

**AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A MIDDLE INCOME, URBAN
SCHOOL DISTRICT: FIVE SUCCESSFUL SECONDARY TEACHERS'
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This research study was conducted as a qualitative case study of five successful teachers of African American students in a middle income, urban school district. The study was designed to hear the ‘muted’ voices of successful teachers concerning their beliefs and practices when they effectively provide learning opportunities for African American students in their classrooms.

Ethic of Care and Equity Pedagogy created the theoretical framework for interpretation of the powerful narratives and counter-storytelling that influenced this group of successful teachers. Data were collected by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Constant comparative method and narrative analysis were used to code and categorize the data. Analysis was conducted after each interview to discover emergent themes. Teachers conducted member checks throughout the process.

The findings from the study yielded the following: (1) teachers developed an educational approach that informed their instructional practices, (2) teachers displayed a high level of efficacy and care when working with their students, particularly African American students, (3) teachers build relationships with students that required students to work at higher levels of rigor and meet more demanding expectations for performance. Themes that emerged included: care, parental involvement, culturally responsive pedagogy and “life skills”.

DEDICATION

To Dennis...I thank God we are traveling this journey together. Thank you for believing in me and supporting my dreams.

To Bryttani and Jerrad...You are a blessing in my life. God could not have given me two more beautiful people to call my children.

I love each of you more than words can express!

To my extended family and friends...I appreciate your love, support and words of encouragement. I pray God's continued blessings in your lives.

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“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11 (New International Version)

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. “

Nelson Mandela

I give glory and honor to God for all the blessings in my life. I’m grateful that he answers prayer. I thank God that his word is true and cannot return to him void. It must accomplish what he said it would do.

To Drs. Norvella Carter and Chance Lewis, it was through your visionary work that you established the Center for Urban School Partnerships (CUSP) and launched into developing scholars to carry on the important work needed to improve urban schools. I’ve had the privilege of being one of those scholars. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to share so much of your knowledge.

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To the teachers that gave their time to share their beliefs and experiences with me, I am forever appreciative. Educators are the professionals that enable all other professions. Please continue to share of yourself with our students.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: IN NEED OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child;
it is whether we can afford not to.

Marian Wright Edelman
The Measure of Our Success (1992)

Hamre and Pianta (2007) defined learning opportunities as empirical connections to students' social, emotional, and academic development caused by their interactions with teachers and peers. At an individual level, it includes the children's development of mental models (schemata) for learning. Effective, successful teachers are able to implement instructional practices, pedagogical strategies and techniques which allow maximum connections to be made by students in the affective and cognitive domains. The result of such focused effort is that more students being able to achieve at higher academic levels. African American students are in need of such teachers who will create those meaningful learning opportunities.

Data and research surrounding African American student achievement testifies to the need of increased learning opportunities such as those described above. African American children are feeling disenfranchised within the school system (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). They experience limited access to quality curriculum and are resegregated in schools through practices such as tracking (Oakes, 1987, 2008). African American students are referred to remedial and

special education programs more frequently (Ford, 2010); while at the same time receiving more stringent discipline which takes them out of the learning environment more frequently (Skiba et al., 2011). They are underperforming on standardized testing at state and national levels by 25- 35 percentage point differences with their peers (Sable, Plotts & Mitchell, 2010). As a result of these and other daily microaggressions, which include negative teacher-student interactions that leave the students feeling disrespected or undervalued, this cohort of children is ultimately deciding to leave school at the alarming rate of nine percent on average (Sable, Plotts & Mitchell, 2010).

As deplorable as the number of African American high school dropouts is to many, their future is just as bleak. Darling-Hammond (2010) theorized about America in a more competitive, flat world that these African American dropouts are ill-equipped to navigate and manage. The structural change in the United States economy demonstrates a manufacturing base that is limited. Meanwhile, the need to keep pace in an information economy is happening at record speed. Knowledge is no longer static, but fluid. Therefore, the need to create knowledge, consume information and manipulate it is critical. Science and math are also prominent as more companies seek tech-savvy employees. “Green industries” and jobs are the focus of the government in effort to make sure America remains a leader.

Earning a high school diploma and moving forward to postsecondary education will definitely impact the standard of living for future generations (Huurre, Aro, Rahkonen & Komulainen, 2006). In the current 2011 National Center

of Educational Statistics report, *The Condition of Education*, data shows that in 2009 approximately 63% of African American students that graduate high school attend a two or four year institution to further their education. The same report also shows that fewer persist with only 19% earning a Bachelor's degree in 2011. This effects their employment status and earning possibilities. African Americans classified as young adults from ages 25-34 with a high school diploma were employed at a rate of 47% and earned on average \$25,000 per year. In contrast, members of the same young adult cohort that persisted in a postsecondary setting and earned a Bachelor's degree or higher were employed at a rate of 76% and earned approximately \$45,000 per year (Aud et al., 2011).

The rate of employment and earning potential carry strong implications for the need for African American students to start achieving at high levels in school. This also means that all factors which disrupt their learning opportunities in the classroom should be addressed. This chapter will review African American student achievement milestones as a basis to reflect on present performance, discuss the connections between the theoretical underpinnings of the research, and address the purpose of the research study.

Although it currently appears that African American children being cast as not capable of being competitive globally, it is incorrect to assume that performance on standardized tests are the only means of assessing their accomplishments. There has been a long tradition of undervaluing African

American student abilities. When given appropriate learning opportunities they have always been able to excel.

From its tainted inception, the education of African American children has been married to the greater struggle of African descendants seeking the fullness of the United States narrative. Slavery, the original sin of America, serves as an ever-present backdrop in scenes of American historical periods. Its toxic residue can still be felt in many facets of the educational system. Based partially on the work of Lewis Terman, the belief that African American children have inferior learning abilities has been a constant strand running within school systems and academic scholarship to malign their achievement and not grant them equal learning opportunities (Franklin, 2007).

The perception of African American students' failure to achieve at high levels academically has spurred significant amounts of research and writing (Ball, 1996; Banks, 2001; Boykin & Baily, 2000; Carter, 2008; Chambers, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Ford, Howard, Harris & Tyson, 2000; Gay, 2010; Hilliard, 2003; Irvine, 1999; King, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a; Lleras, 2008; Nisbett, 2011; Oates, 2009; Siwatu & Polydore, 2010; Tatum, 1992, 1997; Wright, 2011). The recent iteration to the more modern underachievement theme is showcased in the comparison of African American student achievement levels on standardized testing with that of their White peers. The importance of this line of scholarship is that it reinforces or dispels the notion of the inferiority of African American students in classrooms. However, the comparison of African American students'

achievement levels and the achievement levels of their European American peers requires a more thorough, or historical, 'frame of reference' for an accurate examination to occur. African American students have traditionally made significant gains at tasks when given opportunity.

Historically, African American people were legally denied access to education. Since slavery, it was thought that educating an African American would cause insurrection. Those that were taught to read were not allowed to learn to write. It was thought the slaves would forge passes, create incendiary materials, and increase their ability to communicate (Erickson, 1997). Notwithstanding the difficult circumstances to which many slaves and freed African Americans found themselves living, they succeeded in learning through the practices of 'hiring out slaves', running illegal schools and peer tutelage (Erickson, 1997). Benchmark cases of litigation, such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, note the efforts made by African Americans to acquire the equity and the quality of education offered to Whites (Patterson, 2002). Benchmarks such as these are useful in plotting the progress made in education by African Americans (Jackson, 2001).

During the Reconstruction Era, in 1865 Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands in the Southern states to establish state-supported public education as a right of citizenship (Gara, 1955). This institution was to last only one year for transitional purposes from slavery and was underfunded in comparison of the needs of the newly freed slaves. Freed African Americans also had to establish private schools through philanthropy to address

the discrepancy in funding of schools. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that separate was equal (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) ordained the doctrine of discrimination against African Americans. The 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* began the dismantling of separate schooling. Although the Brown decision did not change the educational outcomes for children of color in the school system immediately, the court ruling did decree that separate schools were not equal. By separating children based solely on race, the court found that there was a stark disparity in the schools' funding, materials, and opportunities granted to the students that attended them. The court decision has also played a significant role in the arena of social justice and moving that agenda forward. In spite of the progress made and more than 50 years later, many African American children in urban settings are educated in minority-majority settings (Lewis, James, Hancock & Hill-Jackson, 2008) thereby creating de facto segregation not much different from the classrooms prior to the Brown verdict.

African American students have made tremendous gains academically despite fundamental inequalities that have presented barriers (Anderson, 2007). Today, the educational agenda focuses on the "test score gap" (Cross, 2007; Sohn, 2011; Yeung & Conley, 2008), but there have been other "gaps" that have been debated in the public forum. Each generation of African American students has had to overcome a challenge presented to justify institutionalized racism and preserve the notion of White superiority. The first gap to receive great scrutiny was the 'literacy gap'. Embree (1941) reported the increase in literacy among African

Americans from five percent, among the 4,500,000 slaves and “freed persons of color”, at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation to 85% or more of the 13,000,000 Americans of African descendants at the time. With increased access to public education, the literacy discrepancy was tackled.

Even as the literacy gap was addressed through increased opportunities for learning, African American students were being maligned by yet another “gap” to maintain White hegemony. It was the ‘elementary school attendance gap’. In his monograph, *Education of the Negro*, for the Paris Exposition of 1900, Booker T. Washington (as cited in Butler, 1968) documented the disparity in funding granted to schools for the education of Negro youth. Due to the inequity in school funding schools attended by White children flourished while the schools attended by African American children grew more slowly and utilized substandard materials. To address the obvious inequities in educational opportunities, the Rosenwald philanthropic program provided funding for schools in the South. Washington (1947) found during the period of 1929-1930, elementary school attendance in the United States averaged approximately 83% for students. While in states that maintained separate schools, the average attendance rate for White students was approximately 80% and the attendance for African American students was at 72% which was an eight percent difference. By the collection of data for the 1943-1944 year, Washington discovered the gap had closed significantly with White students attending 83.6% of the time and African American student attendance rate at 81.4% in comparison.

With the elementary attendance gap remedied, by the mid-1900s, it was time to turn attention to the 'high school completion gap'. This was considered a more arduous task. As noted by Daniel (1963), opportunity for high school completion was not isolated but part of a more intense effort of racial and economic stratification all over the southern United States. The increased importance of a high school diploma made the system in the southern states part of an oppressive paradigm. White children were attending and finishing high school at a rate of approximately 82% (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007). During that same time period, although they were being overtly discriminated against, African American children were able to graduate at a rate of approximately 64% (Heckman & LaFontaine). It impacted their ability to progress economically. A high school diploma became a symbol of equality and gaining equal opportunity in the financial arena. By the end of the twentieth century, African American students had made significant progress in eliminating the gap that exists between themselves and White students.

This new century dawned with the disparity in standardized tests scores between African American and White students became the educational gap more intensely spotlighted. The National Commission's striking report, *A Nation at Risk*, ushered in the age of accountability and increased high-stakes testing. The initial cures proposed to the educational system were targeted for White suburban and rural students. They did not address the needs of poor children or children of color (Causey-Bush, 2005). Only recently have stakeholders chosen to address this

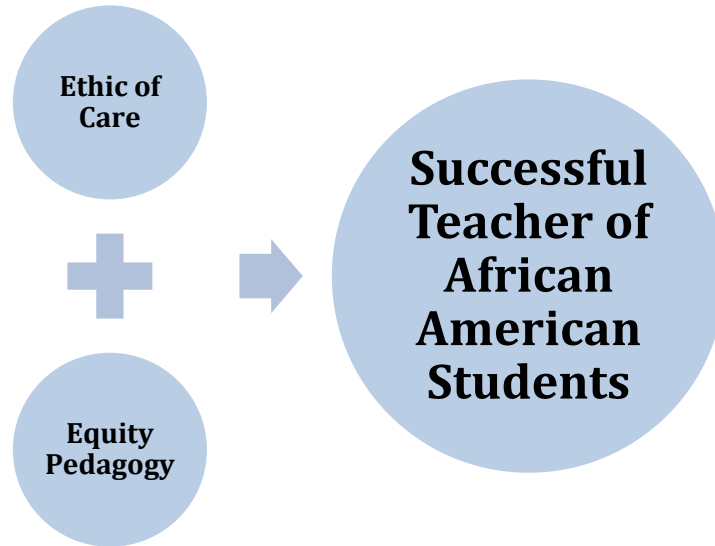
problem as one that impacts America and not just the African American community.

When contextualizing African American student achievement, the aforementioned educational gains highlight the progress made in the school system when given learning opportunities. As shown in Figure 1, two salient frameworks can be utilized to contribute to the conversation, the Ethic of Care and Equity Pedagogy. While each of these paradigms may function independently as a form of analysis, each also complements the other in a dyad for deconstructing practices and policies that bear upon teachers and the learning opportunities presented to African American students in classrooms.

Noddings' (2005) work on the ethic of care maintains that relationships are fostered through dialogue whereby the 'one-caring' and the 'cared for' share viewpoints and establish common ground for a rapport. Roberts (2010) called for instructional practices that viewed the students' culture as an essential component of the learning process. Similarly, equity pedagogy requires the implementation of culturally-sensitive teaching methods in classrooms (Tellez, 2008). The ethic of care and equity pedagogy both encourage student-centered practices. Effective teacher practices and interactions foster reciprocity of care by students and the perception that their teacher is a caring person (Banks & Banks, 1995; Owens & Ennis, 2005).

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework for Successful Teachers of African American Students



Ethic of Care

While critical race theory is substantial in understanding African American student achievement, the ethic of care also provides a framework that gives insight into African American student and teacher interactions. Multiple studies document the ethic of care as a key component of high achievement for African American students in a K-12 setting (Honora, 2003; Lee, 1999; Parsons, 2005; Toldson, 2002; Toldson & Owens, 2010; Vasquez, 1988). The purpose of Noddings' (1988) seminal work was to define the role of caring in teaching as part of moral education. Her study included four components in relation to care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Modeling demonstrates care to students with the intention of them replicating the positive caring behaviors. Although children in their early years are typically too ill-equipped to take on the role of the 'carer', it is through modeling that they acquire the awareness of what a caring relationship entails. Students within the classroom observe daily interactions between the teachers and the students. Those interactions are the basis for students to extend care to peers or during role play. Modeling of caring relationships extends throughout schooling and sets the stage for young adults to interact appropriately beyond the formal school setting in society. Key to African American students' early learning and development is the presence of nurturing adults (Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996).

Dialogue is necessary to establish a rapport and relationship with another person. Through dialogue relations are strengthened when the 'carer' and the 'cared for' gain a greater understanding of each other which helps to maintain caring relationships. It is open-ended with the purpose of rendering a decision that is mutually agreed upon. Children and adults are often resistant to entering into a conversation with a person that they deem indifferent to their opinions. They are less likely to let their guard down and engage at a deeper level with that person. Dialogue serves to extend understanding. Teachers invite students into conversations that help shape and expand their thinking about their lives. Engaging students in dialogue allows them to test theories and ideas, validates their decisions and helps train their minds when evaluating and judging situations.

African American students use dialogue to develop a deeper level of trust with their teachers.

Practice serves as a simulation for training a mind to care and carry on good deeds. Through practice in the ethic of caring, a person is given opportunity to use caregiving skills which reinforce a moral approach to life where care is rendered to people, objects and ideas as needed. An example of care implemented in the schools is community service. In its pure state, community service stands as a way for students to render aid to the community in which they live. In as much, allowing them to see the benefits of helping their own community. There has been a distortion of the concept. Now it is very common for students to undertake community service projects to boost their college applications and receive scholarship money. Within this context, practice has not upheld its origins with moral education. However, practice can also be used to create a supportive community with the classroom which allows African American students to flourish.

Finally, confirmation requires teachers of African American students to view them in a positive mindset and affirm their strengths while encouraging and expecting the best from them. Positive mindsets are critical because humans don't confirm people in ways that are deemed wrong or inappropriate. Positive teacher and student interactions are fulfilled through a relationship that is grounded in trust. African American students often look to teachers as authority figures (Sizemore, 1981); while at times not in cultural synchronization with the norms or

mores accepted by their schools and teachers (Arriaza, 2003; Monroe & Obidah, 2003; Talbert-Johnson, 2004).

Parsons (2005) maintains that teacher care can diminish the “disconnect” that African American students feel when dealing with negative situations. Regardless of missteps or sometimes poor decision-making, the teacher has to know the student well enough to see beyond the mistake to what the student can become. Teachers must convey their disapproval of wrongful acts while reinforcing the fact that they believe in the potential of the student to become someone successful in life. Pang (2006) maintains that caring-centered teachers act as a response of their personal integrity. These teachers care and are able to treat children as individuals that deserve to be educated to the best of their abilities in a just, fair and equitable environment.

Other researchers have since expanded the work of Noddings. Tarlow (1996) viewed the characteristics for the ethic of caring as: providing time, ‘being there’, dialogue, developing sensitivity, acting in the best interest of each other, caring as feeling, caring as doing, and demonstrating reciprocity. Garrett, Barr and Rothman (2009) research indicated that African American students’ definition of caring teachers correlated with the prerequisites established by Tarlow, providing time, ‘being there’, and dialogue. Students most attributed caring to teachers they felt they could talk to about their dreams as well as their concerns, time spent together in school and at school-sponsored activities fostered caring relationships, and teachers they thought was present and accessible to provide help.

The practices of expert teachers are said to be enhanced by the ethic of caring (Agne, 1992). Research has revealed that teacher care reinforces positive school results such as increased work effort, improved attendance and a good attitude if the students believe their teachers care for them and their welfare (Bulach, Brown & Potter, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995).

Knowledge of the ethic of caring as it relates to African American students can inform teacher education programs at universities which are heavily comprised of European American students. These graduates work in more diverse classrooms with cultures that are unfamiliar. King (1991) tells of a “dysconscious racism” found among many White pre- and in-service teachers. This dysconsciousness allows them to focus on negative attributes of African American students; in that way, supporting their beliefs that African American students need more discipline and remediation (Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002). These beliefs undermine the success of African American students in the classroom because they stifle their ability to question ideas, explore new concepts, and be presented accelerated curriculum. The students perceive the cultural incompetence and dysconscious racism as a lack of care on the White teachers’ behalf (Delpit, 1995; Honora, 2003).

Cochran-Smith (1997) argues that employing the care ethic in the classroom is in sync with researched practices of successful teachers when working with students of color. Literature reveals that the ethic of care is a critical component in the culturally responsive teaching practices of African American teachers educating

African American students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002; Foster, 1993, 1997; Irvine, 1999, 2002; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Monroe & Obidah, 2003; Morris & Morris, 2000, 2002; Sizemore, 1981; Wilder, 2000). Slaughter-Defoe and Carlson (1996) put forward the student-teacher relationship as the most salient factor of school climate for African American students. An affective, nurturing teacher builds relationships and creates a caring, yet demanding, environment that makes students work hard and learn (Vasquez, 1988).

According to Delpit (1988), teaching academic language is generally believed to happen in tandem when teaching the new concept itself. However, Brown (2004) recommends that teachers place focus on the conceptual development of material prior to engaging in academic language. Students' attainment of conceptual underpinnings should be grounded in familiar experiences that tie to their prior knowledge. At which time students are able to master deeper levels of knowledge and appropriate academic language.

Just as students' prior knowledge impacts their ability to connect with new information, students' understanding of social discourse is also influenced by the experiences from a younger age. Teachers should teach discursive expectations for various settings (Howard, 2001a). Not knowing the appropriate discourse for a given situation makes learning inaccessible for some students. Typically, the teacher spends more time than necessary "managing" the classroom behaviors instead of teaching content. Again, African American students must master this concept without losing their own culture. Ultimately, teachers of African American students

must not view their culture as an impediment, but rather as a resource to scaffold new knowledge upon for learning.

Equity Pedagogy

Equity pedagogy has also taken on the form of a comprehensive reform strategy for struggling schools and districts. When viewing through the lens of a reform strategy common patterns can be found such as (a) teaching students of color to fit into mainstream American society; (b) teaching groups to coexist in harmony; (c) ethnic group studies that attempt to focus on awareness and respect for differing cultures; and (d) improving the curriculum to address the needs to students of color more thoroughly. Since equity pedagogy is student-focused, it actively involves students in knowledge construction and shifts the balance of power within the classroom. Classrooms of teachers that employ equity pedagogy concepts are encouraging and filled with opportunities for success.

African American students in teachers' classrooms that employ equity pedagogy would recognize their teachers as informed about content and pedagogy, centered around their needs, and aware of the influence of culture on their learning styles. As a reform strategy, equity pedagogy has major implications for African American students through policies and the political predispositions associated with them.

As part of the larger umbrella of multicultural education, equity pedagogy is aimed at addressing the needs of a diverse school population. Part of the needs of African American students, and other students of color, is anti-racist education.

Unfortunately, many approaches to multicultural education do not squarely address power differential in the classroom such as racism (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). Further, Duesterburg (1999) asserts that anti-racist education characterizes racism not as a behavior simply related to attitudes or ignorance about diverse cultures or ethnicities, but instead as a work of the institutional arrangements of a system that privileges White Americans. Educators that embrace equity pedagogy are knowledgeable of the existing inequities in school policies, practices and structures. Equity pedagogy certainly addresses the need for learning opportunities in the classroom that increase African American student achievement.

As I reflected on the purpose of this study and my beliefs concerning academic achievement for African American students, I realized that multiculturalism and critical race theory require my positionality concerning this research be disclosed. I come to this research with much professional experience as a classroom teacher for 15 years and a school administrator for seven years. More importantly, I come to this research as an African American mother of two children, Bryttani and Jerrad, each of which has encountered teachers with limited understanding of the importance of high expectations and providing meaningful learning opportunities.

My Personal Story

When I decided to get married and have a family, I chose to major in education. This decision was based on my experiences when I entered college. As a

product of an urban majority-minority public school, I was woefully underprepared for the rigor that awaited me at a Tier-I state research university. Throughout my K-12 school career, I was considered a good student. I was tracked into accelerated courses. I made the honor roll and I graduated at number 20 in a class of 550 students. What my parents did not understand was that grading is an abstract concept, all “A”s are not equal. Grades are relative to the teacher’s expectations and the school’s culture for achievement.

With better knowledge of how the school system worked, I approached my children’s education with fervor. I was determined that each would be challenged in rigorous courses that would prepare them to do well in college. When my husband and I enrolled our children Bryttani and Jerrad in first grade and kindergarten respectively, we found that their teachers did not necessarily share our enthusiasm and passion concerning their learning. The first year was a sequence of disappointing interactions.

Prior to a public school setting, my husband and I had enrolled Bryttani and Jerrad in a small private Christian pre-school. The school used the A-Beka curriculum. It served as a good launching pad for their learning and acquiring basic skills. Once enrolled in an urban, middle income public school, I monitored the work samples, activities and correspondence from their teachers. I noticed that Bryttani and Jerrad, in 1st grade and kindergarten respectively, were each earning excellent grades on their assignments, but the assignments did not look to be any new material. It was all concepts they had mastered the previous two years in

private pre-school. I discussed it with my husband, but as a teacher I thought we should give them a little time.

The beginning of the year moved quickly and surely their teachers were still assessing skills and getting to know the students in their classroom. After the first six weeks of school, we did not notice a change, so I called each teacher for a conference. I presented our concerns and informed them of our expectations. My motto was, "My child has one year to be in your class, in this one particular grade level, and they need to learn everything necessary to excel the next school year." Each teacher assured me that my children were just wonderful and so polite and respectful. They were a joy to have in class. And oh, yes, the pace of instruction would pick up.

Another six weeks grading period passed with somewhat of the same results. I called another meeting, but this time I presented artifacts and previous work samples from the private preschool. It was evident that the claims I made concerning rigor were true. My daughter's teacher and the assistant principal agreed to allow her to travel to a second grade classroom for instruction during the reading/language arts time block. She also was given the assignments of the students in the gifted and talented cluster for her math and science. We were preparing her to be on target with that group of students the next year.

My son's teacher was quite a different story. She basically told me that he would be allowed to be her assistant, but that she felt her 'neediest' students required more of her time. We were frustrated. It was evident that she was not

abreast of any new instructional practices or pedagogical theories. We had our suspicions concerning her motives. So as any other parents would do, my husband and I began probing our son for information about his school day. We remained frustrated with his teacher's performance the remainder of the school year. Therefore, we would just be proactive concerning his teacher selection the following year.

We finally arrived at the end of the school year that seemed like an eternity. We arranged conferences with each teacher concerning placement recommendations for Bryttani and Jerrad the next school year. Bryttani's teacher offered good feedback concerning her strengths and areas for improvement. She recommended her to the gifted and talented cluster with accelerated reading instruction.

Jerrad's teacher had little if anything to offer in his meeting. She literally could not tell us what he had learned that year. When the conversation turned to her recommendation for his placement the following year, she hedged her response and said she did not know what the administration was going to do. I suggested that he be placed in the gifted and talented cluster since he was clearly not challenged. Ironically, the one thing that she could concretely say was that she did not think he needed to be in the gifted and talented cluster. Jerrad's teacher looked at us and asked, "Don't you think it would be better for him to be at the top of a lower group than at the bottom of a higher group?" At that point our suspicions concerning her were confirmed. My son's teacher appeared to be willfully ignorant

of the fact that she provided few, if any, learning opportunities for Jerrad that school year.

