don’t value education!”- On the basis of myth, mythmaking and debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 1* (2), 81-103.

Venzant Chambers, T. T. (2009). The “receivement gap”: School tracking policies and the fallacy of the “achievement gap”. *Journal of Negro Education, 78*, 417-431.

Viadero, D. (2000). Even in well-off suburbs, minority achievement lags. *Education Week, 19*(27), 22-23. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2000/03/15/27shaker.h19.html?qs=viadero#top

Wagner, P. (2012). Incarceration is not an equal opportunity punishment. Retrieved from the Prison Policy Initiative at http://www.prisonpolicy.org/articles/notequal.html.

Walker, V. S. (1993). Interpersonal caring in the "good" segregated schooling of African American children: Evidence from the case of Caswell County Training School. *Urban Review, 25*, 63-77.

Warner, M. (1999). Social capital construction and the role of the local state. *Social Forces, 75*(4), 1343-1360.

Webb-Johnson, G.C. (1999). Cultural contexts: Confronting the overrepresentation of African American learners in special education. In L. Meyer & J. Scotti (Eds.), *Behavioral intervention: Principles, models, and practices*. (pp. 449-464). Baltimore, MD: Brookline Publishers.

Webb-Johnson, G. C. (2002). Are schools ready for Joshua? Dimensions of African American culture among students identified as having behavioral/emotional disorders. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 15*(6), 653-671.

Webb-Johnson, G. C., & Carter, N. (2007). Culturally responsive urban school leadership: Partnering to improve outcomes for African American learners. *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice, 1*(1), 77-99.

Weiler, K. (1988). *Women teaching for change: Gender, class, and power*. New York, NY: Bergin and Harvey Publishers.

Wellman, D. T. (1993). *Portraits of White racism*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wentzel, K. R. (1998). Social support and adjustment in middle school: The role of parents, teachers, and peers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 90*, 202–209.

Wheary, J., Shapiro, T. M., Draut, T., & Meschede, T. (2008). *Economic (in)security: The experience of the African-American and Latino middle classes*. New York, NY: The Institute on Assets and Social Policy at Brandeis University.

Wight, V. R., Chau, M., & Arataniand, Y. (2010). Who are America's poor children? The official story. Retrieved from The National Center for Children in Poverty at http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_912.html

Williams, B. (2001). Ethical leadership in schools servicing African American children and youth. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*(1), 38-47.

Williams, B. (2002). A no-excuses approach to closing the achievement gap. In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving achievement for African American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 73-79). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Williams, B. (Ed.). (2003). *Closing the achievement gap: A vision for changing beliefs and practices* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Williams, B. (2006). Lessons along the cultural spectrum. *Journal of Staff Development, 27*(4), 10-14.

Williams, D.R., and Williams-Morris, R. (2000). Racism and mental health: The African American experience. *Ethnicity and Health, 5*, 243-268.

Winfield, L. (1986). Teacher beliefs toward academically at-risk students in inner urban neighborhoods. *The Urban Review, 18*(4), 253-267.

Wlodkowski, R. J., and Ginsberg, M. B. (1995). *Diversity and motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Woodson, C. G. (1933). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers.

Wong, S. W., & Hughes, J. N. (2006). Ethnicity and language contributions to dimensions of parent involvement. *School Psychology Review, 35*(4), 645-662.

Wu, F. & Qi, S. (2006). Longitudinal effects of parenting on children's academic achievement in African American families. *Journal of Negro Education, 75*(3), 415-429.

Yan, W., & Lin, Q. (2005). Parent involvement and mathematics achievement: Contrast across racial and ethnic groups. *Journal of Educational Research, 99*(2), 116-127.

Yau, R. (2002). High-achieving elementary schools with large percentages of low-income African American students: A review and critique of the current research. In S. Denbo & L. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 219-234). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 81*, 69–91.

Zeichner, K. (1996). Designing educative practicum experiences for prospective teachers. In K. Zeichner, S. Melnick, & M. Gomez (Eds.), *Currents of reform in preservice teacher education programs* (pp. 215-234). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

APPENDIX A

1. Introductory Question - Can you tell me why you originally decided to be a teacher?
2. Introductory Question - What is it about teaching you find most rewarding?
3. Transfer Question - As a (teacher, parent, administrator, student), why do you think there is an achievement gap between African American and White students at our school?
4. Key Question - What do you see as some of the factors that contribute to the achievement gap on our campus?
5. Key Question - What role do you think our African American parents play in the success or failure of their children?
6. Key Question - What do you see as your role in addressing the achievement gap between White students and students of color on our campus?
7. Key Question - What role do you think our African American students play in their success or failure at our school?
8. Key Question - What do you think are the short term outcomes of the achievement gap for our African American students?
9. Key Question - What do you see as the long term outcomes of the achievement gap for our African American students?
10. Closing Question – How would you summarize your thoughts and experiences about the achievement gap on our campus?

Suggestion/Opinion Question – What are some ways we might address the achievement gap on our campus?