The actions of my son's teacher left me with an indelible realization that day; every teacher does not go to work each day to teach all the children in their classroom. As a teacher, I knew of colleagues that weren't performing at 100%, but once my child was the recipient of such treatment, it heightened my awareness of the importance of parent and school partnerships. My interactions with my children's teachers that year helped to solidify my teaching philosophy. I vowed that I would never do anything to someone else's child that I would not want to happen to my own children. Twenty years later, I still use that measure in my interactions with students and parents as an administrator.

Statement of the Problem

In light of grim statistics concerning current achievement levels of African American students on national measures and their implication for future earnings and global competitiveness, it is imperative to seek answers from successful teachers of African American students. Acknowledging the classroom to be a dynamic intersection of human behaviors is paramount in gaining insight into its functioning (Jackson, 1990; Jones-Walker, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Poll, 2010). Within the typical school day, the juncture of teacher knowledge and beliefs, diverse student perceptions and learning needs, and interactions with curriculum offer many occasions for ruptures in the learning process. Teachers are having difficulty anticipating and seizing those interactions that undermine learning for African

American students in living in low SES settings, but also those living in middle class urban areas.

Researchers (Ball, 1996; Banks, 2001; Boykin & Baily, 2000; Carter, 2008; Chambers, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Ford, , 2000; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 1999; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a; Lleras, 2008; Nesbitt, 2011; Oates, 2009; Siwatu & Polydore, 2010; Tatum, 1992; Wright, 2011) have provided a large amount of information about the achievement of low income African American students living in urban areas. Most of the studies conducted focus on finding answers to their underachievement. African American students are typically over-represented in special education and remedial courses while being under-represented in gifted and talented programs or advanced placement courses (Ford, Howard, Harris & Tyson).

The misappropriation of culpability in the ongoing discourse surrounding the underachievement of African American students is contributing to a narrative of pathological inferiority. Responsibility for student learning should be squarely placed on the shoulders of teachers as professionals.

Purpose of the Study

Fewer research studies (Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Hale, 2004; Yeung & Conley, 2008) have been conducted on the learning opportunities provided to African American students that garner positive results or findings. This is particularly true for students attending school in urban school districts predominately populated with middle income earning families rather than those

students identified as living in poverty. Therefore, additional studies are needed that explore how teachers create learning opportunities for African American students in the classroom. We sought to find out the personal characteristics of successful teachers of African American students. We researched what actions the teachers undertake that ensure learning takes place and how they interpret, or explain, those actions. Finally, we will gain insight from these successful teachers as to what they believe are the academic and affective learner outcomes of the students that produce future success. This study's use of powerful narrative and counter-storytelling will give influence to this group of successful teachers that work in a middle class, urban school district.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it will contribute to the dialogue surrounding African American student achievement, specifically, to include the voice of successful teachers that provide learning opportunities for African American students in their classroom daily. By contributing to the dialogue, I hope to present a more comprehensive picture of what learning opportunities thrive in the classroom with African American students in urban school districts predominately populated with middle income earning families (Broughton, 2008).

This study will benefit several constituents. Those persons researching and/or funding research will find the data useful in informing their decisions and furthering their goals. At a school practitioner level, the research data can help decision makers at multiple levels. At the district level, the findings of this research

can certainly help in decision-making concerning personnel choices for campuses, help shape professional development requirements for staff members, help shape curriculum development and instructional practice decisions. Ultimately, this research can help empower parents in their quest to ensure their children have high-quality, successful teachers in the classroom.

Research Questions

This study seeks to add to the conversation concerning achievement for African American students. To that end, successful teachers of African American students will contribute their beliefs about learning opportunities. The following questions will be used to guide the research:

1. How do teachers describe their personal characteristics that contribute to the success of their African American students?
2. How do successful teachers exercise and interpret their acts of cultivating classroom learning opportunities for African American students?
3. What do successful teachers describe as academic and affective learning outcomes that produce further success in their African American students?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following glossary will provide an operational definition of terms that will be frequently used.

Successful/effective teacher – A teacher that can effectively design and

deliver lessons to meet students learning needs, while managing a classroom is considered a successful, or effective, teacher. Their lessons produce learning opportunities for all students to master content. This great level of skill is evidenced by mainstream standards such as high standardized test scores, increased number of students of color in Advanced Placement and accelerated classes, post-secondary scholarships obtained by students in their classes, few office referrals for misbehavior during instruction and high class attendance. There are also more unquantifiable elements that constitute a successful teacher. These teachers believe all students can learn and knowledge is to be shared by all in the classroom. They are able to create a community of learners within their classroom and make the students feel connected to and cared for by the teacher. Successful teacher have positive interactions with parents and community members (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Learning Opportunities – Learning opportunities can be defined as empirical connections to students’ social, emotional, and academic development caused by their interactions with teachers and peers (Hamre & Pianta, 2007). Schemata, instructional practices, pedagogical strategies and techniques used by the teacher to ensure students are able to grasp and master the curriculum content. Learning opportunities cause students to become highly engaged in their school process.

African American – A United States citizen that is a descendant of an African slave. Although African Americans are natural born citizens, the term can

be interchanged with Black which includes naturalized citizens of the African diaspora (Berlin, 2010).

European American – A United States citizen that is a descendant of European immigrants. The term European American will be used for consistency as an ethnic grouping paralleling the term “African American”. This term can be interchanged with White which includes naturalized citizens of European descent (Webster’s Dictionary, 2011).

Middle Income, Middle Class – These terms are used interchangeably throughout this research study. The term middle class is widespread. However, when referring to people as being part of a class system, it often holds a negative connotation. The term middle income is used more favorably in those situations. There is no definitive answer by governmental standards that constitutes whether a family is considered middle income or middle class. However, “the lower end of the range corresponded roughly to the implicit income cutoff for Pell Grant eligibility. (Based on a maximum Pell Grant in 2005-06 of \$4,050, the current cutoff would be approximately \$47,500. The maximum income at which a family of four with one in college would qualify for maximum Pell Grant is \$25,500.) The upper boundary was based on the income level at which most undergraduates would be able to afford to attend a public research institution without needing subsidized loans. These definitions are necessarily circular in nature.” (Presly & Clery, 2001).

Middle Income, Urban School District – Large school districts of 50,000+ students usually located in the suburbs or on the fringe of a large metropolitan

area. The area is decidedly middle income by the standard family income above \$60,000 and a majority of free-standing individual family homes (Frankenberg, 2009).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Although a variety of factors contribute to the disparities in academic performance that correspond to the race and class background of children (e.g., parental support, peer influences, health, nutrition, media), the need to provide teachers with the requisite skills to teach effectively, regardless of race, class and culture, is now widely recognized as essential.”

A. Wade Boykin & Pedro Noguera
Creating the Opportunity to Learn (2011)

In effort to rationalize the failure on the part of schools to educate students of color, the stereotypical “culture of poverty” concept, with its new iteration recently popularized by the profit-driven work of Ruby Payne (1995), suggests that school failure is linked to students not knowing the requisite skills of the middle class to effectively navigate the school system. The performance of middle class African American students has shown this conceptualization of academic achievement to be false. Researchers (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Sampson, 2007) have found that African American students in solidly middle income school settings are not achieving at the same level as their European American peers. Their work suggests that race, not parental income level, is a more salient factor in academic success.

Undergirded by theoretical foundation of the Ethic of Care, Critical Race Theory and Equity Pedagogy, this chapter will discuss factors influencing learning opportunities in the classroom for African American students. In effort to appraise relevant aspects of classroom interactions that allow learning to take

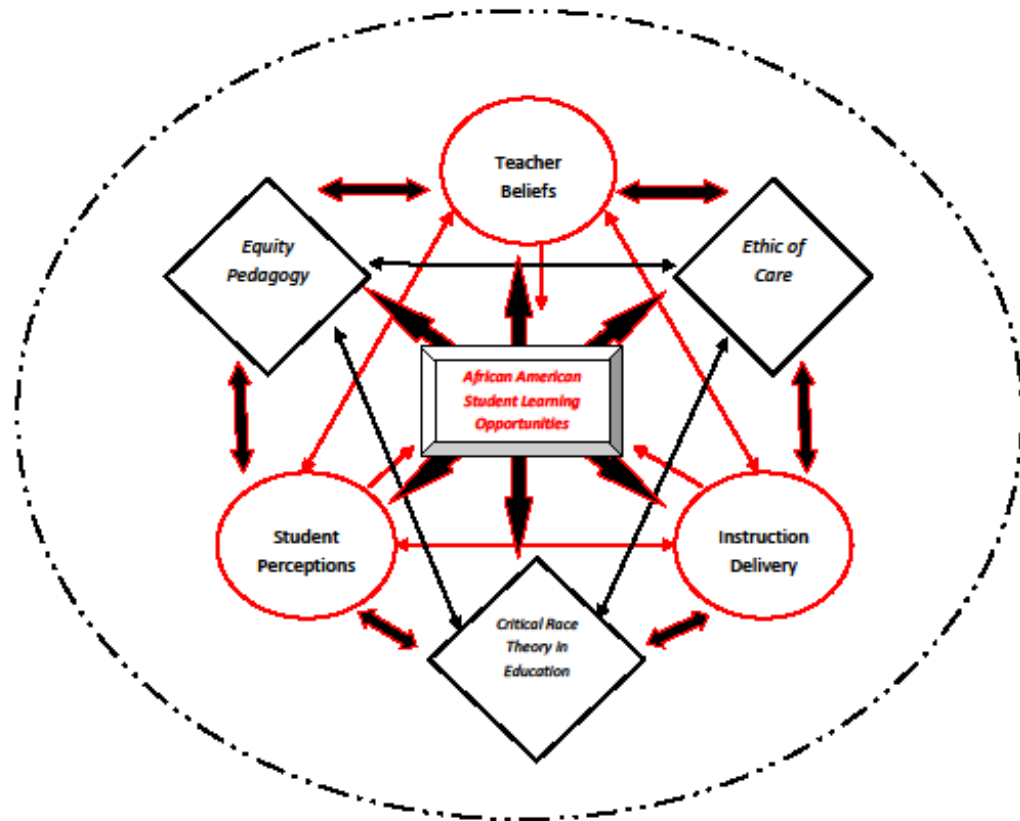
place for Black students, this literature review begins with a sketch of successful classroom teachers, a profile of African American high school students, and an overview of African American middle income earners. The conceptual framework then moves into the classroom setting with how teachers' beliefs affect their work, followed by a focus on students' perceptions of their teachers and their classroom environment's impact on their learning.

Finally, the instructional delivery of curriculum content utilized when teaching African American students will be examined. Figure 2 illustrates how the interactions of the theoretical and conceptual factors contribute to the learning opportunities for African American students in the classroom setting.

Successful Teachers

The importance of an effective teacher in the life of a child cannot be underestimated. Successful teachers positively form and shape all areas of childhood growth including cognitive, affective and physical. Community organizations celebrate successful, effective teachers. Parents sometimes go to great lengths to secure their child a seat in a successful teacher's classroom. These people know what research has set out to identify for years, a successful teacher is at the core of student performance in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Haycock & Hanushek, 2010). The effects of a good teacher can be realized in student performance levels for multiple years (Sanders & Horn, 1995; Sanders, 2000).

Figure 2
Interactions of Theoretical and Conceptual Factors Influencing African American Students' Learning Opportunities in the Classroom



With this understanding, Howard (2010) examined the nexus of race, social class and student performance. From his research, he concluded that the expectations of the teachers proved to be an enormous factor in student performance. He categorized teachers based on his findings. Howard (2010) contends there are two sets of teachers, sympathetic teachers and empathetic teachers. Table 1, adopted from Howard, lists the characteristics of each teacher. The successful teachers possess many of the attributes identified by Ladson-Billings (1994) as essential when educating African American students.

Successful teachers of African American students demonstrate efficacious teaching in the classroom. They believe their students are capable of learning at high levels of rigor. Their ability to appreciate and use the cultural capital that the students bring enable a caring community of learners to develop. Children feel nurtured, but also held to task for learning. Successful teachers of African American students embody the term “warm demanders” (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). It is typical for this teaching disposition to be effective with Black students from low-income and middle-income levels because it is grounded in the child’s culture and not the amount of money earned by their parents.

African American Middle Income Earners

The African American middle class is seen to be a relatively new phenomenon in America as a result of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. Willie and Reddick (2003) assert that due to the history associated

Table 1

Characteristics of Empathetic and Sympathetic Teachers

Empathetic Teachers	Sympathetic Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold students accountable despite difficult circumstances (attributed to race or economics)• See promise and possibilities in students• See assets in students• Become active problem-solvers• Develop critical and complex teaching practices to engage students• Listen and learn from students' experiences to inform teaching• View learning as a reciprocal process between teacher and student	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower expectations of students due to race, poverty, or language• See limitations in students• See deficits in students• Paralyzed by problems• Have narrow, limited teaching repertoire due to perceived student capacity• Place little to no value on students' perspectives or voices• View learning as a teacher-dominated practice, with students having little to offer

Source: Howard, T.C. (2010). *Why Race and Culture Matter In Schools*. Teachers College Press

with the development of the African American middle class, there are some differing ideologies from other classes and cultures. The areas of education and living conditions are two such examples impacted by the Civil Rights Movement.

Lacy (2007) reports that there are two distinctive tiers of the Black middle class – the lower-middle income earners and the high-earning middle. The lower-middle income earner is a result of African Americans being granted access to jobs

which do not require a college degree, but do provide a living wage. African Americans earning less than \$50,000 per year employed in clerical positions and sales positions typically make up this group. Their children live in homes situated in more racially segregated urban areas with higher crime rates, inadequate public services and schools that underperform.

The second tier of the African American middle income earners is comprised of individuals whose socioeconomic situations more closely resemble that of the White middle class (Attewell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2004; Lacy, 2007). The high-earning middle class African American typically has a minimum of a bachelor's degree. They have professions such as accountants, doctors, engineers, doctors, school administrators and corporate managers. Although it has just started to increase in frequency, these individuals, much like White middle class Americans, are more likely to leave an inheritance to their families.

Though tiered by Lacy (2007) by income level, there are commonalities within the Black middle income earners. Most have achieved middle class status through employment of both the husband and the wife. Willie and Reddick (2003) documented a strong work ethic. The African American middle class believes material and financial advancement will come through the virtues of hard work, perseverance, and thriftiness. They teach their children the proverb of being twice as good to succeed in life.

One-third of all African American children now live in suburban areas (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005). Despite the designation of middle class,

suburban areas populated by Blacks tend to be less affluent than Whites and are often situated in less geographically appealing locations. Therefore, they have the tendency to feel like a more urban setting. One of the most important differences among African American middle income earning families and their European American counterparts is the inequitable education received by their children. Due to school funding being primarily based on property values, Black suburbs tend to have lower tax revenues thereby playing a part in the school experiences allocated to their children. Not surprisingly, Willie and Reddick (2003) found that most income for middle income earning African American families was spent on acquiring better housing and educating their children.

“Better Off “African American Youth

In recent research, Gosa and Alexander (2007) examined “better off” African American youth. These students family incomes were based on “well off” or “better off” parents that were college educated or parents that were employed in high-level technical jobs that solidly placed them as middle income earners. Gosa and Alexander discovered that these African American students were not achieving at levels of their European American peers in schools. They concluded that regardless of income level, race still played a part in the learning dynamics of the classroom.

In their study, Gosa and Alexander (2007) noted differences of African American youth and their European American peers in relation to the social context of family to theorize how it impacts learning at school. They found 1)

social processes ripple outward for African American youth and eventually reach them at the school level; 2) many African American middle income earning families manage to keep their children engaged in levels of high achievement in spite of racial challenges; 3) the denial of race as a factor in schooling is misplaced and dangerous to the progress of students; and 4) strategies to close the perceived achievement gap must be viewed through the lens of race. Gosa and Alexander (2007) put forward the following:

“These differences in school quality, segregative patterns within schools, and teacher relationships intersect to hinder the academic development of better-off Black youth. Consequently, the family background advantages that middle class Whites enjoy in positive schooling outcomes are not realized to the same extent by middle-class Blacks..” (p.306)

Gosa and Alexander’s research (2007), as shown in Table 2, emphasized the need to place greater effort into understanding the intricacies and dynamics of learning in the classroom since race and not socioeconomic level appears to more strongly correspond with learning outcomes. Teachers must realize that many Black students from middle income earning families do not come to school with a generational reservoir of middle class norms. Therefore, teachers may not see the behavioral dispositions in the “cultural toolkit” that readily signify their White peers. Teachers should not confuse a more passive parental involvement style by the Black parents as not caring. The students rely more heavily on the family’s

validation for identity and self-confidence. Negative beliefs concerning the parents may affect the teacher's efficacy beliefs while in the classroom.

Within the classroom, teachers and students' perceptions of their interactions may be very different. The African American students may appear to be more "street-wise" due to their relationships with family members and friends that have a larger variety of jobs, lifestyles and value systems. African American students relationships with school personnel are more defined by the authoritative role adults play at school.

The students' perceptions about the level of caring by the teacher, or other school personnel, are critical for African American students to bond. Teachers ought to be mindful of the classroom environment for high-achieving Black students from middle income earning families. They often have fewer peers for support, socially and academically, in accelerated courses.

When not placed in lower tracked courses that are less challenging, African American students are more often required to assimilate into more mainstream modes of learning. Teacher delivery of instruction seldom is compatible with the learning styles and modalities of African American students. The curriculum used is also more likely to be Eurocentric. A multicultural curriculum and pedagogy could be utilized by teachers to correct this practice.

Table 2

Factors Influencing Educational Prospects of Better-Off African American Youth

African American Students in Middle Class	European American Students in Middle Class
Affluence Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle class is typically first generational • Less likely to receive a sizeable inheritance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle class and upper middle class frequently goes back three to four generations • Accumulate greater wealth
Family Context	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting style usually more authoritative • Until recently differences in parenting seen as a deficiency • Similar behaviors to White peers, however must go the extra step in preparing their children for a society with racism and harsher realities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting style usually more permissive • Family life seen as normative for society
Network of Intimates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rely on family and friends to form academic identity • Less peer support for high achievers due to fewer peers in same high level school courses • Academically, most interact with students from other ethnic backgrounds • Embedded in strong kin networks • More likely to have a relative in poverty that often needs financial help • Have more relationships with people that have a greater variety of jobs, lifestyles and value systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain academic identity through school personnel, grades and academic tests • Lesser degree of financial considerations granted to extended family and friends • Circle of relationships tend to be more circumscribed
Neighborhoods	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle class house is usually in closer proximity to poor neighborhoods • Less likely to be integrated locally in the neighborhood • More out-of-the-neighborhood friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to know neighborhood friends
Schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents have more negative or passive interactions with school personnel • Students experience greater difficulty establishing ties with teachers and other personnel • Experience within-school segregation through being tracked into less challenging courses • Different behavioral dispositions which typically caused their academic potential being overlooked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents have more positive interactions with school personnel • Tracked into more advanced coursework • Students forge relationships with teachers readily • Middle class “cultural toolkit” evident to teachers

Source: Gosa and Alexander (2007), *Family (Dis)Advantage and the Educational Prospects of Better Off African American Youth: How Race Still Matter*

Ogbu (2003) had differing findings from his research in Shaker Heights, Ohio with African American students living in an affluent subdivision. African American parents specifically moved to the area based on the high quality rating of the school district. Ogbu's findings placed much blame for student underachievement on the African American students.

Figure 2 synthesizes and depicts the dynamism of the classroom. Easily testifying to how multifaceted learning is and how much teachers must manage simultaneously. However, it is judicious to focus on the three most prominent factors impacting African American student learning opportunities – the teacher, the student and the instructional delivery. Figure 3 focuses attention on less often pronounced dispositions and nuances of these variables in the classroom.

Teacher Beliefs

Efficacy Levels. Teacher efficacy gives insight into teachers' thoughts and beliefs concerning their ability level to work with students. Researchers (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2006; Warren, 2002) have formulated different types of efficacy surrounding a teacher's ability to do their job.

General efficacy refers to the belief that teaching is a good profession and can bring about a positive change in students' lives and the society at large.

Personal efficacy, or self-efficacy, notes the teacher's belief in their individual competency in the classroom. Their efficacy level bolsters their beliefs on their ability to be a positive catalyst in the classroom with students. They believe in

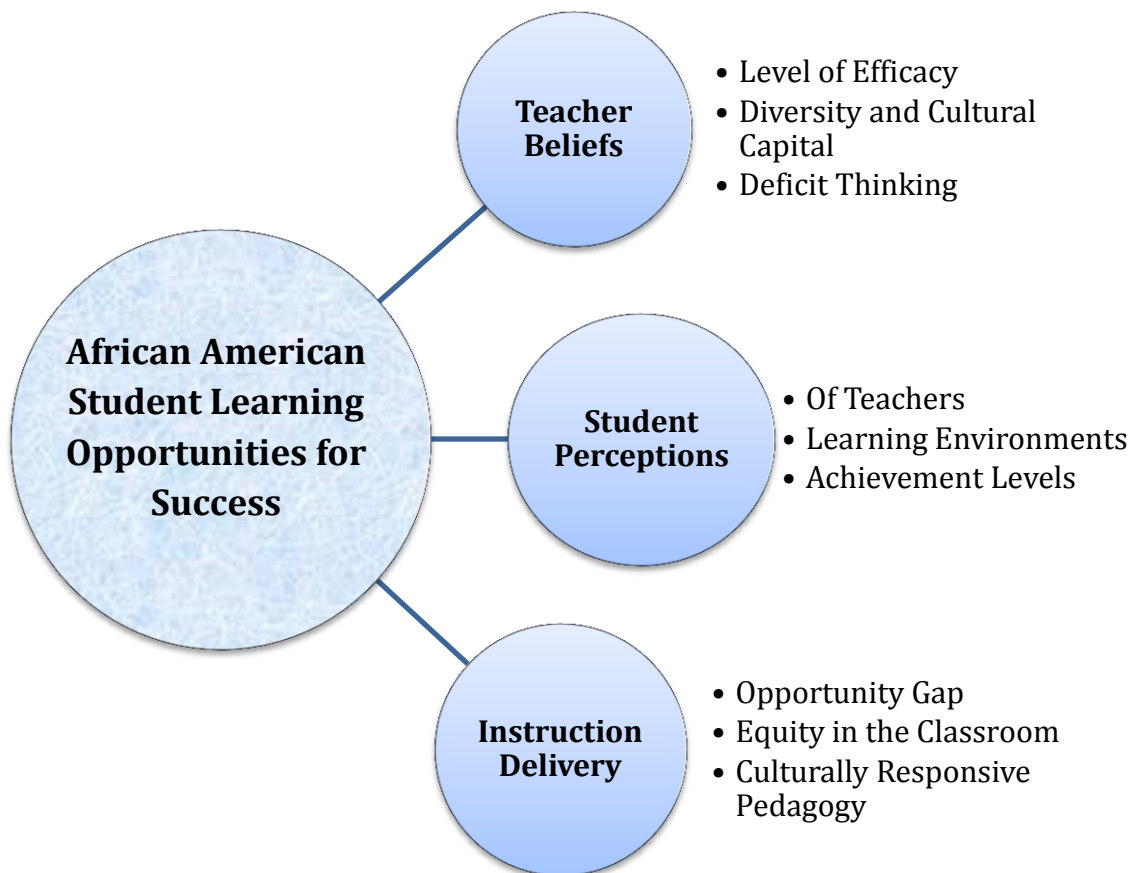
their ability to reach and teach students. Similarly, collective efficacy is determined by the teacher's belief that a group can bring about a desired result or change.

Ashton and Webb (1986) found that teachers' efficacy levels were situation specific. Bandura (1977) theorized that teachers' level of efficacy and classroom behaviors were reciprocal. In the classroom, teachers' with higher levels of efficacy brought greater enthusiasm to teaching and are more likely to persist when faced with a challenge (Guskey, 1984). In the Aston and Webb study (1986) of middle school and high school teachers, results showed that teachers with high efficacy levels displayed a disposition of warmth to their students, engaged them in dialogue, made classroom decisions that supported a feeling of mutual respect, provided more challenging learning opportunities instructionally to the students, and allowed for student feedback in class. In contrast, teachers with low levels of efficacy felt more helplessness in the classroom. They did not believe their work was able to make a difference with students. Consequently, students with lower ability levels performed poorly for these teachers. Teachers then began attributing student failure to the "deficit thinking" model which believes the lack of achievement is due to the child's inability to learn, inadequate motivation, character flaws and/or poor home environment. Low-efficacious teachers are concerned with the lack of achievement on their students' part, but do not believe there is anything that can be done help.

In a more recent study conducted by Siwatu (2011), teachers' levels of self-efficacy were examined in relation to their preparedness to teach in urban and suburban school districts. Using teacher attrition as the backdrop for the

Figure 3

**Conceptualization of Learning Opportunities
for African American Students**



research, he investigated pre-service teachers' level of efficacy based on school contextual factors. Student teachers' understanding of culturally responsive teaching, their prior field experiences, or personal experiences of school, and their level of efficacy formed the framework for the study. Siwatu's sample of 34 teachers consisted of elementary, middle and high school pre-service teachers. Twenty-one were White, five were Black and four were Latino. A few were post baccalaureate students or graduate students, 16 were juniors and 15 were seniors. Siwatu's quantitative study used essays to standardize the urban versus suburban context for the teachers' self-efficacy appraisals. This allowed him control of the variables that actual school sites would have presented. The measures were a preparedness questionnaire and a Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (Siwatu, 2007) developed by the researcher. This scale measures teachers' self-efficacy to perform specific teaching practices and tasks related to the adoption of a culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

The results were presented in relation to teachers having a sense of preparedness and teachers' levels of self-efficacy. Results showed the pre-service teachers felt more prepared to teach in a suburban setting rather than urban setting. Also, they were more comfortable teaching White American than African American and Latino students in that suburban setting. Congruently, pre-service teachers self-efficacy beliefs on the CRTSE were significantly lower in an urban school context versus a suburban school context. In the discussion, Siwatu credited some of the results to the ineffectiveness of teacher preparation

programs which often require students to observe and work in suburban areas. He also noted the pre-service teachers' naivety on the complexities of teaching thereby rendering their self-appraisals overconfident. Lastly, Siwatu proposed that pre-service teachers may have a distorted view of urban schools due to the media and negative stereotypes of urban students.

Results from Siwatu's research study bring into question the effectiveness of these low-efficacious teachers and the level of expectations that are placed on students in their classrooms. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) seminal work revealed that teachers' expectations created a process of self-fulfilling prophecy and influenced children's achievement. This is a disturbing realization because African American students are more field-dependent learners than their European American counterparts, therefore teachers with low expectations of their performance have greater negative impact on their learning (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004). Teachers' deficit-orientation beliefs concerning African American student learning showed a decline in the teachers' sense of responsibility for their student learning outcomes.

More recently, Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) conducted a meta-analysis about teacher expectation for European American students versus other racial groups of students in the school system. They reviewed articles using moderators for the different types of measures, unit of analysis and publication characteristics. Four separate meta-analyses were conducted that included studies related to 1) differences in teacher expectations for European American

and other ethnic groups of children, 2) differences in teachers' referrals for special education services, gifted and talented programs, and disciplinary office referrals, 3) teachers' positive and neutral speech in student interactions and 4) teachers' negative speech when having student interactions. They assert that teachers have more favorable interactions with European American students and hold higher expectations for their school performance. The teachers' high expectations translate into more positive verbal communication, an apparent differential in student academic performance and less than fair classroom climate with more limiting educational opportunities for African American students.

Deficit Thinking. The beliefs of deficit orientation about African American students exact a hefty toll on their learning. Valencia and Solorzano (1997) has delved into the theories of deficit thinking as it relates to students of color and students with low socio-economic family status. The six characteristics he describes have been used in contemporary times to justify practices at schools, they include:

1) *Blaming the victim* involves the failure of individuals to be linked to a group membership such as an ethnic group or low SES group of people; students' poor school performance is based on their low cognitive abilities and lack of motivation;

2) *Oppression* as a deficit orientation does not recognize the power imbalance that occurs in schools involving European American personnel

and students of color. School segregation was an example of oppression operationalized;

3) *Pseudoscience* entails educational researchers approaching their work with engrained negative biases toward people of color. Therefore their research is flawed and their findings are offered in proselytizing manners.

Valencia and Solorzano goes as far as to call pseudoscience, scientific racism;

4) *Temporal changes* come about due to the era and climate, or spirit, of society. The ideological and research climate of the time forms the variants of deficit thinking. Iterations have been seen in the genetic pathology variant, the culture of poverty variant, and the cultural and accumulated environmental variant;

5) *Educability* thinkers promote the notion that the achievement levels of students of color largely depend on their innate intellectual ability, and that political, social, and economic conditions within school and society have no bearing on student learning; and

6) Heterodoxy has emerged over time as more scholars question the orthodoxy of the dominant cultures' assertions concerning learning and students of color.

Through Valencia and Solorzano's (1997) deconstruct of the deficit thinking model, it is clear to see the variations of the discourse in use in the classroom as well as in school policy. He counters these characteristics of deficit

thinking by arguing for better pre-service teacher preparation, more parental engagement, expanding the teaching and championing social justice in schools systems, and calling for more ethnographic research in schools.

In their research and writing on racial stereotyping and deficit discourse, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) question the masking of the deficit terminology used by professional educators to perpetuate the notion of deficit thinking. The teachers and teacher educators are politically correct, but the results are the same for the children...failure. They express a keen interest in the eradication of such language as a first step in policy makers solving educational inequalities.

Skrla and Scheurich (2001) situate their research in Valencia and Solorzano's 1997 book, *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking*. Deficit thinking concerning low SES students and students of color had been pervasive in district leadership. Skrla and Scheurich focused on four school districts in Texas deemed to be successful based on their equity-based accountability systems. They found through conversations with the leadership that the accountability systems imposed by the state highly influenced the reshaping of their orientation toward students of color and low SES students. The high stakes testing displaced, but not eradicated, deficit thinking among the superintendents that participated in the study.

Using qualitative research methods, the researchers found five ways in which the state accountability system helped displace deficit thinking. Those five ways included the empirical data showing the district was not serving all student

groups equitably, enabling the district personnel in leadership positions to shift the political risks surrounding racial and socio-economic discussions with stakeholders to the state agency level, growing instructional leaders on all campuses through exemplar models, causing reflexivity by superintendents and other district personnel concerning their deficit paradigms, and increasing academic achievement expectations for all students in the district.

Milner (2008) used narrative and counter-narratives to disrupt the pervasive notions of deficit in his work at the Bridge Middle School. In his work, Milner chronicled the work of successful teachers in an urban school to shed light on promising practices. His goal was to offer another picture of teaching and working in an urban setting where differences did not connote deficits. Bridge was considered a strong, or better, urban school to work in. The students and staff took pride in the school as evidenced by their competitive standing athletically and the climate and cleanliness of the building. The teachers spotlighted in the report represent a variation in age, ethnicity, and years of professional experience.

Milner documented successful teachers in the school that placed value on education, immersed themselves in the lives of the students, did more teaching with fewer resources, rejected deficit notions as it related to their student performance, understood how equity was practiced, built and sustained relationships with their students, allowed students to get to know them personally, embraced the fact that they and the students were racial and cultural

beings, perceived their profession as a mission and a responsibility to teach students, and developed a critical consciousness that allowed them to advocate on behalf of their students when they perceived inequity. Milner gave those counter-narratives to provide an unromanticized, but optimistic view of urban teaching while disputing the persistent negative narrative.

Cultural Capital. Teachers' should build on the cultural capital present in students residing in urban school areas. Yosso (2005) conceptualizes a "community of cultural wealth" to challenge the traditional construct of cultural capital. Williams (2009) found that African American students in middle-income families come to school with more cultural capital and are more in tune to the cultural capital of the culture in power. Spurred by the work of Ladson-Billings (2000) and Delgado Bernal (2002), Yosso asserts that people of color have cultural knowledge, skills and abilities that are overlooked by Bourdieu's interpretation which places White, middle class culture as the standard. There are six ways in which communities of color nurture cultural wealth. They possess 1) aspirational capital which allows the ability to dream in the face of adversity - there is an intense amount of resiliency; 2) linguistic capital which is rooted in racial cultural history and language; the children are often bilingual and have had extensive exposure to the art of storytelling and oral history; 3) familial capital refers to the understanding of kinship and community connection; through which family emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness is formed; 4) social capital is understood to be working with community networks to meet

needs; historically education, employment, health care and legal justice have been gained; 5) navigational capital allows communities of color to gain access to needed resources which maintain levels of inequality permeated by racism; individual agency is utilized in addition to community; and 6) resistant capital allows parents and community members to instruct their children in behaviors to resist the oppressive structures of racism and social injustice. In urban schools, the students typically enter the classroom with the aforementioned skills. Teachers must focus on the capital that the children do possess.

Rodriguez (2009) tested the acknowledgement and acceptance of the students' cultural capital in an urban high school classroom. He conducted a case study involving a Social Action Research Seminar and an undergraduate social foundations course for pre-service teachers. During the summer courses the two groups met to dialogue and interview each other. The meetings were video-taped. One group of student-researchers identified teacher discrimination as a factor in their school performance. Unsurprisingly, the White undergraduate students from middle income earning families/backgrounds rebuffed their findings. The pre-service teachers had difficulty accepting the message due to their preconceived connotations of the students based on dress and demeanor. The non-standard language usage was critiqued also. Rodriguez concluded that the university needed to better educate the pre-service teachers as a means of educating often marginalized students.

Equity pedagogy as part of a larger multicultural education program would assist pre-service teachers in meeting the needs of students in their classrooms. Pang, Rivera and Mora (1999) posit that caring-centered multicultural education integrates the ethic of care and the significance of culture as a blended foundation which empowers students to tackle matters of social justice. Multicultural education was in part birthed from an ethical desire to care for and educate all children. Erickson (1993) asserts that teachers who focus on low-level skills development for instruction and use teacher-centered practices do not yield high levels of success with students of color. In an effort to demonstrate a caring environment for learning, teachers must incorporate cultural knowledge, experiential ways of knowing, nonverbal communication styles, languages, analogies, and community into all aspects of schools. A caring teacher uses culture as the primary lens for understanding students.

Across a variety of educational settings, teachers are one of the most salient factors in student learning (Conchas, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Elmore, 2004). A good teacher impacts student learning dramatically. The effects of a good teacher can be realized in student performance levels for multiple years (Sanders & Horn, 1995; Sanders, 2000). This clear understanding links the level of efficacy a teacher feels with the learning outcomes for African American students. Teachers beliefs concerning the students' abilities contribute to their thinking patterns and their outlook for the cultural differences in the classroom. Successful teachers of African American students report high levels of efficacy and

demonstrate an appreciation for the cultural capital students bring with them and share in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000).

African American Student Perceptions

Classroom Teachers. Just as teachers arrive in the classroom each day with expectations for student learning, the relationship is reciprocal. Students arrive wanting to be successful and having the expectation that the teachers are supposed to teach them. In the K-12 school setting children as young as second grade can verbalize the efforts of a good teacher, what constitutes a supportive learning environment and how they are perceived by the teacher for their achievement level. Students' perceptions are important because they sometimes voice perspectives that researchers and teacher observers don't apprehend. Nieto (1994) called for more research to be conducted concerning student perspectives in the classroom. She reasoned that students voice their challenges and pain but are often ignored when schools are unresponsive, cold places for young people. She tells that students, being the population which spends the most time in classrooms, often are given the least amount of time to contribute to the dialogue of school improvement. Giroux (1988) determined that students offer the much needed perspective of the teaching and learning process and in voicing their opinions are allowed to regain ownership of their lives and learning. Slaughter-Defoe and Carlson (1996) documented that teacher-African American student interaction was the most important facet of school climate from their perspective.

In a qualitative study, Howard (2001b) highlighted thirty African American students in second through eighth grade were interviewed to gain insight into their perceptions of school in general. The student revealed teachers could make the school a better place by making the classroom feel like home. They wanted more cooperative learning and interdependence in work assignments. The teachers needed to gain further understanding of the students' home lives, values and experiences to incorporate it more into the classroom. The second perception consistently presented to researchers was the concept of caring for the students. Students considered care to be demonstrated through holding high expectations for their learning, offering positive reinforcement, acknowledging their accomplishments and taking an interest in their lives outside the classroom. Finally, students' sought verbal affirmation. Students were about to detect differing modes of discourse when interacting with their teacher. Students expected teachers to be firm, but fair. They were sensitive to the perception that teachers were mean-spirited, unnecessarily harsh or belittling in their correction.

In another study with high school students, Pringle, Lyons and Booker (2010) examined the perceptions of suburban African American students concerning their teacher expectations for them and the quality of instruction provided to them. Students equated teacher care to teacher expectations. If the teacher was perceived as having low expectations for the students, then the student in turn thought that the teacher did not genuinely care about him or her. Teachers with high expectations created a sense of belonging in their classroom

and were encouraging. Over half of the participants believed race was a factor in how they were viewed and treated by teachers.

In the suburban class setting, 60% of the students that participated the study reported receiving adequate instruction from teachers. African American students responded well to comments about teachers that were challenging, but fair (Williams, Sullivan & Kohn, 2012). Most comments concerned their four core content area teachers; English, math, science and social studies. Students designated teachers with the attitude, “I’ve got mine, you need to get yours” as bad teachers. They became disengaged and did not put forth their best effort in those courses. When asked about their opportunity to take advanced level courses, student participants had mixed reviews. Nearly all students had taken one honors course, but several voiced concerns about being discouraged from enrolling in higher level courses. The students’ perceptions of the teachers’ dispositions played a huge role in whether or not they would enroll in advanced level classes.

Howard (2001b, 2002) also conducted a study gaining student perceptions of Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT). In relation to their learning environment at school, Howard’s research documented the high verve discussed by Boykin and Baily (2000). Elementary students in the study attributed successful learning experiences to the teacher making learning fun. The teacher engaged in storytelling, allowed for movement, and allowed talk time during class. Students

rejected the notion of “doing the same stuff over and over again”. They needed variation in routine assignments to remain engaged in learning.

Learning Environments. As noted, the classroom climate, or learning environment, is significant in the success of African American students learning. These students are field dependent (Witkin, Moore, Goodenough & Cox, 1977), which means they seek relationships with their teachers and desire classroom settings that are social and communal in nature. Unfortunately, many teachers, even those in urban settings, do not understand how to reach the students. As a result, they establish classrooms based on the mainstream values of individualism and competitiveness.

Another area related to classroom climate, or class environment, is classroom management and discipline. Data concerning African American students in schools show that they are disproportionately disciplined. Repeated disciplinary action, which is perceived by the student as being unfair, leads to disenfranchisement with the school system. Monroe (2005) reported the disproportionality of discipline with African American students in her report. She found that African Americans’ culture and lifestyles were portrayed negatively in popular media and even scholarly literature. The culture was depicted as one of constant violence, drug-filled, social deficiencies rule and total disregard for authority. She situated her research in the criminalization of the black male.

Teachers frequently report their emphasis on custodial control of students’ behaviors for classes that are populated with low-income students or African

American youth. Due to cultural dissonance, African American students' behaviors in the classroom are interpreted to be inappropriate. Examples include talking when the teacher is talking, playing the dozens or put-downs, and horse-play in the hallways. Teachers then send students to the office for disciplinary actions. In the office, White middle income earning individuals hold most positions of decision making power. Therefore, when interpreting situations more punitive consequences are accessed to the students than are necessary.

Gregory and Thompson's (2010) research showed that African American students were perceived differently across their teachers and the students were able to differentiate their teachers' dispositions. Compared to their European American peers, African American students are disproportionately sent to the office for disciplinary purposes (Gregory, 2006). In their study, Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace and Bachman (2008) discovered approximately 50% of African American students in 10th grade reported being suspended or expelled from school in comparison to about 20% of European American students. They documented the sharp rise in number of suspensions and expulsions between 1991 and 2005. Noguera (2003) also suggest that negative stereotypes of African American children portrayed in the media as overly aggressive and dangerous have permeated the American culture. As a result, those portrayals are making their way into the schools and classrooms (Gordon, 2010).

The study focused on 35 African American students who shared comparable school histories for low academic achievement and high incidence of

office discipline referrals. Weinstein's (2008) work showed that teachers experience the same student differently across multiple educational settings. The research confirmed that teachers describe African American students as being more defiant, disrespectful and rule-breaking in the classroom than with other groups (Wentzel, 2002). Researchers noticed students' cooperation or defiance in the classroom was directly linked to the relationship with the teacher. Students that thought they were unfairly treated or discriminated against consequently acted out more defiantly and received harsher punishment from the teacher and administrative staff. Differing studies have shown the general perception of students concerning fairness at school as it relates to disciplinary actions (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne & Gottfredson, 2005). Other discipline related studies have focused on academic achievement standing of students (Marshall & Weinstein, 1986), gender of students (Spencer, Steele & Quinn, 1999) and race of students (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin & Cogburn, 2008). Each study outlined that negative outcomes for students have been linked to their perceptions of discriminatory or unfair disciplinary treatment by teachers.

Achievement Levels. As with the confusion regarding African American students' discipline issues, there are also a false impressions in schools concerning African American students' desires to be successful academically. Most would say that African Americans don't care enough about their academics or that they are unmotivated to learn. Neither of these excuses is true. But rather, they are a variation of deficit thinking that plagues these students at school, while

allowing middle income earning European American teachers to remain in their comfort zone instructionally.

Allen and Boykin's (1992) prescriptive pedagogy can be used to guide the review. The framework views African American culture as encompassing three distinct realms of experiences: mainstream, minority and Afro-cultural. The Afro-cultural experience forms the link for world views between African Americans and other descendants of the African Diaspora. It is manifested by familiar stylistic behaviors. The minority experience refers to the coping techniques and defense methods developed by people of color to combat life in an oppressive environment. The mainstream experience involves the beliefs, values, and behavioral styles of most European Americans living in the United States. As shown in Table 3, Boykin (1983) attributes Afro-cultural styles to nine interrelated dimensions of the Afro-cultural experience. The afro-cultural ethos of African American people can be related back to these nine dimensions.

Boykin states that mainstream classrooms lack outlets for the cultural attributes African American students bring to the classroom. This lack of expressive conduits leads to the perception that what cultural capital the African American student brings to the classroom is of no value for him or others. Boykin, Allen, Davis and Senior's (1997) research study substantiated his belief that African American students would perform better than their European American peers on task with high levels of variable and stimulation. He theorized this performance difference would be due to the students' home environments which

were distinct with intense elevated stimulus such as frequent social interaction and back ground noise (music on the radio or television programming). The trails showed the student receptivity to high levels of “psychological verve”.

Using Boykin’s psychosocial integrity model, Marryshow, Hurley, Allen, Tyler and Boykin (2005) countered the popular assumption that African American students do not aspire to academic success. Looking at the Afro-cultural themes of communalism and verve, Boykin had fifth graders read scenarios of high achieving classmates and their styles of learning. He found the African American students were very comfortable and favored the scenarios in which the high achieving student exercised high verve and high communal styles. The same students scored the learning situations involving mainstream themes of competition and individualism lower. African American students associated and assessed the cultural values underlying the behaviors employed to achieve academic success.

Boykin’s study was replicated with children from a different region of the country. In addition, Marryshow, Hurley, Allen, Tyler and Boykin (2005) sampled a larger population of 90 low income students, equally gendered, ages 10-12 years old. The secondary school aged children completed two instruments: the Learning Context Scenario (LCS) and the Pathway Preference Measure (PPM). The LCS assessed the students’ attitudes about a high achieving peers depicted in different social situations. They had to answer questions about their opinion of the achiever, C-Own, and predict the teacher’s opinion or reaction to the achiever

in the scenario. The PPM gauged the students' preference for variability. The task required the students to trace a route in an open-ended maze showing the path they would take to school on five different days.

Findings of the research indicated students favored the high achieving student with the high levels of cultural traits, verve and communalism. Children also predicted that the teachers would not approve of achievers in the scenarios that exhibited high verve. Both studies demonstrate that African American students do value high academic achievement. However, they prefer that their achievement and the achievement of their peers be consistent with their cultural values.

Table 3

Boykin's Nine Dimensions of the Afro-Cultural Experience

Realm of Experience	Characteristic
Spirituality	a vitalistic approach to life rather than materialistic
Harmony	humans and nature are harmoniously conjoined
Movement	expressiveness; an emphasis on interweaving of movement, rhythm,
Verve	receptiveness to high levels of sensate stimulation
Affect	emphasis on emotion and feeling
Communalism	connectedness where social bonds transcend individual privileges
Expressive Individualism	cultivation of a distinctive personality and a proclivity in spontaneous behavior
Orality	preference for oral and aural modalities of communication
Social Time Perspective	time is treated as passing through a social space rather than a material one

Source: Boykin, A. Wade (1983) "The Academic Performance of Afro-American Children," in *Achievement and Achievement Motives*.

Sankofa, Hurley, Allen and Boykin (2005) extended the work of Marrayshow et al. (2005). In addition to student perceptions and predictions for their teachers, they studied the predictions African American students made relating to their parents attitudes and their African American peers attitudes about high academic achievers. The project involved 80 students bussed to a suburban area school in the southern United States. Again, the students were administered the Learning Context Scenario instrument. However, this time there were three sets of questions to consider; C-Own, C-Parent and C-Peer. The results showed a greater preference for the high achieving African American students with cultural values comparable with their own.

Differences from the Marrayshow, Hurley, Allen, Tyler and Boykin (2005) research indicate that the students in a suburban school did not completely reject the high achieving peer with the predominant mainstream orientation. Researchers deduced the African American students in the suburban school setting may have a better understanding of the systems that govern academic achievement in a mainstream-dominated classroom. Students may recognize that in most classrooms learning orientations are directed for mainstream learners, and therefore feel the necessity to endorse them. Another consideration is that students sensitized to suburban schools may better distinguish between academic and social settings. As a result, they allow themselves to appreciate mainstream

high achievers academically, but rebuff those same high achievers in social settings due to their perceived lack of cultural values.

African American students want to achieve in the school setting. Their perceptions of their teachers, the school environment and their peers play an important role in their success. Identified as field-dependent learners (Witkin, Moore, Goodenough & Cox, 1977), African American students perform better when they have a positive relationship with their teachers. They desire teachers that cultivate a caring connection and a sense of community in the classroom. That sense of community allows them to celebrate their high achievement and that of their peers. African American students respect peers that are able to show achievement while retaining their cultural backgrounds. Roots Students perceive the classroom of successful teachers to be supportive with high levels of verve. African American students perform better when their learning styles are being addressed through instruction.

Classroom Learning Opportunities

The elusive quest for learning by African American students in the classroom has been well documented through the incredible amounts of research conducted surrounding the underachievement of African American students. Yet, much less research has been undertaken concerning high academic achievement with African American students. Both tasks should compel researchers to look at what learning opportunities are readily available to African American students in the classroom (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). These opportunities can be viewed

through the prism of access to rigorous coursework, support for student learning styles, and classroom pedagogy that connects and challenges students with the curriculum.

Opportunity Gap. African American students have not always had access to rigorous learning opportunities. Oakes (2008) contends that the practice of tracking in the face of today's high educational rhetoric concerning standards and accountability are contradictions the public school system has yet to address effectively. After examination, Carter and Larke (2003) noted that many standards imposed by the government are not supported effectively in the classroom and therefore do not meet the needs of underserved students of low-track classes are more often populated with students of color or students with low socio-economic family status. Oakes reports:

“...Students in lower-level classes had less access than their peers in high-level classes to high-status knowledge, fewer opportunities to engage in stimulating learning activities, and classroom relationships less likely to foster engagement with teachers, peers, and learning.” (p.703)

She reports that despite the overall denunciation of tracking by policymakers and practitioners alike, the system of tracking continues today in America's schools (Griffin, Allen, Kimura-Walsh & Yamamura, 2007; Guiton & Oakes, 1995). Mickelson and Everett's (2008) recent study in North Carolina high schools exemplify the trend. In effort to reform their curricular standards, the schools implemented a Course of Study Framework (COS). Students as young as eighth grade selected a track for their high school careers; University Preparation,

Tech Preparation or Career Preparation. The researchers used the aggregate data on the COS frameworks to evaluate patterns by student demographics, school, and school administrative characteristics.

Mickelson and Everett (2008) found COS framework was closely related to race, ethnicity and socio-economic class stratifications present in North Carolina. Schools with student populations that families had high-income earners overwhelmingly entered university preparation tracks. The career prep framework was filled with students from families with mid to low level income earners. Asian and European American students occupied more seats in university prep tracks, while Latino and African American students had the highest percentages of students enrolled in the career track framework.

In a between-school comparison, enrollment in the differing course of study frameworks followed school demographics, students attending a racially imbalanced school where <37% of the students were African American or Latino undertook courses in the university preparation track. African American and Latino students were enrolled less frequently. Predictably, the racially imbalanced campuses within the district, with >69% of Black or Latino students, also enrolled higher numbers of their students in university prep frameworks. However, the Mickelson and Everett (2008) found in minority majority schools, African American students were more likely to pursue high level coursework and enroll in university prep level courses.

When completing a within-school comparison, researchers found stratified learning opportunities for African American students based on the schools' racial composition and poverty level indicators. Students enrolled on campuses with rigid subject-area tracking practices had less access to prepare for college level work. College preparatory framework courses include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, Honors (academically gifted), and Accelerated. These are viewed more highly by competitive colleges and universities. Nevertheless, at high schools with majority African American student enrollment, fewer college prep level courses were offered. The researchers found only 21% of all mathematics classes and 23% of all science courses met the standard as being rigorous.

The findings at the North Carolina high schools indicate that African American students who attend majority minority campuses are more likely to be enrolled in higher track classes than those that attend majority White campuses. However, at majority minority schools there are smaller numbers of courses at advanced, rigorous levels for college preparation. When viewed together, these dynamics constitute fewer, less challenging learning opportunities.

Some schools have attempted to implement detracking procedures, but they have met with resistance and varied amounts of success. Rubin (2003) examined the detracking efforts of three northeastern high schools in ninth grade World History courses. Her goal was to contextualize detracking based on student ability levels through the local constructions of schools and classrooms. Local

construction of ability levels included school personnel beliefs about: 1) attributes of children – based on intellectual capacity, classroom motivation, general school behavior, linguistic competence, and students’ race and class backgrounds; and 2) parental attributes – views of local communities and families, value of education in students’ homes, parents’ influence on school district personnel decisions, parents’ professional status and educational achievement levels. Rubin and her research team observed and interviewed teachers, counselors, and students over the course of a complete school year.

The three schools that were selected were strikingly different. The first school was an urban city school, Oakcity. The school’s demographics included 61% Latino, 35% African American, 2% White and 1% Asian American students. More than 70% of the students qualified for the federal free and reduced meal program. School two was suburban and high income, Walnutville. The student body was comprised of 88% White, 5% Asian American, 4% African American, and 2% Latino students. No students that attended the school qualified for the free or reduced lunches. The last school visited as part of the study was Elmtown. Elmtown’s student population was more racially and economically diverse. At the school 17% of the students participated in the free and reduced meal program. The school students composition was 47% African American, 43% White, 5% Latino and 4% Asian American.

The research findings of Rubin (2003) both confirmed that which was already known about many urban schools serving African American students, but

it also gives insight into the conceptualization of detracking in urban settings. Oakcity High School personnel limited their view of the students' abilities and often verbalized negative deficit oriented comments. The instruction presented by teachers in this detracked setting allow little, if any, opportunity for learning that demonstrated anything other than compliance to rules and rote mastery of basic level lessons. Teachers made statements that blanketed all students with the generalizations of being – code word, “urban”, unmotivated, and unskilled. Higher level curriculum and dynamic classroom interactions between teachers and peers were negligible at best.

In contrast, Rubin's findings (2003) documented Walnutville High School faculty and staff strived to create an environment of high expectations and challenging, supportive educational opportunities for “typical” students. Many school, especially instructional, decisions were seen through the lens of the impact on students' applications to college. Students were given assignments that required creativity, research skills, and group collaboration for projects. As a part of detracking at Walnutville, the teachers were required by the district to implement differentiated instructional strategies to meet the needs of the students.

This was all very positive, but as Rubin (2003) noted, detracking at Walnutville “had two faces”. Teachers approached the ability levels of students with care and commitment to gain the best academic performance for each student. On the other hand, these promising classroom practices had not resulted

in racial heterogeneity. Though small in number, many of the school's African American students were not viewed as "typical" Walnutville students; thereby, disenfranchising the students. They were educated in self-contained special education classrooms and did not benefit from any of the detracking efforts made by the faculty and staff. At Walnutville, academic achievement was linked to race. This was in direct contrast to the White students, at both ends of the academic spectrum, which received distinctive care while remaining mainstreamed in detracked classes.

After close analysis, Rubin and her team (2003) documented the efforts of school personnel at Elmtown High School were the most promising. Unlike the other two schools, Elmtown's student demographics were more balanced: 47% African American, 43% White, 5% Latino, and 4% Asian American. The diversity was seen as a benefit. The teachers embraced detracking as part of a larger effort to create a sense of community in the school. They wanted to bridge the differences present in the student body and provide greater instructional opportunities for all, especially students in the lower socio-economic group that may have had fewer material resources or experiences brought from home. Teachers described detracking as providing unified programming for students, closer curriculum connections, and a better mix of the students for academic as well as social benefits. The two teachers at Elmtown that participated in the study were both former students. With that distinction, it was believed they had a vested interest in the seeing the students succeed.

Detracking was also implemented to address the issues the district had concerning over-representation of African American students receiving special education services and closing the infamous achievement gap. Therefore, detracking was seen primarily in a racial context, but the results for all students had been beneficial. The detracked classroom at Elmtown High School required classroom instructional strategies to be relevant, interactive, and accessible to a variety of students. Each teacher strived to make lessons that provoked students to think, hold their interest, and foster each child's participation in an accessible manner. The primary participant in the research study, a white male in his early 30s, advised that in addition to varying instruction, he worked hard to relate and make personal connections with his students.

Rubin's study to contextualize detracking efforts demonstrated that although generally greeted with skepticism, proper implementation can lead to more learning opportunities that encourage critical thought, collaboration, and increased student motivation toward learning. Releasing the stigma associated with tracked courses may help to re-enfranchise students that struggle academically. More important the research affirmed the need for pedagogical instruction that is relevant, interactive, and accessible to a variety of children.

Equity in the Classroom. Equity pedagogy, as a foundational component of multicultural education, also provides a context to explore African American student achievement. As discussed by Banks and Banks (1995), equity pedagogy is one of five dimensions within multicultural education. Equity pedagogy

according to Banks includes teaching strategies and classroom environments that help culturally diverse students gain knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful within a just, humane and democratic society.

However, Secada's conceptualization (as cited in Johnson, 2009) argues that equity conjures up varied meanings to different people, individually and as a group. It therefore influences the way educators and researchers seek to find equity pedagogy being applied to a classroom setting. The complexities of equity require that each conception be considered as it relates to multicultural education and pedagogy.

Equity as *caring* centers on an environment in which learning is taking place for culturally diverse students. Teachers create classrooms that are safe and nurturing. Students' social and emotional needs are met. Students' real-world situations are met with an appropriate level of empathy to cultivate nurturing relationships.

Equity as *a socially enlightened self-interest* focuses on education as an investment in the future of adults of America. Equity means equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to fully participate in democratic processes. Future adults will contribute to the greater good of American society through political, economic, social and military participation.

Equity as *representations* involves ensuring that classroom settings and materials do not perpetuate stereotypical propaganda of specific populations of people. To counter the perpetuation of stereotypes, the concept of

representations requires the participation of members of the under-represented groups.

Equity is also conceptualized by Secada as *equality*. This involves addressing differences found among cultural groups based on social-demographic attributes. Equality of inputs focuses on the distribution of resources for and treatment of different cultural groups. Equality of outputs lends attention to the strategies or practices that result in equivalent educational outcomes for differing groups of students. Of course, equity can be characterized in both equal inputs and outcomes. Providing equal opportunity, equal educational treatment, and decidedly equal educational outcomes support Fennema's (1990) concept of equity as equality.

Equity as equality has two differing views according to Crenshaw (1988). The first is a restrictive view of equality. In this view equality is treated as a process without regard to actual outcomes. The other view involves the more expansive notion looking at real consequences. It is a more results based approach. The concept of equity and equality deserves more discussion, especially in terms of the policies and the practices that occur in schools daily involving African American students.

Equity as a *social justice construct* means compensating students for the larger social injustices perpetrated on members of oppressed groups, compensating students for denial of educational opportunity and dismantling the

social structures that continue to impact the lives of members of discriminated groups.

Equity pedagogy can be viewed as the gatekeeper to the tools of power and access (Delpit, 1988). These tools involve academic language, protocols of social discourse, highly valued knowledge and academic conventions of thinking and processing information. African American students that fare better in school settings have learned to master these concepts while not losing their own cultural and linguistic identity.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2000) and Gay (2010) have written extensively and shared their research findings to advance culturally based instructional practices for teachers working with African American students. The thread of social justice runs through each researchers work. However, Ladson-Billings approaches her work from her position as a critical race theorist, while Gay advances her research through her perspective as a multiculturalist.

Ladson-Billings' (1994) research, *The Dreamkeepers*, based on successful teachers of African American children was an ethnographic study. Her intent was to record the practices of effective teachers. The teacher participants in the study were nominated from community members at a local Baptist church. Afterwards, Ladson-Billings cross-checked the nominations with school principals and colleagues of the teachers. She found through this process the parents and school officials had slightly differing perceptions of what was considered effective for the

classroom. Parents expressed that they wanted a teacher who challenged their child and made them “hold their own” in the classroom without forgetting their community connections. They wanted a teacher that understood their child did not need to become socially isolated in order to succeed academically. The school officials supported the teacher nominations through more traditional means such as test scores, classroom management and student attendance. Of the seventeen nominated, eight were actual participants.

During the course of the study, the teacher participants agreed to be interviewed individually, attend focus group meetings, be observed and videotaped in the classroom. Ladson-Billings findings suggest that culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three major propositions: a) teachers had a high regard for themselves and their students, b) social interactions were reciprocal, and c) knowledge was brokered and shared.

The exemplary teachers of African American students believed their pedagogy was an art form. Teaching students was held in high regard. It was a way for the teachers to give back to the community in which they lived and worked. More importantly, with this group of African American students, the teachers viewed the children as being capable to academic success. They thought their students could learn at higher, abstract levels.

Social relationships were essential to the students in the exemplary teachers’ classrooms. The teacher-student respect was reciprocal. The teachers demonstrated that they were aware of individual students’ strengths and created

a sense of community in the classroom by allowing different students to be class experts. Through that sense of community, students were encouraged to support each other and less individual competitiveness was stressed. The teacher became the student on occasion thereby allowing the students in class to feel like competent leaders, conveying knowledge.

Teachers in the Ladson-Billings study were thoughtful concerning their beliefs about the curriculum content they taught. They shared with students and demonstrated they were not the only source of knowledge in the classroom. Students were encouraged to construct their own knowledge through experiences. Teachers supported the students taking a critical position on topics and materials used in the curriculum. They also supplemented the standard district curriculum and content. Teachers insisted the children become true learners and move away from the false dichotomy of rigidly right and wrong answers to questions. Therefore, student learning was required to be assessed in more than one format.

Ladson-Billings (2000) also suggest ways to increase the effectiveness of pre-service and novice in-service teachers of African American students: a) recruit teacher candidates that have the desire to work specifically with African American students, b) provide opportunities for teachers to learn the central role culture plays in learning, c) allow teachers to critique the system to become agents of change, d) require teachers to participate in an immersion program that affords them the opportunity to learn about the community, e) allow teachers to observe

culturally relevant teachers, and f) conduct pre-service teachers student teaching assignments for longer periods of time in more controlled environments.

Gay (2010) maintains that for teachers to be effective in the classroom with African American students, they must possess an explicit knowledge about cultural diversity. Gay asserts:

“...Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success. It is anchored on four foundational pillars of practice – teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum, and culturally congruent instructional strategies.” (p. 46)

Gay (2010) supports the view that teacher expectations have tremendous impact on student learning. She believes teacher expectations are frequently not grounded in facts, and unfortunately they persist even when contrary data are presented. Gay posits that expectations are responsible for the disparities often perpetuated in the classroom. Teacher expectations affect the quality of teacher – student interactions outside the classroom also. African American students have fewer learning opportunities in the classroom if the teacher does not fully have the expectation that they can learn at high levels. The cultural dissonance in the classroom eventually minimizes learning opportunities and achievement. Learned helplessness is a partial result of sustained negative teacher interactions. The students decide to disengage mentally from tasks in the classrooms. The vicious cycle begins and then impacts teacher efficacy with groups of culturally diverse students, particularly African American and Latino students. In order to

lessen the impact of this rift, Webb-Johnson and Carter (2007) posit that more effort should be made by teachers and administrators to partner and learn effective culturally effective practices.

Communication in the classroom is impacted by culture. African American students come from a rich history of oral tradition and communication that is expressive, active, participatory, dialectic and multi-modal (Gay, 2010). They expect engagement in conversation, feedback on thoughts, and engagement in commentary. This usually presents a problem for European American teachers that expect the students to quietly listen and take turns speaking. African American, and other cultural groups, ways of communication are seen as disruptive, rude, inappropriate and distracting to the class. As a consequence of the teacher reprimanding the students for seemingly numerous rule infractions, the children often silence themselves in the classroom. This act is detrimental to their intellectual development. Communication is key in acquiring and sharing knowledge. Gay (2010) found culturally competent teachers understand the students' communication and linguistic patterns. They seek not to eliminate the home, culturally-based language markers, but extend the students' knowledge base by teaching the students to code-switch, or code-shift. In doing so, they are teaching the students the valuable skill of addressing different audiences through style, format and annunciation.

Gay's (2010) culturally responsive teacher also has the ability to effectively address the component of culture in the curriculum. It is more than the mere

Black History program once a year, but a consistent infusion of ethnic and culturally diverse materials in the classroom. The criteria for evaluating classroom materials includes whether or not the ethnic groups and their culture are represented accurately, authentically, and comprehensibly. Filling the voids of knowledge and correcting stereotypes are important in the practice of culturally responsive teaching. There is no single source of materials that is able to address the cognitive, affective, social, political, personal and moral aspects of learning, thus the teacher must cultivate a wide - range of resources. The culturally responsive teacher will teach the students to contextualize and evaluate the resources; scaffolding and making connections with the knowledge they have already. As co-creators of knowledge in the classroom, the teachers empower their students.

Culturally congruent teaching practices round out the recommendations made by Gay (2010) to increase the learning opportunities for African American students. She puts forward that students require instruction which is compatible with their culturally based learning styles. As noted by Boykin (2000), students' cultures impact their learning styles. Gay offers different areas in which teachers can diversify instruction to reach their African American students. The dimensions for diversification are procedural, communicative, substantive, environmental, organizational, perceptual, relational, and motivational. There are not many pure learning style characteristics; teachers may see variances in the

learning styles based not only on ethnicity but also gender, social class, and levels of in-group ethnic identification.

An opportunity gap still persists for African American students being able to gain access to rigorous curriculum and instruction. Learning opportunities can be viewed through the systemic structures put to place to regulate the flow of the educational system.

Chapter two contained research findings in literature regarding primary factors that influence the learning opportunities available to African American students in the classroom. Learning is an interactive, dynamic undertaking. Teacher beliefs surrounding diversity, cultural capital, deficit thinking and levels of efficacy impact their effectiveness with the students in the classroom. Likewise, students' perceptions of their interactions with the teacher, the classroom climate, the acceptance of their peers, and the validation of their culture affect the effort and motivation children put into learning. Learning opportunities include being granted access to rigorous instruction. It also entails knowledge being shared, co-constructed, communicated and presented in style which allows maximum understanding and manipulation.

Chapter three will discuss the comprehensive methodological approach that guided this research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Context is ever-present, working as an invisible force operating behind the scenes...it is experienced entirely as an embodied and lived reality and is therefore extremely difficult to define where, when, or how its manifestations begin and end.

J Holstein & J Gubrium,
'Context: Working it up, down and across', (2004)

Epistemological Framework

This study was to investigate successful teachers' beliefs concerning the ways which they create learning opportunities for African American students. It was constructivist, or interpretivist, in nature. The term constructivism is often interchanged with the term interpretivism depending on the author or researcher writing. Creswell (2007) reports:

This paradigm allows researchers to inductively construct meaning through the multiple experiences and contexts in which people live and work . They develop subjective meaning of their experiences... The meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views...Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other works, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual's lives." (pp. 20-21)

The intention of the research was to 'hear' the muted voices of teachers concerning their beliefs when they successfully provide learning opportunities for African American students in their classrooms. According to Taylor (2009), narrative can be used to adjust the gaze of the dominant culture to see a different viewpoint that has been there all along, but overlooked. Narrative gives 'voice' to

the marginalized 'other' through storytelling/counter-storytelling, dialogue, autobiography, and parables. Unlike quantified research which claims objectivity, narrative provides space for experiential knowledge and context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting of events (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). With much of the national conversation involving African American student achievement focused on standardized assessment, the work of narrative provided a valuable voice for teachers of African American students as focus is placed on classroom learning opportunities. This study gave voice to this group of teachers that work in an urban school district predominately populated by middle income earning families. Through this framework, I was able to understand, construct knowledge and interpret meaning concerning African American students' learning opportunities in the classroom by interacting with the teacher participants.

Qualitative Research

Seeking to get a holistic view of successful teachers of African American students was best achieved through qualitative research. By its very nature, qualitative research looks to understand how people interpret their experiences, mentally construct their worlds, and what is the meaning they assign to their lived experiences (Merriam, 1995, 2009). Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as follows:

...is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to

the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

With this awareness, it was determined that qualitative research could best be used to examine how successful teachers are able to provide learning opportunities for African American students in their classroom daily, specifically those teachers that work in an urban school district predominately populated by middle income earning families. The focus of qualitative research is on meaning and understanding and I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Therefore, I was able to converse with teachers about their world views to contextualize the state of education today, educational opportunities for African American youth, and how they felt they are making a difference or contributing in a positive way.

Collective Case Study. Specifically, this qualitative study was a collective case study (Creswell, 2007). Creswell explains collective case study, or multi-case study, as occasion when the researcher selects one issue to examine through multiple case studies (p. 74). Merriam (2009) defined a case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (p. 40). Merriam focuses on the unit of analysis as what characterizes a case study from other methods of qualitative research. The case being studied was selected due to a particular instance, issue or concern. Although case study is considered distinctive from other forms of qualitative research, it does not have a specific method for gathering data. Some

ways such as interviewing are used more than others. Since these studies were concentrating on a singular entity, they were very context driven. Yin (2011) believes it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context in a case study. In this collective case study, I chose more than one case to illustrate the issue and to present a multidimensional view of the issue. Each presented their own unique context. Merriam (p. 43) maintains that case study can also be defined by its three special features:

- *Particularistic* – case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. This research design is good for examining practice problems.
- *Descriptive* – case studies are rich descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. They give a full, holistic picture of the case presented.
- *Heuristic* – case studies shed light on the readers' understanding of a phenomenon. Rethinking of old constructs, confirmation of previous knowledge or new knowledge and insights are all results of case study research.

The use of the collective case study methodology was selected by me because it allowed for in-depth analysis of single units while offering multiple perspectives. The single unit of analysis was the teacher; while the schools of the teachers provided a rich context to situate each case study. This multiple case methodology required me to conduct a two-step analysis. First, I studied individual teacher's perceptions, actions and interpretations of their work at their school through within-case analysis. Each within-case study analysis was individually comprehensive. The findings from each of the within-case studies were cross-referenced to investigate commonalities. Through cross-case analysis, I supported findings for all cases. The second level of analysis required me to

build a generalized explanation that encompasses each individual unit. The development of broad categories or themes was the goal.

Data Collection

District Background. The selected school district is in Texas. It is the 25th largest school district in the nation and the third largest school district in Texas (Stillwell, 2011). The district meets the criteria of an urban school enrolling over 109,971 students as of September 17, 2012. The district has 84 campuses which include 52 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, 11 high schools and 4 special program facilities. Forty-nine percent of the students enrolled are classified as economically disadvantaged since they meet the criteria to be provided a free or reduced lunch.

The demographic breakdown of the student population was 16% African American, 8% Asian, 43% Latino, 0.4% Native American, 2% Multiracial and 30% White. According to the *Academic Excellence Indicator System* of (2012), there were 6,243 teachers in the district. Eighty-two percent of them are female and 18% are male. African Americans comprise 10.2% of the teaching staff, Latinos are 11.9%, Whites are 74.2%, Asians are 2.0% and 0.2% of Native Americans rounding out the teaching staff. The average number of years of experience is 11.5 years. However, the largest group of teachers consisted of the 36.5% having one to five years of classroom teaching experience.

As showcased on its website, this urban school district also has achievements to attest to work performed by staff members. Ninety-two percent

of seniors have sufficient credits to graduate and passed all portions of their TAKS testing requirement per the school district's website. Texas Education Agency (2012) reports a 91.2% completion rate. Over 3,400 students are enrolled in dual-credit college courses. Volunteers and business community partnerships are supportive as evidenced by donations and volunteer hours in schools.

Pilot Study. A pilot study was helpful to gain feedback on many aspects of research when designing this study. I conducted a pilot study to gain information concerning the solicitation of teacher participants, to refine questions being used to solicit narrative responses from participants, and to monitor time allocations during interviews prior to the actual study. For the pilot study, I interviewed two teachers considered by their campus administrators to work well with African American students. The experience was valuable because I acquired insight for asking probing questions and follow-up questions. It also helped heighten my awareness to be an engaged, active listener during interviews.

Purposeful Sample. The use of case study required that I establish a rationale for purposeful sampling that included selecting and gathering background information for each of the units of study. Patton (2002) asserts that researchers want information-rich samples that have potential for extensive learning by allowing for discovery, insight and understanding.

After receiving the approval of the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University, five of the eleven district high schools were selected to participate due to similar student demographic patterns. Within this middle

income district, each of these five high schools averages an African American student population near 20% enrollment. The enrollment of White students, Latino students and Asian students are 27%, 44%, and 9% respectively. Economically disadvantaged students average approximately 44% - 50% of the student body for each of the schools. The school's also average an eight percent mobility rate, which is similar to the district's numbers. Therefore, district personnel in upper management positions often group these schools together for comparative purposes to review student growth and progress academically.

Each of the five high school principals was contacted by electronic mail as well as interoffice mail (Appendix A). The letter offered the principal an opportunity to briefly meet with me and ask questions concerning the research and their campus. The principals, or other persons from the campus administrative staff, were asked to each nominate five teachers, or cases, on their campus that met the criteria of being a successful teacher of African American students. These teachers' classroom practices are aligned to the attributes noted by Ladson-Billings (1994). These teachers design effective lessons, provide learning opportunities to master curriculum content, co-construct knowledge with students in their classroom, demonstrate caring and create a supportive environment for learning. In addition to attributes established by Ladson-Billings' research, evidence of successful classroom practices may have included more mainstream achievements such as high standardized test scores, teaching significant numbers of African Americans in Advanced Placement (AP) or

accelerated courses, African American students receiving college scholarships through their help, or African American students serving in leadership roles in student organizations on campus.

I contacted the initial nominees to explain the research study and asked that they sign the consent form if they were interested in participating. Each nominee also had to complete a demographic questionnaire to gain background information as a potential participant in the study. During the conversation when nominees indicated their interest in the research study, I asked for additional names and contact information for colleagues that they felt exemplify the attributes of a successful teacher of African American students. Gathering information-rich sources in that manner employed the purposeful sampling strategy of snowballing. The process was repetitive, but very useful in locating participants that were few in number, “hidden” within the general population (Noy, 2008). The snowballing technique continued until I felt that I reached a saturation point with the nominees. The saturation point occurred when responses to questions in the preliminary discussions became repetitive and nothing of significant value appeared to be coming forth in the conversations.

Demographic Questionnaire. As part of the within-case selection, each participant received an invitational letter and a demographic questionnaire to complete (Appendix C). The purpose was to gain more information concerning the teacher’s experiences in the classroom with African American students, general work experience, age, ethnicity, gender, background growing up, school

experiences as a child and their general disposition for what constitutes good teaching.

Table 4

Criteria for Purposeful Samplings in Study

Criterion for case selection by principals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male or female teachers • Any ethnicity • Any age • Employed as a classroom teacher at least three (3) years minimum • Traditional or alternatively certified • Successfully teaches African American students...should be evidenced by any combination of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual caring relationships in the classroom • Low number of office referrals • Differentiated and/or culturally relevant teaching strategies utilized • High class attendance • Good communication with parents • High standardized test scores • Significant number of African American students in their advanced placement or accelerated courses • Students receiving scholarships for post-secondary study with their help • Students under their tutelage serving in student leadership roles

A Composite of the Participants. The five participants in the research study consisted of two females and three males. The group consisted of one European American, Cheryl, two African Americans, Monica and Steve, one Latino, Antonio and one bi-racial participant, Brad. Cheryl, Steve and Monica were over 50 years of age. While Brad was the youngest in the age range of 20-30 years old and

Antonio rounded out the group between 41-50 years of age. Three of the participants reported that their experience teaching in a middle income school district closely paralleled their educational experiences growing up. Each participant had graduated from a college or university in Texas; two of the five had a Master's degree in the field of education. Three of the participants were also alternatively certified to teach in Texas. Four of the five participants reported working at least a decade in a Texas public school, and brought experience from other Texas school districts. Most have experience in the high school setting, but Cheryl has taught college freshman and Antonio has taught elementary age students in a private school setting. Table 4 details more information pertaining to the participants backgrounds.

Individual Interviews. The primary source of data for the study was the one-on-one in-depth interviews which revealed five successful teachers' insights concerning learning opportunities for African American students in their classrooms. Each participant in the study was assigned a pseudonym. The interviews occurred during the course of a month in the fall 2012 school semester. Interviews were conducted at a mutually acceptable place and time for me and the participants; either at the local library or the teachers' home campus. Participants signed a consent form (Appendix D) to participate and have their interviews audio taped. The audio recording was essential in the transcription process.

Each interview was semi-structured, yet, conversational in nature and lasted approximately 60 minutes. I developed an interview guide containing

questions to lead the discussion. The questions asked were focused to solicit experiential and behavioral narratives from the participants (Appendix E). This semi-structured format also allowed for probing and clarifying questions to be asked by me as needed. Seeking narratives as a part of the data offered the participants the importance of human agency and imagination.

Therefore, it was also compatible for research containing subjectivity and identity such as with teachers in the classroom (Riessman, 1993). This strategy was generally used to provide more data to support responses relevant to the research questions. When conducting interviews in this manner, researchers must follow the participants “down their trails” in the story.

The interview guide questions that were asked of the participants in each of the categories were derived from previously discussed factors that influence the learning opportunities for success of African American students in the classroom.

- Teacher Beliefs: How have you seen your personal characteristics in the classroom?
- Student Perception: How have students indicated to you that they felt successful in your classroom? What is your most memorable example of African American student success?
- Learning Opportunities: Describe how you’ve been able to create learning opportunities for your African American students that require them to engage at higher thinking levels?

Data Analysis

The three research questions served as a guide to analyze the data presented by teachers that provide successful learning opportunities for African American students in their classrooms. They consisted of transcriptions of individual interviews. Due to the volume of anticipated data, systems to manage the data were created for easy retrieval and referring during the analysis and writing processes. Each interviewee was given a pseudonym with identifying information such as gender, race, age, experience in the classroom, and school name/location. Data were managed through a dual system of computer software, notebooks and file folders. All data were backed up electronically in multiple locations. An established workable organizational system allowed for a more thorough examination process of the data.

As part of a collective case study project, two levels of analysis were required. The first level was the within-case analysis followed by the cross-case analysis. Each within-case study analysis was individually comprehensive. The procedure for analysis described below was repeated for each case. The second level of analysis required me to build a generalized explanation that encompasses each individual unit. The development of broad categories or themes was the goal. The use of Constant Comparative Method was the primary tool for analysis. Further support for the findings was done through the analysis of narratives provided by the participants.

Constant Comparative Analysis Method. I chose the Constant Comparative Method as the primary analysis technique for this study. Glaser (1965) advocated the use of an inductive, organic analysis of qualitative data. Constant comparative analysis was born of their grounded theory, but without the substantiated theory being developed.

Merriam (1998) recognizes five key benefits of the constant comparative method that support its use for the purposes of this study. The first benefit is that it allows the examination of complex social units containing multiple variables of latent importance in understanding the phenomenon. The second benefit is that it results in rich holistic accounts of a phenomenon. Constant comparative analysis offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand the readers' experiences and is identified as the third benefit. The fourth noted benefit is that its insights can be interpreted as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research. Finally, the fifth benefit is that the method can be useful to education innovation, evaluating programs, and implementing policy. While the Constant comparison method is an extremely flexible and utilitarian tool for the conduct of qualitative research, it, as are all methodologies, is more suited to particular purposes and questions than others, and it has certain limitations (Merriam, 1998).

Narrative Analysis. Narrative Analysis has been chosen as the technique for analyzing this study because it will allow the researcher to interpret and make meaning from the teacher stories concerning their classroom experiences with African American students that was presented by the participants. Also, Riessman

(2008) discloses that narrative analysis easily lends itself to this research because of its case-centered commitment. Although meaning and interpretation in narrative analysis is not static, each teacher's selective and imperfect reconstruction of events gives rise and insight into their human agency in the classroom as successful teachers. It is subjective, based on many social dynamics inside and outside of the school setting, but granted me insight into their self-identity and interactions. I gave attention to the fact that narratives "do different work in different settings". This was taken into consideration during the individual interviews.

Riessman asserts there are primarily four ways to analyze narrative interviews. They are thematic, structural, dialogic/performance and visual analysis. In this study, thematic analysis was chosen because its focus is on the content of speech and how it was stated; thereby giving insight into teacher's personal characteristics, success of African American students learning opportunities in the classroom and learning outcomes for these students. The techniques used in the thematic narrative analysis are similar to techniques found in grounded theory analysis, but without the substantive theory being formulated. Coffey and Atkinson, as cited in Merriam (2009), argue there is no one best, formulaic way to analyze narratives solicited or collected in research.

Since the best field practices require researchers to simultaneously collect qualitative data and perform analysis, after the first, and each subsequent individual interview, I took time to jot notes and reflect on the general feel and

tone of the interview. I began the process of organizing data and beginning transcription. Multiple readings allowed me to make notations concerning the interviews. After each interview was transcribed, I conducted multiple readings for accuracy in transcription. Several readings followed while listening to the audiotape of the interview and making notations in the margins concerning more nuanced speech patterns, intonations and sounds heard on tape. Nonverbal communications recalled and jotted on interview guide was noted also.

I began using open coding during the third reading of the interviews. After reviewing the open coding and other margin notations, I began grouping the codes, axial coding, to form themes found in the data. This was repeated for each interview given by the participant. A master list of tentative themes was completed for each interview. This was followed by sorting the narrative evidence according to the themes. Based on the results of the sorting, I ensured that the refined, sensitized themes were compatible with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the research project.

As part of level two of the data analysis, the individual case themes were reorganized during cross-case examination. According to Yin (2011), the goal is build abstractions, or general explanations, that dissect the individual cases. Each case had three to four themes; which was manageable. I collapsed themes into each other, thereby ending the level two analyses with a select number of themes.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Understanding the different underpinnings of research paradigms and designs, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed analogous terminology for qualitative research that governed quantitative research. They used the terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability which substituted for internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. For this research study, credibility and trustworthiness were achieved by the use of thick, rich descriptions, member checks, and reflexivity.

Member Checks. Throughout the data collection process and data analysis process the teacher participants were asked to do member checks. This was used after each individual interview. Teachers were asked to read through a brief preliminary analysis and determine if my interpretation represented what they intended to say or communicate.

Thick, Rich Data. Since the research design was a collective case study, the participants and the setting were contextualized to include vivid details. This tenet for promoting credibility also worked to establish transferability.

Reflexivity. Just as the interviewee does not “have a view from nowhere”, I didn’t either. Riessmann (1993) notes that “individual narratives are situated in particular interactions but also in social, cultural, and institutional discourses, which must be brought to bear to interpret them” (p.61). In qualitative studies, the primary instrument is the researcher. Therefore, to assist in establishing credibility, I must disclose my biases, dispositions and assumptions concerning

the research I undertook. My interpretation of the data was filtered through the lens of a middle income earning African American woman. The sieves which accompanied me through this research journey, in addition to being African American, included being a classroom teacher for 15 years, currently being an urban school administrator and being a mother of two college-age children that attended urban, middle income schools and rural schools. In each role, I found myself on many occasions advocating for African American students in some capacity.

Positionality. As the major instrument in this study, I was reflexive about my position within the study. I asked myself a critical question, “What is relevant about me or my experiences that may impact my data collection or my data analysis?” I found several areas that required me to challenge my subjectivity. First, the area of race was prominent. As an African American woman that has married for 27 years and raised two children, I wanted to be able to pinpoint, or identify what I felt was an effective practice from a teacher. I wanted these teachers to have “answers” they could share through this study. The negative narrative concerning African American students lends to their continuous underachievement. If educators are sincere in their desire to reach all children, let’s work to give them the tools.

Second, I have seen the value of my race vary by situation. My lived professional experiences include my voice being silenced by the majority in meetings; although the discussion at hand concerned the needs of African

American students. My opinion was not always registered, or validated, as a true solution to the problem being discussed. At other times, I was looked upon as “the other” when asked to answer for the entire Black race. My race was an asset then. This would occur when someone in the majority group was challenged by another person of color, particularly a Black person. In those professional situations, I was asked to vouch for the honest intent of the person in power.

Third, my position as an insider, through employment, within the group added another layer to my reflexivity. As an insider within the school district, and for three participants – a campus insider, I had to examine how authentic the responses from the participants were and probe further for understanding. I had to reassure the teachers that their interviews were confidential. I also had to be mindful of the fact that narratives do work depending on the audience. Therefore, the teachers need not “work” to impress me, just be honest.

Last, my experiences as a parent has shaped by professional career. I look for others working in the best interest of African American students.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe.

John Berger

All human knowledge takes the form of interpretation.

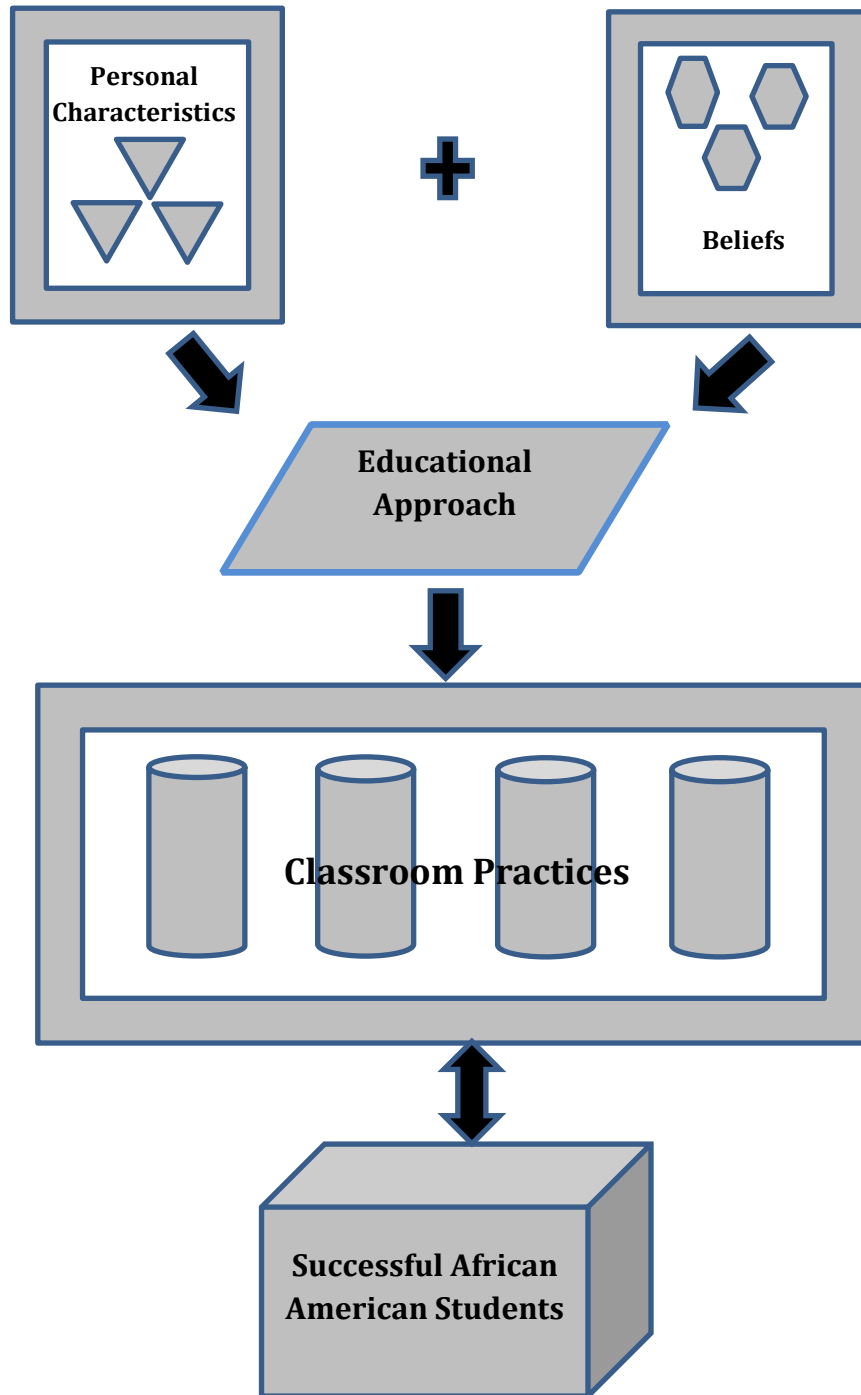
Walter Benjamin

As the principal instrument in this research, I am reporting the findings of these successful teachers through my eyes. However, the findings presented in this chapter are the result of two analysis methods, constant comparative method and narrative analysis. The constant comparative method captured the recurring themes presented by participants, while the narrative analysis method supported the themes through the actual words used to construct meaning of the lived experiences of the teachers. Their words tell their story. The purpose of this research study was to provide an overall picture of the successful teachers beliefs and practices as it pertains to the learning opportunities of the African American students in their respective classrooms.

In order to make meaning of the data and link the research questions to the analysis, I developed a model (see Figure 4) which reveals each teacher's holistic educational approach to working with African American students. The educational approach taken by each of the teachers in their classrooms is a personal one. The combination of each teacher's personal traits and their beliefs regarding African American students highly influence the learning opportunities provided to

Figure 4

Model: Educational Approach Employed by Successful Teachers of African American Students



students. The same educational approach developed by each teacher also guides their decisions, instructional strategies and the classroom practices put into place. Therefore, success for the students is determined in part by how much the teacher sees the students exhibiting characteristics of their approach. Table 5 displays the demographic information for each teacher participant.

Table 5
Demographic Summary of Study Participants

Name	Cheryl	Brad	Steve	Monica	Antonio
Ethnicity	White	Biracial	Af. American	Af. American	Latino
Age	Over 50	20-30	Over 50	Over 50	41-50
Educational background	Suburban	Suburban	Urban	Suburban	Urban
Years teaching experience	22 years	5 years	22 years	15 years	20 years
Previous school district	Lubbock ISD	Conroe ISD	Houston ISD Aldine ISD	Private sector; business	Edgewood ISD
University and Highest degree held	Texas Tech University Masters	Sam Houston State University Bachelors	St. Thomas University Masters	Prairie View University Bachelors	University of Texas – San Antonio Bachelors
Major while in college; Alternative Certification Participant	English	History	Liberal Arts (generalist) ACP	Sociology ACP	Computer Science ACP
Grade levels taught	11 th -12 th ; College freshman	9 th	11 th	9 th	1 st – 9 th
Current teaching content area	English IV	World Geography	US History	English I	Algebra I

There are a few premises that need to be made concerning the findings. The first is that each of the teachers has already shown themselves to be successful teachers of African American students in an urban, middle income school district. This was ascertained by the nominations of the administrators or through my sampling technique. The second premise is that I did not overlook student testing, or other normative data, as a support to the teachers' claims. Numerical data were an option and could have been used by the administrators as part of their determination of successful teachers. However, using quantitative data are not the only way to measure success for students. The third and final premise brings the reader back to the purpose of the research study; which was to "hear the muted voices" of this rather small collection of teachers. I was more interested in their beliefs concerning African American students and the practices they employed to help this group of students be successful. That information is more effectively gathered through conversations and interviews, not numerical data.

With those premises established, the findings were organized in the following manner: a contextual description of the working conditions of the participants, an introduction of each participant, identification of their educational approach, followed by a review of each participant's interview responses. The major themes and subthemes identified between the participants are discussed.

Space City High School

The school opened its doors the fall semester of 2008. The feel for the building is light and airy; plenty of light flows through the windows. There are approximately 3500 students that attend Space City High School. The general climate in the building is friendly. Visitors are welcomed and invited to the classrooms. The building atmosphere carries the disposition of the principal, which is comfortable and laid-back. Parent volunteers are seen weekly. I would be remiss if I did not disclose that I am one of the 20 people serving on the administrative team at this school.

Space City High School implemented differentiated and culturally responsive teaching strategies its third year in existence. As a consequence, many of the teachers are adept at scaffolding the curriculum to meet students' needs. Space City met standards in all areas of the state standardized STAAR End-of-Course exams. The school also has the highest number of students taking Dual Credit college level courses through the local community college. That figure tops the number of students from more affluent families that are at other campuses within the district. Diversity is seen throughout the school. African Americans hold a significant number of positions among administration, student leaders and teachers.

Meet Cheryl: Prepared for the Flat World

Cheryl is what many may think of as a typical high school teacher. She is a middle-aged, 50+ years' old, White woman. Currently, Cheryl teaches English 1V

to seniors. She has 22 years' experience in the classroom and numerous years' experience as an English instructor at the local community college. Cheryl says that her educational background is pretty similar to her students. She attended school in an urban, middle income school district. Cheryl later graduated from Texas Tech University with undergraduate and graduate degrees in English. While working on her Master of Arts degree, Cheryl taught in Lubbock ISD.

At Space City High School, Cheryl serves as a team leader for English 4. A team leader is much like an administrative liaison. Cheryl has an easiness about herself, and a quick smile, that lets you know immediately through experience, she is comfortable in her beliefs about her classroom. She reports that she treats the students as young adults and tries to simulate a college classroom for them.

It is early afternoon, and the library is bustling with students. Cheryl is the first in a series of interviews I conducted for this research study. In my haste, I forgot that the local library would be inundated with students preparing for semester final examinations. Therefore, after moving locations within the library several times, we settled into a computer lab for the interview. Cheryl was gracious as I got the materials prepared for the interview. I reviewed the protocols with Cheryl and asked if she had any lingering questions. She indicated that she did not have questions. She was polite, but task oriented. Cheryl appeared to want to please me through her participation, sort of like doing a favor for a friend. Along the way, I was keenly aware that she was attempting to read

my body language as the interview progressed. I reassured Cheryl that our interview conversation was completely independent of her work environment.

Global Citizenry Approach. Cheryl's interview struck me as interesting. Most teachers do not start conversations about preparing students to become global citizens. Most times, if it is addressed, it is within the context of student's lack of achievement. However, Cheryl was different. This issue was definitely on her radar. In relation to African American students, Cheryl believes that as a whole, they do not view themselves through the lens of a larger global society. She believes they are very insular in their thinking. Cheryl also believes that a greater global awareness is needed by the students to prepare them for a more competitive job market as they get older and leave school.

Empowerment Through Education. As a precursor to global citizenry, Cheryl deems education a tool for the empowerment of African American students. She stated, "My primary belief about African American students in regard to their education is that it is education more than anything else that will help our African American students to succeed, to move beyond the culture of poverty, to be able to make a difference in the world, to be able to access systems, programs, jobs, and opportunities that are available for them." She hopes to instill in her students that learning and knowledge are a means to gaining power. Power is about having the choice to do something, rather than having something done to you. She believes too many students that struggle, and don't feel empowered, speak in terms of being victimized. They do not always see the role

they play in their circumstances. The students commonly say things such as, “He failed me. She failed me. The teacher doesn’t like me. These kids talk about me.” Without these situations turning around, enabling the students become more confident and start being contributors, they become a drain on resources. So much effort is placed into getting them to meet minimum standards, not enough is left for the other students to excel.

It is through a sense of accomplishment Cheryl believes the students begin to feel empowered. Cheryl believes that student success is best gained when high expectations are in place coupled with struggle. “I set high expectations for my students. I try to stay super organized. I try to tell them well in advanced what’s going on.” She goes on to say, “The students know that I care and want them to do well. They have to work. The rigor is there. I am available to help. I treat them as young adults. Many will be entering college the following year and need to learn to self-advocate.”

Cheryl illustrated her concept of struggle for growth through an analogy of the caterpillar.

...People who have really haven’t had to break a sweat, then they get defeated. They get shut down. They don’t know how to pick themselves back up. They lack that knowledge or drive or volition or whatever to start over again. And if students could ever actually feel what it is like to accomplish something under their own volition and their own power, they would feel more confident.

I heard that anecdote about a butterfly. You have a cocoon there and if you opened it, because you saw the butterfly trying to get out – if you pried it open, the butterfly would die because it’s that

struggle that makes it strong. Strong enough to fly, so we're breaking open cocoons all over the place and we've got a bunch of worms that can't fly...too many students are like a bunch of worms with no wings.

Access to a rigorous curriculum and learning environment is what Cheryl offers as a growth struggle in her classroom. She proudly identifies four colleagues that are her former students. Two of the students are people of color. She jokingly added, "Yeah, I yelled at Mr. Johnson almost daily. But, he turned into a productive citizen." Clearly, Cheryl wants to communicate her comfort in doing her job well. Cheryl has confidence in her instructional strategies and supplementation of the curriculum. She integrates current world events into discussions in her classroom, gives relevant examples of major themes in assignments and brings in the works of international authors such as Chinua Achebe. In her mind, this is more than a best practice, it is a necessity.

There is no reason why we need to spend an entire year on British lit, to most of our kids, it might as well be Japanese lit. They feel no cultural ties to Great Britain. By the time we finish translating *Macbeth*, no one is interested anymore. Those are not the only works in literature that allow access to rigorous learning environments, but those are considered part of a 'classical' curriculum.

Although she does not favor the current curriculum organized by the school district, she does feel she has enough autonomy to make decisions that will teach students to go into the world feeling empowered. Seeking an example to reinforce her belief in the need for empowerment, Cheryl spoke of a recent

graduate. She recalled her conversations with him as an example of how she strived to teach the children to self-advocate.

This was CJ last year. He had a scholarship to Prairie View. So I said, "Have you applied yet?" "No, Miss. I've just gotta show up out there. They told me to just come on out." I said, "CJ. You have to fill out paperwork." "No, Miss. I've just gotta go. I've just gotta show up. Coach said to show up."

One thing I told him was, "Okay. Here's where you need power. You can let somebody pick your classes for you or you can develop some kind of control over your destiny and you can pick your own classes or at least have some knowledge about it. You don't just show up there and let people do stuff to you."

"But, I'm telling you, they said just show up." "CJ, you've gotta fill out a paper. Really." And then I gave him a big sermon about college and athletics and I said, "You've gotta make sure if you are a star athlete, that you get a degree out of this, that you're not just being used as a tool for four years of eligibility and end up with nothing. What happens if you get hurt? What do you got? Have you looked at the fine print?" It's stuff like that.

Teaching students to empower themselves encompasses not only self-advocacy, but also knowledge of processes and structures that she believes are present in many American middle income institutions and systems.

Knowledge of Processes and Structures as a Gatekeeper. Cheryl advocated that all students, particularly African American students need to learn the process and structures of systems that will act as gatekeepers to their success if not mastered. As students gain more understanding of processes, they take more ownership of their learning and successes. Some of the processes mentioned as examples included learning to fill out college applications, how to follow through to get financial aid, how to document when something has gone wrong to get a

quicker response. Cheryl feels that students' lack of understanding of processes contributes to a feeling of helplessness.

The reason that you haven't achieved something or you haven't done something is not because you're Black. It's because you haven't done this. You haven't done this either. You haven't done that, but sometimes the thinking is... well, I guess I'm Black.

Cheryl also noted particular structures that she felt would help teenagers prepare for college or the work force. They included time management, productivity habits, communicating with adults and working with others. Cheryl believed that more adult role models and interactions would help students learn the soft skills that many of them lack today. Her suggestion was for the school system to start giving parents concrete examples and exercises to develop skills in students.

They need people skills as far as interacting with adults. They may or may not even talk to their parents and then when they come to a business, when they come to a job, when they come to school, just having the sensibilities to take your headphones off, to look at the person in the face, to speak clearly, those things that your parents used to teach you as part of manners. That skillset is completely missing for too many students. I don't know if it's solely based on economics because a student could have a grandmother that says, "Take your ear buds out and say, 'Yes, ma'am.'" So that's not based on economics as much as it is adult role models. I'm constantly teaching those soft skills, not just in my classroom, but in the library too because I've worked there before school, and so I try to train them. You need to speak up. You need to take this out and –

Cheryl goes on to reiterate that children need to be taught about structure. She gives an example of her adopted daughter's, Mariah, lack of structure at home.

...or maybe they are generational products of people with no structure. Another interesting anecdote about Mariah is she would

never hang up her clothes, and I didn't know. I would give her hangers. I always did the girls' laundry, so I would hang them up. I would go in and they would be folded and she liked those plastic bins, and so finally I understood. The reason was - was because they had to move in the middle of the night so often that you needed to have your clothes in a place where you could grab them and go at a moment's notice.

Cheryl's perception that Mariah lacked structure was untrue. Mariah did in fact have structure. It was a structure, process, that was shaped by the necessity of her circumstances. Cheryl's lack of understanding demonstrates that she saw Mariah through a deficit lens. In the classroom, this deficit view of students' experiences puts them at a disadvantage. Those students that come to school without the middle income normative knowledge should not be viewed as deficient, but rather just needing to learn an additional set of skills.

In addition to acquiring these skills, Cheryl introduced the concept of care through processes and structures. She noted that the schools and teachers care for students was demonstrated by the supports in place to help students. One example given was Space City High School's campus-based College and Career specialist. She is available each day and evenings to help the students complete the process of college application. The specialist also promotes a college-going culture among staff members and students. This was just one example. The overarching theme was that students needed skills to access knowledge, learn process and develop structure. These skills play an important role in them becoming global citizens.

Becoming a Global Citizen. Assisting African American students in becoming global citizens is close to Cheryl's heart due to her adopted daughter, Mariah. Much of Cheryl's understanding of African American children has been generalized from her interactions with Mariah. Cheryl's narrative is one of salvation for Mariah, and enlightenment for her.

My oldest daughter, Mariah, is adopted, and I actually became her guardian when she was in high school. She was a junior in my class and her mother – she's an African American student. Her mother got pregnant and decided to move away when Mariah was a senior and Mariah wanted to graduate from high school. Her mom said, "I don't really care. I don't care if you do or not. You could come with me. I'm gonna go live in the Fifth Ward. I don't care. You can do whatever you want," and she was a friend of my daughters and my daughter Lisa said, "Please could Mariah come live with us?" Her mom gladly gave me papers to assign guardianship and she lived with me and graduated. I took care of her, fed her, clothed her, got her applying to college. She got a scholarship to Sam Houston. She graduated with a bachelor's degree and is working on her master's degree.

One is that her first semester of college I would check on her all the time. How are you doing? Are you doing okay? All she would say was, "I'm having some trouble in school," you know? I asked, "Well, tell me. What are your steps? What do you do?" "Well, I listen to the professor and I write down what he says and this and this and that." Come to find out she never bought the textbooks. She never really understood that you actually had to buy and use and write in and annotate the textbooks. Even though she had gotten a grant to purchase the textbooks and had credit at the bookstore to buy the textbooks, it wasn't part of her understanding, her experience that you needed to buy textbooks and actually go home and use them.

I'd give her school supplies. She had everything, but it never occurred to me that she didn't know how to follow through on the books. That was something new to me, exactly.

Cheryl continues on and begins to generalize the lessons she learned from parenting Mariah.

And so I think that with many of our African American students and any student coming from the culture of poverty now – this is my underlying assumption – is that many of our African American students are economically disadvantaged and that’s where I’m going from. I’m not talking about the parents whose mom’s a lawyer, dad’s a doctor and they’re African American. This is not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about the vast majority of our African American – all students of color, you know?

If they don’t have somebody to show them how to do school and how to even go to a university and go to an office, fill out a form, and follow through with steps, they’ll get lost in the system. It’s not that they’re incapable of learning that, they have no model for it, no model at all.

However honorable the cause, Cheryl has extrapolated more erroneous conclusions about African American students. Although, Cheryl says that she has not generalized issues of poverty to encompass all African American students, her narrative indicates otherwise. Since Mariah is possibly her closest association with African Americans or other people of color, it is prominent in her thinking. African American students that do not fit within that paradigm are considered exceptions.

The narrative Cheryl tells informs her practices of teaching her students the importance of understanding processes and structures. Her conclusion is that this lack of understanding contributed to Mariah struggling in college. Through Cheryl’s intervention, Mariah was able to complete college at Sam Houston and

was offered a position in a new town. The job offer affirmed Cheryl's belief in the need for her African American students to broaden their horizons.

But I think my African American students in particular are very insular. For whatever reason, they don't see themselves as part of the global community and like with Mariah, she had an internship with – it was funny – a community – what is it? Like, the governor or mayor's office in Any City, Texas. And so she didn't know if she should go or not. I said, "Oh, absolutely. You need to see the way different places operate, the way different places work," and just trying to get her to see herself as not limited. I don't have to stay in Houston. I don't have to live in the Fifth Ward. I don't have to live in Texas. I don't have to live in the United States. I could move to Japan. I could learn a new language, but I don't know. It was hard to get her to even envision herself in her mind as living among other people. That was hard. Too many of my African American students don't really see themselves as functioning in a larger, even global, community, and that's my goal for all my students, but in particular for my African American students and I had to work with this with Mariah as well. If you only identify yourself as one thing – making a difference in the world and even functioning as part of a global community is harder.

Cheryl's conclusions as to why Mariah was hesitant to venture to a small town setting for employment illustrate her unawareness of the constructs of White privilege and the advantages it provides to her that are not available to her own adopted daughter, her African American students or other people of color. Cheryl doesn't recognize the privileges granted to her, making her life a bit easier, due to her whiteness. McIntosh (2009) noted some of the advantages supplied to Whites that may not have been in place for Mariah, or other African Americans, venturing into a new setting beyond what was familiar. Examples include being in the company of people of her race and culture, being greeted pleasantly by new neighbors in the community of her choosing, finding foods for recipes unique to

her culture, finding a beauty shop/hair salon for people with her hair texture, finding organizations to join that are welcoming and fit her interest, assuring she will not be harassed by law enforcement and there are people living in the new community that will treat her concerns seriously if there were an occasion for legal proceedings. Cheryl's declarations concerning the lack of African American students' views of living globally are overly simplistic. There is more to living as a global citizen than merely working processes which will presumably give equivalent results or outcomes.

While some of the underlying premises to Cheryl's beliefs give me reason to pause, the goals that she has for students are admirable. The need for African American students to recognize their marketability in the complexity of the 21st century workplace through globalization is very important. Students' understanding that power is primarily acquired through gaining knowledge has far-reaching implications. It doesn't matter the field of study or professional pursuit, grasping the institutional structures and learning to navigate within that system's processes will help African American students becoming more successful.

Meet Brad: It's You and Me Kid

Brad is a product of the school district where he currently teaches. He is unique in that he is the only twenty-something year old participant and he is the only biracial participant. Brad currently is a ninth grade World Geography teacher; a position that encompasses all five years of his teaching experience.

Brad has the least amount of experience as compared to the other study participants. He has previously worked in Conroe ISD as a substitute teacher while studying at Sam Houston State University. Brad holds a Bachelor's degree in History with a minor in education.

At Space City High School, Brad works on a team of eight teachers. The team is balanced between younger colleagues and more experienced teachers. Brad is receptive to feedback and feels it is important to engage students in what they should be learning. His 'hook' is his ability to use music to bridge the curriculum gap. Brad was not in a historical African American fraternity while in college, but has been the boys step team coach for their past three years. He says his inspiration for doing so has been his ability to serve as a mentor to the African American young men on campus that do not have fathers in their homes.

Another meeting at the local library and I was feeling a little guilty. I had trouble leaving my high school on time because a parent needed help and arrived without an appointment. Lucky for me, Brad had forgotten about the interview and arrived a little late himself. He was meeting with the step team and had to dismiss them quickly. His late arrival gave me a few minutes to 'gather myself' and get organized. College finals were over and the campus library was quiet. Brad arrived apologetically entering the room. His general disposition is that of a friendly guy. I reassured him that I appreciated his participation and the wait was not a problem at all. I offered him a bottle of water and he started relaxing.

Relationships Approach. It is through relationships with students in his classroom that Brad feels he is able to make the most impact. When he establishes a mentoring relationship, he can impart not just academics knowledge, but wisdom about life also. Brad realizes that his age, mid-twenties, gives him an advantage in terms of him being able to still relate to some of the teenage students' interest – such as video games, sports, music and pop-culture. He says, "I'd like to think I'm pretty hip, tuned in to what's going on. I can remember high school and I see them struggling with some of the same things I struggled with in terms of friendships, being popular, certain classes being tough for me, dealing with personal issues such as girlfriends or boyfriends, whatever the case might be." Brad wants to make sure that he addresses the whole child.

Home and School Dissonance. Having adopted a whole child approach while working at Space City High School has served Brad well. It allows him to address needs of students that generally cannot be found within the curriculum guide. In terms of his African American students, Brad thinks there is a dissonance that exists between home and school. He says that he generally doesn't see the same dissonance occur with as many of his other students.

I think that for our White students, their home culture is very compatible with school culture. Whereas I think for a lot of our African American students, they feel that their home culture is not compatible with school culture, and I think that leads to some problems.

Brad identified two factors that he believes contributes to the dissonance experienced by some African American students in middle income school settings

– generational advancement and identity development. In his conversation, generational advancement refers to how long the African American family has been removed from an impoverished setting. He is very aware that with each generation moving farther from poverty, the children’s experiences and exposure begin to look more like those of their European American peers. The students become more ‘cultured’, which he believes to be a good thing.

... so I feel like the main thing that a lot of our African American kids need is more enrichment that happens outside of the seven or eight hours that they’re at school, more stuff with their family, more positive interactions with successful adults in the community - in terms of just knowing the interpersonal communication skills with adults, in terms of just understanding this world that we live in, understanding a little bit about politics, a little bit about art, a little bit about genres of music, a little bit about what is culture.

Brad feels this generational advancement is also seen among African American students that are enrolled in his advanced level classes. He says that the comparison of his African American students in the advanced level classes versus those in on-level classes isn’t difficult. As an observant teacher, he notices that the students struggle with many of the same issues. More typically, the African American students in the advanced level classes have more educated parents that have taught them skills for coping in mainstream classrooms. These parents of his advanced level students could be, but aren’t generally the first generation out of poverty, or those having more blue collar jobs.

I’m not saying it’s income level because growing up, my parents were not wealthy and we were never a high income family. If anything, we were middle class, maybe even lower middle class, but one thing that my parents had was that both of them finished high

school and my dad finished college. My mom did about two years of college. I remember growing up, any time we were struggling financially, one thing that was always emphasized to me was the reason why we're struggling is because my parents didn't finish their education. I feel like they must be coming from a background where education is important or education is emphasized by somebody in their home life.

Another indicator of a greater variety of experiences and exposure is the vocabulary the students bring to the classroom. Teachers are keenly aware of African American students that aren't conversant in what is considered Standard American English.

I think it's mostly a vocabulary thing. I think that when they do have those interactions with adults, like I said, if they're not interacting with educated adults, adults who have a high level of vocabulary and maybe even read a little bit, I think that they miss out. They're gonna miss out on a lot of vocabulary that they need to be successful in school, so I think yeah, a lot of it does come from home. And I think that a lot of the kids have a hard time understanding that there is your academic English and then there's the English that you speak at home. And one thing I've tried to emphasize a lot with my African American students is you don't have to feel like you have to choose one or the other and just stay with that one. If you use the academic English when you're at school, it doesn't mean you're a sellout or anything like that, or that you're abandoning your culture, but you've gotta know how to switch between those two. I don't want the students stigmatized, so we work on it. I want them to know that they should be able to express themselves fully in a variety of ways.

The second area that Brad feels is shared among his African American students is identity development. This is a common concern for all teenage students regardless of ethnicity and culture, but it is prevalent in the schooling of African American children because their circles of association are typically less circumscribed.

I think some of the ones who live in the middle income areas, even if they've never been in poverty, they probably still know people in poverty, whether it's through church or through family members. Also from what's portrayed in the media as what it means to be black, to struggle, to not have anything, almost the idea that everybody's against you, I think that even some of those kids in the suburban areas carry that with them even though it's not manifesting itself in their actual life, but they feel like I'm Black, so it's part of me to struggle.

It's part of me to not fit in with school or it's part of who I am as an African American to speak a certain way, or act a certain way, or dress a certain way and if I don't, then I'm turning my back on my culture. So, even if they don't come from poverty, it's almost like some of them I noticed, especially at our school, have a mindset that if they don't behave in a way that makes it seem like they're from poverty, that somehow they're not genuine.

Brad recognizes the double-edged sword of pop culture and media as it plays out in the lives of his African American students. Hip hop's lure is evident with teens. Displayed in lifestyle, clothing, music and television programming, it has become a touchstone with African American youth. But, he has also identified the media as part of a larger societal issue bringing to bear generally negative stereotypes of African Americans.

The result of this cultural home and school dissonance is students seeking a sense of belonging while at school. This is one of the purposes of the Lambda Nu Theta boys step team at the school. When the previous year's club sponsor transferred to a different campus, Brad was sought after due to his reputation among the students.

...so they came to me and said, "Mr. Brad, would you sponsor this club?" and the kid who came and asked me, I didn't even know him. He wasn't even one of my students. It was Jesse Reed. He

impressed me so much with his demeanor and his willingness to come up to a complete stranger and talk to me and say, "Hey. I heard about this. I don't know if this is true or not, but we really wanna have a step club here and this is something that could be positive for us." When I got to know these boys, that's when I really found out that virtually every boy that was wanting to be on the step team, they were looking for something to be a part of at the school.

They wanted to contribute to the community, and not only that, but I could tell that a lot of them were looking for a father figure because most of these boys don't have a dad at home. Some of them still have contact with their dads, but it's not always positive contact, and I feel like so many of them are used to seeing an African American male walk out on them. And I wanna show them that that's not how it has to be and hopefully to show them that that's not the kind of man that they should be when they become an adult.

And so I use all my time. I mean heck, before I even came here today, that's where I was at, was with those boys, and I'm with those boys probably seven out of the eight or nine months that we're in school.

Brad goes on to say that he finds mentoring the young men to be fulfilling. He wants to foster the positive contributions the students seek to make through the step team, while allowing them to have a greater sense of belonging on the school campus. Brad places high standards on membership in this step team organization. He feels it is a way to foster leadership skills the students need to be successful at school now and life later.

I tell them every time you put on our step team letters, you represent our whole team and so I said, "I don't care if one person sees you doing something bad or if 100 people see you doing something bad. Not only does that reflect on you, but that reflects on every single one of us who wears those letters, me included, and so I don't wanna be a part of an organization that stands for something negative.

So I try to tell them that people see y'all wearing those jackets. Those jackets are very visible. It's got your name on the back in silver letters, okay? So everybody knows who you are and so when you walk down those halls, a lot of kids wanna be like y'all. They look up to y'all.

Brad utilizes membership in the step team as a means to fostering positive skills in the young men, but more importantly helping give the young men a sense of belonging at school; thereby, mitigating the impact of the dissonance that exists between some of the students' home and school culture.

Mentoring as Care. Brad's connection to the Lambda Nu Theta step team serves as a powerful example of this commitment to the African American students he encounters at work. He exemplifies care through mentoring. Brad builds relationships with students in his classes. He seeks to be not just a teacher in class, but a mentor. As he noted, in spite of living in a middle income area, many of the African American students live in single parent homes. The students may serve as role models to younger siblings they are helping their single parent raise. So, not enough attention is paid to the older children in the house. He demonstrates a deep level of care by the amount of off-contract time he spends available to help students with coursework alongside the step team. Club sponsorships are voluntary and not granted stipends by the school district.

Within his classroom, Brad reports that he holds himself up as an example to the students. He has high expectations for their learning and maintains relationships even when he has to discipline their conduct. He expressed the

importance of disciplining the students as a learning experience and not a punitive measure. This fosters his belief that the students understand that he is trying to teach them about the big themes of life, such as being responsible, not merely missing one homework assignment.

Brad's token economy was showcased by him as a positive construct he uses to engage kids in his class. His thought is that the students respond better to positives, and in life when you do the right thing, you earn positives. So, he has developed a token economy for his classroom. Throughout the six weeks, students earn tickets for a raffle held at the end of the grading period. Brad then bakes the winning student homemade cookies.

Well, okay. So we have of course the polano incentives. Polanos are basically incentive tickets developed by the campus PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support) team. The name is derived from the shield used by Spartan warriors in ancient Greece. Our campus mascot is a Spartan. I do try to use incentives a lot. I've noticed a lot of the times if kids are off task, I don't even have to say anything, I can just go around to the kids who are on task and give them polanos, and all the other kids I've noticed, "Oh, he's giving out polanos," and they'll just get to work just because they wanna get a polano.

I also do a cookie drawing every six weeks where for 25 polanos kids get a ticket and it goes in a little raffle and they can add as many tickets as they want. They stay in there all year, and every six weeks I would draw a name and I'd make them homemade cookies, whatever kind of cookies they want. And oh man, they'll go crazy for that, so they'll really work hard to get polanos.

The positive climate in Brad's classroom has helped him reach some of his more difficult students. He gave a narrative of a student that he reached and in turn received something he needed from the student also.

I can tell you that there was one moment that almost made me cry, and it was with one of my African American students. A couple of years – it must've been two years ago. I had a student in one of my on level classes. Not really a very studious kind of kid.

He had been in and out of trouble quite a lot and when he arrived in my class, a lot of people were telling me, "Oh, watch out for that kid." But despite all the things I was hearing about him, I still tried to go into it with a clear mind and give him the opportunity to show me who he is and I really did build up a pretty good relationship with this young man, to the point where every day he came to my class and I was hearing things from his other teachers about how he behaved, but I never saw those things in my class. He was never disrespectful. He was never late. He was always on time. He turned in his work. He wasn't always stellar on his tests, but at the same time, he still was passing because he was doing everything he needed to do and showing me that he cared.

The last day when we were shutting everything down after the last final and I thought all the kids were gone from the building, but all of a sudden this young man comes knocking on my door. I'm like, "Hey. What are you doing here?" He's like, "Oh, Mr. Brad. I wanted to come and see you because I got you a Christmas present," and I was like, "Really?" He got me this really nice shaving kit, like a Nautica shaving kit. I was just totally blown away because you more so expect the honor students to give you a gift, but not a kid that's in an on level class that you're always hearing bad stuff about. He said, "Oh, I didn't do this for all my teachers, Mr. Brad. I just did it for you because you're my favorite teacher," and so that really touched me and that really made me feel like all right, so I'm doing this for a reason. It recharged my batteries. It was really a good way to end that semester.

I still see him. I mean even now, he actually came to me last year and he was trying to write a book. I was like, "What?" He was like, "Yeah, Mr. Brad. You're always talking about writing and I really like to write, so I started writing a book. I was wondering, could you look at it for me and tell me what you think," and I mean he had this three ring binder with a bunch of notebook paper in it and he was just writing. It was his life story.

That was definitely... – I still see that student. I saw him actually just the other day and every time I see him in the hallway, he still comes and says hi to me.

Building relationships and mentoring students allows Brad to teach decision making skills. Brad believes the students need to learn to think critically and make good decisions. He deems it one of the most important skills necessary to be a success in life. “We should not always tell students what to think, but rather how to reason and make decisions. It will be their ability to make decisions that determine the choices they’ll make in life.” To that end, Brad discusses how good decisions shape his definition of success.

I definitely – at least for the boys on the step team, I always tell them, “You need to pass every class and you need to stay out of trouble, so no discipline issues.” I feel like for any kid, especially an African American kid, but for any kid, if you can make it through high school not failing any classes and staying out of DMC, then you are being successful because yeah, you might not be a straight A student, but that’s okay, because not making straight A’s is not gonna prevent you from being successful in life, you know what I mean?

So, I think that making those conscious decisions – good decision making is what defines success. If you make that decision that I am not gonna be a kid who fails, then you’re gonna be successful. If you make the decision that I am not gonna be one of those kids that’s sitting down in the principal’s office or in DMC, then you’re not gonna be in the principal’s office or DMC because you’re gonna make the right kind of choices that keep you out of there, so that’s what I tried to really do to define success for sure for my step team of students. But even to take it to another level, I would say that that success is really about maintaining a positive image to other people, but also maintaining a positive image for yourself.

Not surprisingly, Brad uses the time he has in his curriculum to make connections and teach decision making skills.

Curriculum Issues. Not surprisingly, Brad has turned his attention to his curriculum more. He has five years teaching experience, has met success with classroom interactions with students and has confronted the End-of-Course state mandated testing system. He isn't pleased with the changes that were made at the district level to the curriculum he is required to teach. Brad suspects that the curriculum was revamped to address the concerns of the EOC testing, but with little regard as to where many students are functioning. He likens the curriculum to a Christmas tree.

I have a bit of a problem with the way that we've changed some things around in our curriculum. Last year we switched from being a regional based course to being a course based on themes, so in the past in geography, when we taught it, we would go through the different regions of the world. I feel is geared towards students who already know a lot about the world, who already know about these different places we're studying or have an idea about what the Middle East is.

Like for example, I always try to compare it to a Christmas tree with no branches. If you've got a Christmas tree with no branches, what are you gonna hang your ornaments on? You can't hang any ornaments on that tree. I mean you could try to hook them on the side of the trunk of the tree, but they're gonna fall right down because there's nothing to hold onto. And so I think we're trying to hang all these – I think we're trying to hang all these real beautiful, big ideas on these kids' minds and they don't have the branches to hold these ornaments. They might have a couple of branches here and there, but it's hard to identify where those branches are and it's certainly hard to grow those branches when it's not worked into the curriculum for us to do that anymore, you know? The curriculum is geared to the test and the test is geared to students that have more exposure and experiences.

I found Brad's analogy to be quite interesting. First, because I know in lower grade levels, those content areas not tested by the state sometimes get

short changed due to teachers attempting to prepare kids for testing. Second, I found the analogy interesting as it relates to Brad's years of experience and the fact that last year was the first time that World Geography had to be measured by a standardized state test. Brad's level of experience predicts that he is now comfortable as a teacher in the classroom and is placing more time into honing his instructional strategies. Also, just like any other content area being tested, students come to class at differing competency levels and the teachers have to address it. The new testing of his content area and supervisors making assumptions about his teaching for the first time based on tests scores may have added stress to Brad's perception of the curriculum.

Brad also considers the need for more technology integration to be paramount. He says that we all walk around with a computer in our front pocket, referring to smartphones, so he has to be innovative. Again demonstrating caring through mentoring, Brad utilized himself and technology to engage a student in some reciprocal teaching, while teaching a life lesson – perseverance.

I had another student my first year teaching and he was a kid that came into one of my worst classes and he was one of the worst students I had. He was the one that when I saw him on my roll, I was just like, "Oh, my God." He didn't follow the rules. He was always in and out of DMC and he ended up failing the class really badly. I thought, "Well, at least he's not gonna be in my class next year. At least somebody else is gonna deal with him. He's not gonna be my problem." - Wow, I guess I can say I've grown too - And then lo and behold the very next year after the first six weeks when all these crazy schedule changes are happening, he gets dropped right back into one of my on level classes again, and I'm like, "Oh, my God. How am I gonna deal with this kid two years in a row?"

But one thing that I knew about him was that he really liked to play video games, because he was always on the PlayStation network playing Call of Duty. He found out that I was playing Call of Duty, he had asked me if I wanted to play. I said, "Okay, sure," and we played against each other online one time and I mean this kid is like a virtuoso at Call of Duty. I told him, "If I could give you a grade for Call of Duty, you would be an honor student."

I thought, "Well, I'm sure that the first time he played this game he wasn't good at it because it's something you have to learn," and now I'm pretty decent at it. I could at least hold my own, but I thought, "That's a good lesson," and I talked to him about it. I said, "Look. You are awesome at Call of Duty. What was it like the first time you played?"

He said, "Oh, man. I got my butt kicked," and I was like, "Yeah. Me too." And I said, "How did you get better?" "Well, I just kept playing." "Okay, so even though you were getting your butt kicked, you just didn't quit. You kept going?" "Mm-hmm." I said, "You could be that way at school too, but you just have to make up your mind that you're not gonna quit and that when things get hard, you're not gonna say, 'Oh, the hell with this,' and just stop. I actually saw, after that, his grades in my class started improving to the point where he passed my class for the year.

Brad's narratives indicate that he is in-touch with his students. He is on his way to being a master at fostering essential relationships to mentor students and teach them. It is through a sense of belonging that his African American students are able to develop into critical thinkers and make good decisions both academically and behaviorally. Decision making is what he deems to be the key to success for these students in the future.

Meet Antonio: Learning Skills to Pay the Bills

Antonio said that he never planned on being a teacher. It was through a friend at church that he was invited to teach a computer science course to the

students at the Catholic school. He was a college student and needed the money. So, “things fell into place.” Antonio is now a forty-something year old Latino/Latino male with 20 years’ experience in the classroom teaching. Currently, he teaches 9th graders Algebra 1. When compared with the students that he teaches, Antonio says he grew up in a more urban setting. Antonio graduated from a major university in central Texas with a Bachelor’s degree in Computer Science. Alternative certification came later after he decided that he would teach as a profession. His experiences teaching are varied. He has taught grade levels kindergarten through ninth in a variety of settings – a private Catholic school, a poor urban school district, Edgewood ISD, and now an urban, middle income district outside Houston, TX.

At Space City High School, Antonio is one of ten Algebra 1 teachers on his team. He says that he feels a ‘sense of urgency’ as it relates to his students learning since Algebra 1 is a gatekeeper course in high school for the students future math and science courses. Antonio feels that he goes the extra mile to help the students by always being available for tutoring and offering encouragement.

Antonio’s interview was the most difficult to schedule. We rescheduled on several different occasions. I also had to work around Antonio’s private tutoring schedule. Unlike the other participants, Antonio was interviewed in his classroom after official hours. He felt traveling to the library would consume his drive time to the private tutoring sessions. When I reached Antonio’s classroom door in the building, he was standing outside with his jacket and briefcase. I asked if he

needed to leave and he indicated that he was actually returning. He was in the parking lot when he remembered I would be arriving to interview him. Once inside the classroom, I noticed that it was neat and orderly. The student desks were in traditional rows. Calculators and student work samples hung on one classroom wall with a white board. Classroom rules, the daily objective and a pre-applied math quadrant were on the white board located at the front of the classroom. The classroom looked minimalist, but not in a scarce way. There weren't any extravagant decorations or posters, but everything had a place and a purpose.

Antonio came across as very hesitant, or nervous, about being involved in the research study. He needed reassurance from me that his answers during the interview would not have any adverse effects on his job. So, I allowed him to ask me questions to alleviate his concerns and we reviewed the study protocols concerning confidentiality. As with each participant, I gave them the interview questions in written form to review and gather their thoughts prior to the interview beginning. Antonio hastily glanced at the questions, then decided that he did not want to write anything on the paper. Again, I wondered whether it was a level of distrust that prompted his actions, or whether he wanted to hurry the interview to go to a private tutoring session. Once involved in the interview, Antonio was engaging, reflective and forthcoming with his answers. He had several narratives that were modest, but testified to his success teaching African American students. Overall, he may not have been comfortable examining himself

and his teaching. I concluded that he hadn't engaged in a significant amount of self-reflection. He conducted his class as he did because in his mind it worked.

Community of Learners. Antonio stated that he likes teaching 9th grade Algebra 1. He connects with the students, "Maybe it's my background, you know, my heart goes out to them. I want to help them achieve." Math wasn't always easy for him, but he had to work at it. Within his classroom, he strives to build a community of learners. He requests to teach the designated sections for students that have been identified as having substantial gaps in their math skills as incoming freshman. Unfortunately, that criteria does speak to him having a large number of African American students in his classroom. "Oh let me see," Antonio reflects, "I'm thinking, I have only one Anglo student. The rest are Black and Latino."

Although Antonio recognizes that the students have struggled with the math content in previous years, he still holds high expectations for their performance. He communicates that to the students on a regular basis.

I'm honest. Yeah. I'm straight with them. I don't try to trick 'em. Will they come out and think on their own, "Okay. He's this and this and this" I don't know. However, if I tell them that something is going to happen it does. They know they must perform on their assignments and test. I also have high standards for conduct. Some would consider me strict, but we respect each other in my class. Set expectations and children will rise to the occasion.

Respect is often a word that is bandied about in educational settings. Teachers demand that the students must demonstrate respect. On the other hand, students, particularly African American students, when experiencing problems

will go back to the issue of feeling disrespected by the teacher in the classroom. As a Latino male teacher, respect is paramount in Antonio's interactions with these students.

To preserve the sense of community Antonio is building within the classroom, parents are frequently enlisted to help with student issues. He feels that African American parents, mothers in particular, are more disciplined, which in turn supports the teacher and learning in the classroom.

Let me just give it a little thought. What I am experiencing, and my personal experience is... I think I see what helps me work with my African American students is that they're a little more respectful or they listen to what I'm telling them. I'm not sure why 'cause I'm not African American, but they seem to listen to what I'm telling 'em and it takes root compared to the Latino students. And I'm not sure why. Is that their strength? It works out to be their strength because they're successful. They're taking to heart what I tell them. Yeah. You know, it's hard to put my finger on that.

I think the Black mom is stricter than the Latino mom. I don't think they take the bull. I don't think they baby their kids the way the Latino mom babies hers. I could be wrong on that, but I've heard that from people in my own ethnic group.

They get that little – that, "Oh, you're the little 'king.' You're the little prince." And they come in here with the same attitude, and it's hard to reach them. But the Black boys, I don't really see that attitude in them. So I think the Black mom is stricter on them. So how does that transfer? Well then they will listen to authority. They'll listen to me. They don't feel like they're 'it', I guess.

Antonio's identity as a Latino male also plays a key role in how he addresses culture and learning in his classroom. It impacts how he delivers instruction and incentivizes students. When I initially inquired about cultural responsiveness in the classroom, he struggled to make the connection for

students. It appeared to me that he was thinking of math as some clean and clinical type course, as in numbers don't have a culture. As we ventured farther into the conversation concerning the curriculum, he is quickly able to give an example for himself and his colleagues.

Let me give you an example. You've heard of Quantum Learning? The academic strategies the district wants us to use to increase student learning. Okay, I'm a Latino man coming out of the barrio, right? I'm 40 years old when I first went to that Quantum Learning, 40 whatever. And here they are doing all of this, in my mind, girly stuff. And I'm thinking, "How do you expect me to buy into that stuff?" And it was pretty much Anglo females, and they loved it. It wasn't me. Well, I don't know what it is. That's part of my culture that the Latino man is not gonna do that. I guess I could change that. I can't see myself, "Okay, guys. Let's give him a big whoosh. Whoosh!!" Or, how about 'spirit fingers'? It's just not me. You know?

This is true for the males in my class too. You see, some things are just like, "I don't think I'm gonna do that. I'm too cool for this." You know, the guys in class, "I'm too cool to do that." Not gonna happen. *[Laughter]* It's not gonna happen. So much of the practices in the school system are White and female. Oh, my gosh! And then when the kids don't react the way they think they should, either they're being disrespectful or they're not wanting to learn. When in actuality it's just that -It's contrary to their - "That's not me." Come on! I can just imagine my friends back in the neighborhood seeing me do that. Oh, my God! They'd die laughing. "Man, what happened to Tony? He's gay." I don't know how I could save face after that. They wouldn't let me live that one down.

Constraints To Learning. Antonio expressed frustration and dislike for the way the current curriculum is organized. He feels it has negative side effects for all students, but more so for students struggling to learning math content.

My first semester in the district, I realized, "Wow. These kids are exposed to a lot under the scope and sequence, but they don't

master any of it.” These high school kids, they don’t have that drill. They don’t have a solid foundation of – I’m talking from a math background – of their mathematic facts. And they suffer. In my opinion, they suffer from that. Mastery, you got it? You can’t spend two days on teaching slope and then move on and they don’t use it again, and then come the test, they’re clueless. Yeah. Here’s the problem of how we do things. Algebra 1s a year-long course. Okay? The EOC problems are highly sophisticated problems. You don’t get that mastery in three weeks or for six weeks. After six weeks, we’re giving ‘em a formative assessment.

We’re expecting them to perform, to understand the depth of these questions in only six weeks, when really those questions should be asked at the end of the year. The district’s rationale, is we’ve got to expose ‘em to the questions. We gotta let ‘em see the questions over and over and over before the test. But they’re not at that level of sophistication to answer those questions after 6 weeks, after 12 weeks. So we expose ‘em to a lot of material very fast, but it’s not in depth.

Antonio has specific strategies that he incorporates in his classroom to make up for the perceived issues with the curriculum. He condenses content in the curriculum and spirals skills back in that he knows the students have not mastered. “ I know what I have to cover and I do it in a way that’s gonnna work.” He supplements what is provided with his own daily quizzes, additional textbook materials and worksheets for practice. Antonio also laments the fact that the district does not encourage the use of the purchased textbook. He feels if not for the teachers, it should be provided to parents that are often leery of helping their high school students with math homework.

Real world examples of the use of Algebra are something that Antonio continues to develop. He isn’t overly enthusiastic about much of what is seen in pop culture with teenagers, but he recognizes the need to help them figure out

how learning Algebra will help them later in life. Therefore, he is always on the hunt for examples he can find related to sports, hip hop music, movies, fashion and trends he sees in the hallways. We try to find practical applications to their world.

When it comes to motivating students to perform, he uses daily quizzes which are quick reinforcers of one skill from the previous day. They do count as part of the students' class average. Antonio uses it to breed a feeling of success for students that have already decided that they are not good at math. The technique was the beginning of positives for one student making poor decisions.

You remember Quincy Smith? He sticks out in my mind. He was the kid that had teachers terrified of him, and he and I butted heads in the beginning a couple of times. I even sent him out of class a couple of times. And then once he made that first hundred on a quiz, I told him, "You see, Quincy, if you just work." One thing I do is I give a quiz every day, and I grade 'em quick. You know, two or three problems on the board during the last seven minutes. I grade while they're working on 'em,

I'm walking around and I've put a check on each correct answer. So immediate feedback, and they love that success, "I got these right. Okay. Let's get another 100 tomorrow." So I think what worked with him because he loved that immediate feedback and, "I'm getting it. I'm really getting it by myself." A genuine success. That started turning him around. But he failed first time I had him, first year I had him, but the next year when he came back, I don't know if you remember him, straight A's. He made up his mind and did it.

Antonio has used the concept of personal graphing to show students their progress. He reports that it has been helpful. He goes to his file cabinet and shows me a set for one of his classes.

The kids don't really see the big picture. 'Cause once they get the test back and they throw it away or whatever, it's done in their mind. And so I like the way you graph that, so now they could actually see their progress. You know how I hit that, because, like you said, right now they come in here with a preconceived notion that's been developed over years. Their own history to prove it, "I'm no good at math." So I started thinking I need their own history to counter it, so that's how I started with graphs.

So I use their own personal history, "Hey, this is you," and slowly they started transforming. And my best one, Derrick knew he was low, but you know what he didn't see? And the kids went like, "Wow." Said, "Look, Derrick, if you look at the overall trend, you're getting better." A visual record makes a difference in their perception and performance. By the way, I show 'em this chart, "Look, this is when we started and then look." And it's been a struggle with them. The kids have individual charts and we keep a class chart of test averages. What a difference it makes.

Between this and my Top 10 each six weeks, the students stay pretty motivated. The Top 10 is just a list of students whose names is displayed after each test. No grades are posted, but names of the top performers. They actually what to see if they performed well enough to make the list.

Skills for Success. Antonio believes the students must develop work and study habits to have life-long success. Although the students' desks were in traditional rows at the time of our interview, he says that the students are able to work in different groupings when they demonstrate to him that they can manage their behavior and stay on task reasonably well. Antonio uses the teenage students' natural desire to work in social groups to his advantage.

Learning soft skills such as teamwork and communication, for the workplace, coupled with having good work habits will ensure a student's future success. When discussing what constitutes success for many of his students,

Antonio uses the example of a former student, DeAndre that made an attitude adjustment which paid off for him.

Well, I'd probably have to say success – where were you last year, and where did you end this year? So if you made a 10 percent or a 20 percent gain, right there that was a success. But not only that. See, you're not gonna turn 'em around in one year, but if you can sort of get their attitude in the right direction, then that's gonna pay off next year and the year all after that. So that's success. Not only academic growth but the attitude in the right direction.

Good work habits. There, that's gonna turn into success for them later. Not only the increase from where they were last year. You're not gonna expect someone who scored in the very last lower three standard deviations down to jump to the other spectrum. But if he jumps one standard deviation, okay, then you're going the right direction. If he can develop some work habits or some good attitudes over the course of the year and keep 'em personal, then that's success too. If you had a good year – I mean 'cause good habit can have a big influence. You know? So I would put it in terms of character building or personal habits, good habits, and then growth.

But you just can't look at the growth. You know, you have to look at things that are gonna produce it. Over the next – their whole life. You know, another way I've been thinking of how to present it to my kids is it's really your bad habits making you fail. It's not that you don't have the talent. It's your bad habits that are causing you to fail these classes. Like going tardy to class, never doing homework, going to bed too late, not eating. You know? A lot of bad habits contribute to that failure, and a lot of them are personal bad habits. You know, so to help them realize that, just to grow, that's education.

To me, that would be a successful year if you could get rid of one or two bad habits and acquire one or two good habits. That would make a difference.

I would say – and I've tried stuff like this, but like, "Okay, what can I do? How am I accountable? This year I'm gonna go to tutorials one time a week. I'm never gonna be late. I'm gonna try my hardest never to skip or be absent." All of those.

And then some of them tell me – let me say a name. You know Jamal Harris? I had him three years in Algebra 1. You know what he told me his first two years? “Jamal, your homework?” “I don’t do homework, Mr. Antonio.” Okay. Second year, “Jamal, your homework?” “I don’t do homework.” By the third year he realized that bad habits killed him. We’re friends. Him and I, we talk often. I said to him, “Remember when you were like that?” I said, “That habit is killing you, Jamal. That attitude you have, ‘I don’t do homework,’ that’s killing you. You’re gonna have to do homework your whole life.” So just that one little attitude changed his outcome.

Antonio’s insistence that students’ mastery of his curriculum objectives is paying big dividends. He implements supports such as performance graphing, Top 10 listings and use of real world applications are moving his reluctant students along. Antonio didn’t initially relate culture to learning, which was interesting. He could see it for himself, but didn’t take the understanding another degree further to understand the students.

Bayou City High School

Bayou City High School neighbors Space City High School. The building is generally clean and some much needed cosmetic changes have given a renewed sense of pride to the students. A subliminal acknowledgement of the diversity in the school can be seen through the flags of world countries hung throughout the cafeteria area. Noteworthy is the fact that the new principal is a young, African American male. Teachers report that he has high expectations of the students and has worked on building relationships with many of the more difficult youth. Overall, the general climate in the building is polite and hurried. Visitors are welcomed cordially, but not necessarily warmly.

Bayou City High School has a mature staff. They make it a point to communicate with parents. Parents are kept abreast of school happenings through their active email notification system, frequently updated website and school marquee. The principal and other school administrators are willing to try new avenues to reach students. This past year, they implemented a ninth grade center. The administration's hope is to catch students, particularly African American students, before they 'fall through the cracks", or start the spiral of repeating coursework. Bayou City High School met standards on the state's standardized STAAR End-of-Course exams. The school promotes student achievement and their recent valedictorian was an African American female student.

Meet Monica: 'Warm Demander' in Action

Teaching was not her first career, but it has become her passion. Monica is a 50+ year old African American woman. She has 15 years' experience teaching 9th grade English 1. Monica reports that her upbringing is very similar to the students that she teaches. She grew up in a suburban school setting. Monica holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and worked in the Oil & Gas industry before becoming alternatively certified to teach school.

At Bayou City High School, Monica is one of eight English 1 teachers and has experience teaching advanced, or accelerated, courses as well as on-level courses. Monica knows her way around the English curriculum. She is a mentor

teacher to her new colleagues. Upper-level English teachers report that they can identify Monica's former students because of their well-developed writing skills.

Our initial meeting was scheduled at the local library. Monica was at the library when I arrived for our interview at approximately 3:45pm. She was already seated in the reserved study room. I informed her about the location through our email communications. She appeared to be prepared with a neat set of papers and a folder stacked in front of her. As I entered the room, she was very warm and friendly; offering a smile and extending her hand. Monica was relaxed and ready to talk. As I prepared the audio recorder and asked if she had any questions concerning the process, Monica repeatedly said that she was happy that I was researching African American students. She also was inquisitive as to what I intended to do with the research findings after the doctoral program was completed. She offered the suggestion that I develop some type of professional development workshop for teachers because she believed many of them needed a clear picture of working with the students in the classroom.

Care Approach. Monica places care at the core of student relationships. Care plays a major role in Monica's interactions with the students. She feels African American students thrive in environments where they know the teacher wants them to be successful. She feels that is lacking in the public schools now. Teachers are more focused on content material and not reaching the whole child. Monica tells students that she is in their corner, "Hey, I am somebody who cares about you. You've got somebody that believes in you and expects you to succeed."

Monica's belief is that children sense when adults don't care. "The students know when you're pretending." As a result of the lack of care, the students act out in class or don't put much effort into their learning.

Monica's care also encompasses a high level of expectations. During the first few days of school, each year, she guides the class in creating a mission statement, or pledge, that they recite at the beginning of the class period. It requires them to strive for excellence. It is through the mission statement that Monica feels she has the most success with holding the students accountable for their efforts and behavior. The crux of the pledge is excellence and that standard of excellence extends beyond her classroom.

When I see them in the hall, when I see them in the stores, I'm always watching and I'm always expecting them to be students of excellence. We commit. I do too. And if you ever see me out anywhere and I'm not upholding what we agreed to you have a right to call me on it. So this is what I do because I want them to know that – academics is more than just – I mean it's the whole self. It involves the whole self. We recite that aloud every morning, every single period before we even get started. It's our classroom mission statement. It's not the school's because we do have a school mission but I like to have something more personal for the class and I hold my students accountable and my expectations are high. My expectations are that they are successful and they excel. You don't have to be perfect. There is no perfect person but we can all do whatever we do in an excellent manner and that's what I expect of them.

Monica expresses to her students that she holds them to a high level of expectation because she cares and wants them to grow. She wants them to be ready to meet the world. Although this mission statement is in place, success is not merely defined by the grade of an A in her class. Monica defines success for

her students as growth. She wants to meet them where they are academically and move them forward. The letters the students write at the beginning of the year is an example she uses to show the students their growth, both academically in English and personally as soon to be young adults.

Identifying With Your Students. As we continued to talk before the interview Monica shared that she was busy because she worked two jobs and was also the primary caregiver for her mother whose health was declining due to dementia. She said that a neighbor called her mobile phone while she was in class that very day to tell her that her mother had left the house. She expressed concern that she was going to need to find a health care professional for her mother while she worked. Monica also indicated that her class expressed concern for her and her mother. She said, "I don't tell them all my personals, but some of my pains and hurts to let them know I'm human, I'm real. This is what's going on with me. I'm a human being. I'm vulnerable just like you."

This is the beginning of a journey Monica takes with her students each fall semester. She begins by creating a bond, forming a relationship. The first day of school after Monica introduces herself, she asks each of her students to write her a letter about themselves. They could tell her about their accomplishments and success, or past pains and hurts. The students can share anything that may be going on at home. She asks the students to tell her how she can help each of them be successful in her English 1 class. In turn, Monica responds to each letter with a comment. She returns the letters for her students to see her handwritten

comments. She keeps the letters with her throughout the year. Near the end of the school year, she gives the letter to the students a final time and asks them to reflect on their growth that school year. She says it is amazing what children will share with her. She feels forging a bond is critical and brings reluctant students along for the ride in her class, even if they don't like to read.

Cultural Responsiveness and Rigor. In order to support her students' success, Monica structures the learning environment and becomes the 'bridge' some students need to access the curriculum. This is a result of her own interactions with teachers when she was a student in school. The majority of her teachers were Anglo and the examples given during their lessons related to their lives and what they did outside of school. Therefore, Monica noted that many times she didn't necessarily relate to what her teachers were talking about. As a result, her focus with her students is to ensure that she reaches their level of understanding during class discussions and make the material relevant to them.

Not only is relevance an essential part of her classroom, but rigor is also. Monica provides opportunities for students to engage with rigorous content and increasingly rigorous performance standards. Monica denounces her colleagues concerns about the need to limit access to rigorous coursework to a select few students. She considers it apathetic on the teachers' part. Monica notes, "In my opinion, they don't want to work that hard." New students to Monica's class with no prior experience in advanced level course work are put through a 'bootcamp'. She says, "We've got to mold and shape those kids. We have to teach them about

work ethics. That's my philosophy because they are not all naturally hard workers." When a student is uncertain, Monica will call home and tell the parent that the child wants to leave the class due to the level of rigor required, but she thinks that the child should be able to perform well. Monica enlists the parent to work with her on the child staying in the course and getting the work done. Typically, the call is well received because the parents like to hear that their children are able to handle challenging coursework.

Molding and shaping the students in Monica's class includes empowering students to lead the class. Students feel their knowledge is valued because of reciprocal teaching opportunities. She notes that no one student is an expert on everything and therefore, students are able to teach each other and teach her. Monica's classroom is a safe place to share knowledge. The use of technology in learning is one such area. Monica acknowledges that using technology is an area that she struggles with in the classroom. Therefore, she encourages students to show her how to incorporate more technology into the classroom. The students are empowered by teaching Monica and their critical thinking skills are nurtured because they have to research resources related to classroom standards being taught.

Just as Monica is very aware of the need to spotlight students' knowledge, she is also aware of the need for students to demonstrate their knowledge at a level that is more than superficial. By incorporating multiple modalities in lesson delivery and offering a variety of products to demonstrate mastery, Monica taps

into the students' learning styles. Addressing the students' learning styles during instruction allows for increased rigor and more accurate assessment of learning.

Those students that show a lack of motivation earn Monica's attention quickly. She generally works with the students, on things such as goal-setting, but she also involves parents early and often to help her with unwanted, detrimental actions, both academically and behaviorally. Monica considers the parents allies. She asserts,

Trying to establish a relationship with parents and at home has been my big, big effort since I've been teaching. I call home and introduce myself to the parents of those kids [lackadaisical] so that we can establish that relationship right off. I can see at that point if I'm gonna have mom and dad on my side or not so, I know how I'm going to deal with those chatty, unfocused students. I get to know right off the bat. I call and say, I need you to help me with this. I need you to be onboard with me.

Factors Outside the Classroom. As Monica noted, she engages parents in their children's education. When she is able to garner the support of the parents to reinforce the need to work toward positive outcomes in her English course, the benefits are tremendous for the student. In those rare cases when parents are unresponsive, she does believe that it makes her job more challenging. Monica offered that sometimes students are living with extended family members and that could be a difficult situation also. In cases where parental support is not at a sufficient level, she attempts to forge a relationship with the student and gather support on campus through other teachers, coaches or administrators that may know the student.

Another critical factor outside the classroom that Monica discussed as possibly impacting the success of African American students in her classroom is their sometimes limited exposure and life experiences. She says, “I have some African American students who are sharp. They’re brilliant. Then I have some who don’t have access to some the things that the brilliant kids do and so it’s a process [to provide supports for success].” Monica concluded that some of the exposure and life experiences are related to the timing of the parents/guardians acquiring middle income status. The kids from families that just reached middle income status have fewer traditionally considered middle income experiences.

Mitigating the effects from limited access to resources, dealing with other negative factors, demonstrating care or cultivating learning opportunities within the curriculum, Monica shows herself to be skillful in teaching African American students. She identifies and cares for the African American students that she teaches. She feels her students respond positively to her because she is understanding and positive. Monica focuses her efforts on reaching to whole child and not just her subject content. Therefore, the students are safe emotionally and intellectually to make choices and stretch themselves. Monica has demonstrated to the students that her expectations are not punitive, but rather learning moments. Her tenacious, hard-working attitude is demonstrated through the class mission toward excellence. Monica saturates her teaching with culturally responsive strategies that foster achievement.

Meet Steve: *In Loco Parentis*

Athletic coaches often have an advantage when building rapport with students. Such is the case with Steve. He is a 50+ year old African American male. He currently teaches U.S. History. Steve's experience includes 22 years in both what is considered inner-city urban and suburban districts around the Houston area. Along the way, Steve has also been a football coach, a track & field coach and a wrestling coach since 1990. Steve holds a generalist Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts. He had to return to school to become certified to teach. He recently completed a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from the University of St. Thomas in hopes of moving into an administrative position.

At Bayou City High School, Steve is a special education teacher. He works in a classroom with a general education teacher implementing the co-teach model for service delivery. His team of teachers is heavily experienced and has a positive outlook on student learning and engagement. As a special education teacher, Steve says he knows the importance of not just conveying information, but making it relevant to the student. He believes that his job is to move students forward and make them work hard.

Outside the classroom, Steve has the advantage of seeing the students perform in the areas of their strengths. The students are generally good or like the sport that they compete in at school. Steve feels it is through coaching that he becomes a mentor to many students. Although Steve and his wife have no

biological children, he feels he has assumed the role of father in many situations along the way.

Steve arrived at our interview a few minutes late. I could see that he had been in the gym prior to his arrival. He entered the study room at the local library hurriedly. He seemed genuinely happy to meet me. We had communicated about his participation in the research study several times by email and cell phone prior to the meeting. I opened the discussion for Steve to ask me any questions concerning my research or background. He appeared very curious, but also forthcoming concerning his education, family, and experience working with African American students. After we reviewed the protocols for the research study, I gave Steve the chance to preview the questions for the interview. Steve was very detailed in his written answers, instead of taking notes to jog his memory during the conversational style interview. This perception proved to be true, as Steve was the most detailed and lengthy of all interviewees thus far.

In Loco Parentis. Steve openly discussed growing up in a two parent household and the fact that he had strong family ties. Steve takes the role of parenting seriously and laments the fact that so many students, particularly African American students, grow up in single parent households. When there is only one parent or not an active parent, Steve calls upon himself to stand in the gap and become that surrogate parent. This is also apparent in his coaching. Steve is able to readily share narratives of how his surrogate parenting style helped students succeed.

I had one student last year, he was a football player of mine, real good student, and he broke his collarbone in a game, and it was right at the beginning of the season. It was his senior year and he broke his collarbone so that really messed with him emotionally, and he felt like that was gonna mess up his opportunity to go to college. He was a good student academically though. One of the things that I would do with him though, I would always go and pick him up. I picked him up in the morning time.

He lived a fairly decent distance away and I would go pick him up every morning and he had his brace on and everything like that and we would drive to school and he'd say, "Coach, you know something?" I said, "What?" "You know you treat me better than my daddy." I said, "What do you mean?" "Coach, my daddy wouldn't even do this for me." I said, "What are you talking about, man?" "You treat me better than my daddy. You are just like my daddy." I said, "You really mean that?" He said, "I do."

When he graduated last year he sent me a big picture and his mother sent me a card and told me, "My son would not have probably graduated had it not been for you standing in the gap for him." Then she sent me a card that says, "In Daddy's shoes." The card said that and I thought that was pretty special.

Steve drifted in and out of the interview session for a few minutes, recalling his parental relationship with students he's had along the way. "Oh wait, I have another one. You know, kids I've helped along the way."

....I think that's what drives me to do what I do with my kids, especially my athletes and especially my kids in the classroom. I treat my kids in the classroom just like they're my athletes. I care for them just like that. I care for them because I don't have any children. My wife and I, we were not fortunate enough to be blessed with kids. I think it's that extra in me that looks at them in a different way. When I see them I want them to succeed, and I don't want them to fail, I really don't. I want them to succeed and make it.

I've had people tell me, "Had you had some children you probably wouldn't be the teacher or the person you are," and I said I beg to

differ on that. I don't know about that. I wonder about that though, I really do. There's one incident though that I was grateful for. Then I had another kid that graduated in 1994. My mother-in-law was in the hospital for breast cancer surgery and this was a student that I had taught in '94. This was 2006 when I saw this student. He saw me and he said, "Oh, Coach", and he came up and just grabbed and hugged me.

I hadn't seen him in about 12-15 years maybe. I guess it was, it was longer than that, and when I saw him I had my wife with me and my mother-in-law. She was in a wheelchair. We were getting ready to take her in, and he took care of everything. He did everything, took care of everything, and then he came out and told my wife, "*Ms. Steve*, I want you to know right now what he did for me and all of us, how he was always there teaching and preaching and stressing high expectation and go to school and make it and dare to dream and work for what you want to have." That former student, he's actually a coach and a teacher right now."

Parents as Partners. Steve feels when the parents are actively engaged in their child's educational progress, the child internalizes it as important. It shows up in the attendance of academic nights and Open House sessions, returned phone calls and a more respectful attitude from the students. Steve seeks out parents as partners in setting high expectations for learning, fighting negative pop culture images and helping students reject negative peer pressure.

"Communication is key. The lack of communication with the home will cause more problems than it's worth. I call parents when their children aren't performing, but unlike many other teachers, I make sure to call when they do something good at school too. The parents will work with you if they know you want their children to win." Steve's belief is derived from a sense of care. He says, "If you show genuine care for that child and the parent knows that you've the

genuine care for their children, they'll back you up 100 percent. It's just that relationship that the teacher builds."

Steve believes that so much pop culture and social media is undermining the African American students' images of themselves. Therefore, parents and role models must provide an alternative to the reality shows, cyber bullying and narcissism that the students are being fed continually. Steve is trying to find the balance because this is not the first generation of students that adults thought were off-track socially. He says, "Don't get me wrong, I know you've got to reach them to teach them, but these kids are using technology for social fun and entertainment, not any productivity. Their curriculum is on the laptops, but they don't access it enough."

Steve feels this is negatively impacting too many of the African American students that don't typically apply themselves in class. "...because you're afraid to look smart in class or in front of your peers, you're hurting yourself. I tell them to quit sitting back and quitting. Dare to be intelligent, because society has conditioned African Americans through culture to think that we're not smart. That stigma needs to go...and it isn't acting White! They don't want to appear to be academically gifted. It's almost like it's not cool to be smart. The kids lose street cred. I have to encourage kids that are doing just enough to get by, when I know they are much smarter." The mission to reach the students influences Steve's instructional practices in the classroom.

Instructional Scaffolding. Steve's primary job is that of a special education teacher. Therefore, he is charged with implementing a variety of instructional strategies to reach his students. He shared that the strategies are good teaching practices for general education students as well. To aid in providing support for the students, Steve and his co-teacher administer an abbreviated version of a Learning Styles inventory. He says that it gives insight to the teachers, but more importantly to the students. "These kids think that they can be on Facebook or Twitter with an iPod in their ear and still comprehend their assignment. This allows a springboard for that discussion. "Now, sometimes, we do play music while they are working in groups or independently. But, they need to recognize when they are not understanding the lesson."

The inventory allows Steve to get to know the students individually. This is quite a feat since secondary teachers typically see between 120-150 students daily. Steve uses it to support the special education students and the general education teacher gets a gist of the learning modalities in the classroom each period. It also allows for the scaffolding of instruction within the classroom. "All assignments can't be out of the book. They don't learn like that. That is the way we learned, but these new kids don't learn that way. They have laptops and iPads and cell phones, a book is almost a foreign object to them for information. Sometimes, I want to let those that have a case of 'learned helplessness' fall, so they will try harder. But, I don't. I provide a hard copy of the assignment and

modify it in some way. It's a balancing act. When is too much support for some of the SPED (special education) kids?"

Steve seeks out opportunities to supplement the curriculum and add cultural relevance to the lesson when possible. He is surprised by the number of African American students that seem to know so little about African American history. On a particular part of the curriculum he noted the students' discomfort, but also how relevancy was integrated:

Now when we're talking about history we're talking about African Americans history. It's very little if anything in U.S. history that is positive as it relates to African Americans. I would say for the most part it can be quite stressful for the kids, especially when you see images of the 1920's, images of the 1950's, images of the mid- to late 60's when kids have to really see the truth.

To them, it's like, what's positive? Where is the good for us? And I have noticed though, as we delve into those particular periods of history that our kids almost in some respects shut down. Absolutely, it's embarrassing because even for me it's embarrassing. For me as the person that I am, it's almost like, how did we let that happen? I get those kinds of questions. "They better not try that now. Coach, what would you do?" Then I bring in conversations about the positive things African Americans have done in the United States.

"Look, I know it might be painful and I know it might be embarrassing and I know it might be a whole lot of things, but it's the truth. You need to know what has transpired, where you come from, and now you can understand why it's so important for you to get an education, 'cause education is power."

Another area Steve sees a need for students is that of what the workforce calls soft skills. To aid the students in developing the skills such as a teamwork, communication and problem-solving, the students work in small groups within

the classroom. The groups are there for support as well as celebrating achievements. Every three weeks, the groups are switched. Steve believes it helps the students know everyone in class which fosters a greater sense of community. It is common for Steve to tell groups that are struggling in some fashion, "You have to learn to work with people." This greater sense of community also is believed to ensure students attend school and not skip his History class.

Daily class attendance is one expectation that Steve places on his students. His secret to getting students working up to his expectations is that he fosters relationships and shows care. "Once students get to know you, they will come around. You've got to foster that relationship. If you care about them as a person, they'll do anything in the world for you." For those students that don't meet expectations, or work within the structure and boundaries of his classroom, Steve goes back to the parent component in a little more personal way. He starts making home visits.

"As I said, I do interact with the parents. I call their mothers, I call their fathers, I call their grandfathers, I call their grandmothers. They know me. I have done home visits. I actually will go to their house, bring their grades, bring their folders, bring all the work that they have not done, bring it to their house and tell their mom or their parents or their caregivers, "This is where we are. I'm trying to get them to pass. We're not giving anything away but she's going to have to work. She's going to have to make her way. She might as well learn that now. If not, I can't guarantee that we can help her to be successful academically, and I know your ultimate goal is for her to graduate. You'd be surprised too. They'll come back to school

and tell it. They will tell other students that you came to their house. Then the other ones will start complying.”

Steve truly takes responsibility for his students’ learning. He willingly takes on the role of a surrogate parent in that context. He describes himself as being caring and empathetic and sees himself as a positive role model for too many students that see negative images of African Americans too often in the media. His work as a special education teacher has made him value fairness, which he says does not mean treating everyone the same. Steve believes that bringing in culturally relevant and real world examples expands his students learning. He is high-energy in the classroom working to create a community of learners. Steve is sure to try to foster parent communication and support. He takes a proactive approach to their involvement that does not mean that a student must be failing, or demonstrating behavioral issues, to get a phone call. Academically or athletically, Steve wants to see the students meeting high expectations.

Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Care. Care was a dominant theme throughout all of the interviews. Each of the teacher participants indicated that they cared for the students in some way. It was of particular interest that Cheryl, who is White, defined care differently from the other four participants. Cheryl’s concept of care was discussed through programs and supports provided to the students to help them be successful academically. Monica, Brad, Antonio and Steve, who are all people of color,

referred to care as the relationships they developed with students that supported the students being successful academically.

Teacher-student relationships and efficacy levels of the teachers were impacted by the concept of care. As teachers showed more care for students, the students reciprocated and put forth the effort to successfully work in class. The success of the students then influenced the level of efficacy felt by the teachers. It became cyclical in nature.

Parental Involvement. Four of the five participants identified the involvement of parents as a major theme. All the teachers made regular telephone contact and Steve would also conduct home visits. During the calls and visits, the teachers said they gained insight into family dynamics and outside interests of the students. The calls concerned both academics and behavior. Monica noted that she likes to have her first call be a positive call home to the parents as a welcome to class and joining partnership for she and the parents to ensure the child is successful academically.

The teachers looked to the parents as partners with the understanding that their African American students academic identity was formed and supported by many others outside of school personnel. African American students generally have a less circumscribed network of intimates. That network serves as a reinforcement to the belief that education is important.

Educational Approach. The teachers each spoke as if they were on a mission. The mission should not draw a negative connotation, i.e. they are playing

savior for Black students. Rather, it is comprised of a vision, with hope, of what they believe their African American students can achieve. Monica, Cheryl, Steve, Brad and Antonio each were purposeful in their interactions. They taught like they knew they impacted lives beyond high school.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Four of the five participants acknowledged that they utilized culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms; each to a varying extent. The reasons given included: the curriculum was too focus on standardized testing and not enough on the existing level of knowledge from children according to Brad. Monica wanted to ensure her students related their Shakespearean text to their more contemporary lives. Cheryl said that the kids had no ties to Great Britain. The students had the same level of connection reading Japanese literature. Cheryl felt that the more affluent parents at other campuses wanted to feel like their children were reading the 'classics'. Therefore, district level administrators did not want to go against the politically active parents. Finally, Steve uses CRP to enhance and correct the history being presented in textbooks. Steve noted that during the spring semester, when the Civil Rights Movement is taught, he can augment the lesson due to life experiences.

"Life" Skills. As demonstrated by the differing educational approaches developed of the teachers, each teacher's perceptions of what it will take for an African American student to be successful is character trait driven. Apparent in the analysis was that the teachers felt more than just academic acknowledge

created success in life. The development of self, of a moral compass, would lead the African American students to attaining material things; which is what many people measure success by. Honing soft-skills such as being a team player, being a problem-solver, being polite, being punctual, using effective communication skills and displaying self-confidence are what the teachers feel will make students marketable and competitive.

Further Review of Participants

This study was not designed to guarantee such diversity among the participants. As it worked out, it provided for rich insight as to what successful teachers are doing to cultivate learning opportunities for their African American students. The participants in the study were three males and two females. This was interesting because the school system is predominantly populated by females. The men each talked about being available to the students outside of the classroom for additional support. Brad and Steve served in mentoring roles, as an organization sponsor and coach respectively. Antonio provided extra tutoring before and after school.

The participants' age and experience level correlated easily. Four of the five participants were middle aged with at least a decade of work experience in the classroom. The outlier in the comparison was Brad. He was younger, in his mid-twenties, with five years' experience in the classroom. His age was an asset in that he was able to more easily relate to the teenage students that he taught. Brad was very aware of the television shows, movies, video games and music that

interested students. It fostered his ability to build relationships with students. Age and experience level also was on display during the interviews when classroom management was the topic. Brad was the most laid back in his approach to maintaining his classroom climate. The other participants were more inclined to discuss the structure and rules they had in place. As a teacher of five years, Brad was the only participant that utilized a token economy within his classroom and student management was a conspicuous thought. The more experienced teachers cast an air that they were confident and held positions of authority within their classrooms.

Of the five participants, only one taught in a STEM area. He was an Algebra 1 teacher. Two teachers taught English and two teachers taught social studies. This does not bode well for African American students in the areas of math and science. There are far fewer African American students that connect and excel in the content areas of math and science. Anecdotally, I have found that STEM teachers in high school are heavily engaged in their subject area, but sometimes forget that they teach children, not content. Not that all STEM teachers are less emotionally accessible to students, but they generally have a more direct approach to teaching and their class. In contrast the content areas of English and social studies more readily lend themselves to the cultural attributes prescribed by Boykin such as communalism and orality.

Race served as another factor in the diversity of the study participants. There were two African American teachers, one European American teacher, one

Latino/Latino teacher and one teacher that identified as biracial. Interestingly, the teachers' race appeared to become a factor when examining the cultural capital African American students brought to their classrooms. The African American teachers were able to more quickly and clearly identify the strengths the students possessed and the areas that needed improvement. The African American teachers were able to more easily differentiate African American students in middle income homes versus those whose families were economically disadvantaged in their classrooms. However, the biracial teacher also demonstrated more insight than the White or Latino teacher.

In contrast to the diversity of the participants, there were numerous commonalities among the findings related to each research question. In relation to research question one, which sought to identify personal characteristics of the successful teachers, all of the participants described themselves as being caring in some variation. Words such as understanding, compassionate and empathetic were given as synonyms. Two participants used the word positive to describe themselves, and the same for the word funny. Other words given by successful teachers include excellent, hard-working, knowledgeable, passionate, tolerant, calm, high-energy, fair, honest and relatable. Among the five participants, Brad used three words common to the other teachers.

In response to research question two where teachers were asked to describe what they do and how they interpret those actions that foster learning opportunities for African American students, the participants' reflections included

establishing relationships with students to demonstrate care, setting high expectations for students performance, using real-life examples for the application of concepts, teaching life-long skills and seeking parents as partners in their child's learning.

The learning opportunities nurtured by the participants in their classrooms helped to actualize each teacher's definition of successful academic and affective learning outcomes for African American students. Research question three purposed to discover the results. Each of the teacher participants indicated that their most immediate goal was the students passing their classes and graduating from high school. They also indicated that college would be the logical next step. As degreed people, teachers responding that a college degree would be considered a successful learning outcome fit the model of a successful K-16 experience. Only two of the five teachers also indicated that joining the workforce after graduation would be acceptable as a successful learning outcome. None mentioned the military as an alternative to success. More general responses that point to successful affective outcomes include students becoming adults that expose themselves to new experiences, give back to society, learn to become self-advocates, practice good decision making skills, learn soft skills for the workforce and date to challenge themselves to dream big.

Summary

From this group of identified teachers, the research study sought to allow us to "hear the muted voices" of successful teachers of African American students.

It permitted us to hear the counter-story to African American student failure that is so prominent in the research. These teachers all believed that African American students can achieve academically at high levels. Therefore, they set high expectations in their classrooms. The teachers communicated care to the students through varying degrees of relationship. They knew each student and worked with them individually when needed. The successful teachers had a high level of efficacy. The teachers' efficacy impacted student classroom success, which then impacted the level of efficacy of the teachers. It became a positive cycle. Finally, the teachers had a sense of mission. Each teacher had an approach that taught the children a 'life skill'. These 'life skills' helped to develop the students' character for life beyond high school. They taught the African American students with the belief that academic knowledge and learning are important life-long skills that would place the students' lives on an upward trajectory.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and there are as few as there are any other great artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.

John Steinbeck

Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important factor.

Bill Gates

I began this qualitative research study to examine the beliefs and practices of successful teachers of African American students in an urban, middle income school district. One-third of all African American children now live in suburban areas (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005), yet most of the research concerning African American students' success, and failure, has been related to children attending schools in areas concentrated by low income earning families. Researchers (Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005; Gosa & Alexander, 2007; Sampson, 2007) have also found that even African American students in solidly middle income school settings are not achieving at the same level as their European American peers. Their work suggests that race, not parental income level, is a more salient factor in academic success. Since I know a successful teacher is at the core of student performance in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Haycock & Hanushek, 2010), and the effects of a good teacher can be realized in student performance levels for multiple years (Sanders & Horn, 1995; Sanders, 2000) the insight given

to us by successful teachers of African American students is invaluable forward improving practice.

A teacher's practices are influenced by their beliefs surrounding diversity, cultural capital, deficit thinking and levels of efficacy which all impact their effectiveness with the students. Successful teachers of African American students demonstrate efficacious teaching in the classroom. They believe their students are capable of learning at high levels of rigor. The teachers appreciate and use the cultural capital that the students bring into the classroom, which enables a caring community of learners to develop. Children feel nurtured, but also held to task for learning. Successful teachers of African American students have been coined "warm demanders" (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). It is typical for this teaching disposition to be effective with Black students from low-income and middle-income levels because it is grounded in the child's culture and not the amount of money earned by their parents.

With this information as a backdrop, the study allowed the counter-stories told by these successful teachers to be heard. The following research questions were given in chapter one as a guide for the focus of this study: How do teachers describe their personal characteristics that contribute to the success of their African American students? How do successful teachers exercise and interpret their acts of cultivating classroom learning opportunities for African American students? What do successful teachers describe as academic and affective

learning outcomes that produce further success in their African American students?

This chapter will demonstrate answers to the research questions that were found through the intersection of the theoretical frameworks with the emergent themes. Next, the recommendations for the practice and recommendations for future research will be presented. The chapter will conclude with the impact of limitations on my findings and the summary.

In Relation to Theoretical Framework

I utilized the frameworks of Ethic of Care and Equity Pedagogy to structure my research study. Open-ended protocol questions were developed based on need to delve deeply into the narrative answers provided by the participants. The use of narratives and counter-stories allow us to gain greater understanding of what is required to be considered a successful teacher of African American students and what did the teachers understand as the impact of their instructional practices to be in the classroom.

The Ethic of Care framed my questions to discover what type of teacher-to-student interactions occurred with the successful teachers of African American students. Better insight was gained when I examined the teacher-student dialogues and understanding of the students on a personal level as a major factor in building relationships with students that foster success. In the affirming teacher-student relationships presented, the teachers shared the personal

characteristics they held that they felt also contributed to African American student success. Equity Pedagogy shaped questions needed to help grasp what type of learning opportunities were being afforded to African American students in the classrooms of successful teachers. It addressed the need for access to rigorous coursework and the use of culturally responsive teaching practices which nurture positive academic and affective learning outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

'Care' as a Dominant Personal Characteristic. The first research question asked, "How do teachers describe their personal characteristics that contribute to the success of their African American students?" The participants gave a variety of answers such as being positive when engaging students; being knowledgeable about content taught; being hard-working as a role model to students; being funny and showing students that you don't take yourself too seriously; being relatable to students and being encouraging when setting expectations. The significant commonality was that all five participants provided the personal characteristic of being caring in some form. Monica used the word understanding; Brad said compassionate. Antonio, Cheryl and Steve all stated that they were caring teachers. The Ethic of Care in relation to African American student success is consequential, but not a new finding. Research has revealed that teacher care reinforces positive school results such as increased work effort, improved attendance and a good attitude if the students believe their teachers care for them

and their welfare (Bulach, Brown & Potter, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995).

Pang (2006) maintains that caring-centered teachers act in response of their personal integrity. These teachers care and are able to treat children as individuals that deserve to be educated to the best of their abilities in a just, fair and equitable environment. Monica articulated to her students that she cared about them, believed in their dreams and their ability to succeed. She felt that students needed to know adults were in their corner. Steve's anecdotes support his concept of care. As a teacher of exceptional children, he was required to treat students individually and educate them to the best of their abilities. He emphasized that it is important to do so. Parsons (2005) maintains that teacher care can diminish the "disconnect" that African American students feel when dealing with negative situations at school, whether attributed to their race, culture or ability level. Brad demonstrated care in this way. He sponsored the boys step team on campus which gave the boys a group to feel a sense of belonging at school. Care as a dominant theme agreed with the research studies in the literature review.

Models for Cultivating Learning Opportunities. Research question two asked, "How do successful teachers exercise and interpret their acts of cultivating classroom learning opportunities for African American students?" Emergent themes included providing real world examples for students to make relevant connections; helping students develop critical thinking skills; utilizing culturally

responsive teaching practices; enlisting parents as partners in their child's education; and setting high expectations for student performance. As I described in chapter four, of the five participants, four had at least a decade of experience in classroom. None of these themes would be considered new to many experienced teachers. Although not necessarily new, the level of skill and consistent implementation of those practices may be what sets these successful teachers apart.

As it relates to the teachers' constructing meaning from their actions in the classroom with African American students, I did find something new. Each of the participants' beliefs fed into a model that influenced their teaching praxes (see Figure 4). The teachers' beliefs and personal characteristics combined to develop an individualized educational approach. The teachers' approach included what appeared to be a greater 'sense of mission' when teaching African American students and that mission, or goal, influenced their instructional decisions and pedagogy.

Each participant that I interviewed had an overarching goal, as to what they wanted the students to take from them beyond just content area knowledge. Cheryl wanted her students to know how to be aware of opportunities in a more globally interconnected world. She thought her students would accomplish this by being able to navigate through processes and understand institutional structures, more than she thought their thorough understanding of British literature would help them be successful. Since many of the students in his class

were being raised in single parent homes, Brad felt mentoring his students would help them develop trusting, nurturing relationships. It was through the care and trust developed that meaningful conversations could occur and students become good decision makers. Antonio's greater mission was to teach the students character building lessons more covertly. He wanted his students to learn to persevere, learn to act in integrity and how to develop the soft skills they would need in the job market. This sense of mission, or goal, also incorporated how the successful teachers viewed successful outcomes for their students.

The use of the approaches to increase African American student learning supports literature surrounding culturally responsive pedagogy, equity pedagogy in the classroom, and closing the opportunity gap for students to be taught at rigorous levels.

Character Education Influences Expected Outcomes. The third and final question to guide this study was, "What do successful teachers describe as academic and affective learning outcomes that produce further success in their African American students?" Being that each of the teachers is a degreed professional, a common success outcome resonated with them. The teachers all thought that the students should finish high school and college, and then pursue professional careers. Joining the work force as a skilled laborer was also an option for some students, such as those being taught by Steve that were considered exceptional learners. The teachers also wanted each of the students to leave them with a more positive, polished sense of self. The teachers wanted the

students to recognize their growth and be able to use it to move ahead even further.

Surprising to me was that successful teachers of African American students place a profound importance on the students' affective learning outcomes. Maybe even more importance than what is placed on academic learning outcomes. It could be part of that 'sense of mission', or goal, which the teachers cultivate when teaching and interacting with the students. From the teachers' perspectives, it comprises what the students need to be able to manage in the world beyond their level of academic knowledge. I discovered that the educational approach undertaken by the teacher also shaped that teacher's definition of success for African American students. Table six displays the goals, or mission, of each of the participants as it relates to their African American students.

When I reflected on the teachers overarching goals, I realized that an element of character education was an underlying factor in each teacher's educational approach. Table six also relates the educational approach of the teachers to the concept of character education. Character education is being required in many school settings, but it did not have a structured curriculum, nor was it endorsed as a goal, in the district where Space City High School and Bayou City High School were located. Also, none of these successful teachers communicated that they had an overt agenda to instill common components of character education into their praxes as it relates to African American students.

Therefore, it may just relate back to each of the teachers' strong sense of personal integrity referred to by Pang (2006) when she discusses teacher care.

Each of the successful teachers of African American students had a strong level of care and efficacy with the students. It was demonstrated through their interactions with students. The teachers had a mission that shaped their educational approach in the classroom, including how they viewed their instructional practices. The mission appeared to be greater than just academic content learning. The educational approach of the teachers also influenced their expectations of what constituted successful academic and affective learning outcomes for their African American students. This was something new not found in the literature I found for my conceptual framework.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the conclusions I've drawn, I have developed recommendations for practice that Colleges of Education and school districts could work to implement with pre-service and in-service teachers respectively. The recommendations would address dispositions and skills needed by teachers to successfully teach the African American students in their classrooms.

Professional Development: Care. Engage pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in courses and professional development sessions that focus on the concept of care. This sounds to be unorthodox and unnecessary because the general assumption is that a person entering the teaching profession would already have a caring disposition. However, I noted that Cheryl's understanding

of care was framed differently than the other teachers who were all people of color. Also, due to the number of teachers entering the profession through non-traditional routes, it is required for them to know that successfully teaching African American students requires more than just a firm grasp of content knowledge.

Recruit Diverse Teachers. Urban, middle income school districts are areas of great diversity. There should be greater efforts placed in recruiting more diverse individuals to become teachers. Colleges of Education can partner with neighboring school districts to increase people of color joining pre-service teacher programs. Additionally, school districts can focus their recruitment efforts on hiring more people of color. Recruiting recent graduates from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) may be a good place to start.

Character Education. Schools can incorporate the tenets of character education into their campus milieu; thereby situating student achievement and success in a greater goal than acquisition of content knowledge (see Table 6). The inculcation of character education in schools may foster teachers gaining a greater 'sense of mission' with their students, but more importantly their African American students.

Professional Development: Students of Color. In-service teachers should be required to take courses or professional development sessions relating to best practices as it relates to African American students and other children of color. Generally, the current multicultural education platforms being offered now in the

Table 6

Educational Approaches of Participants

Participant	Educational Approach	Character Education Component	Examples in Practice	Goal of Approach
Cheryl	Global Citizenry	Citizenship	*empowering students through education *teaching students to navigate processes and structures	Students will think in global terms and be marketable in the global workforce.
Monica	Care	Caring	*setting high expectations for performance *finding materials and opportunities that nurture students' dreams	Students learn to persevere and work toward excellence. They in turn will nurture the next generation.
Brad	Relationships	Trustworthy	*mentoring students in classes and extracurricular activities *teaching students to be critical thinkers	Students will be able to maintain healthy relationships inside and outside of the school setting.
Antonio	Character Building	Respectful	*insisting on classroom being a respectful community of learners, fostering teamwork *incorporating student performance data	Students learn integrity and perseverance. They display soft skills needed for the work force.
Steve	In Loco Parentis	Responsible	*providing order and structure to the learning environment; simulating the order and structure a parent would put into place for a child *scaffolding instruction to meet the individual students where they are instructionally	Students learn to take responsibility for their learning. They become thinkers and not succumb to peer pressure.

district are at an 'awareness' level. Many teachers are struggling with the disconnect between their knowledge base and the decisions and practices they implement in their classrooms.

Monitor and Measure. School administrations must develop ways to monitor and measure the implementation of best practices surrounding African American student learning. Due to the substantial number of instructional decisions made by teachers on a daily basis, it is easy to see how without a concerted effort they would fall back to their comfort zone of familiar practices. Required documentation for evaluation purposes would focus the teachers and the administrators. Within the busy school day, what gets measured is often what gets done.

Implications for Further Research

The findings of my study suggest that successful teachers of African American students care for their students. They teach them with an educational approach that clarifies each teacher's great sense of mission, or goal for the students. The educational approach is also linked to the various tenets of character education. It is with this understanding that I make the following suggestions for further research:

African American Students and Character Education. Inquire about the success levels of teachers with African American students at campuses where character education principles are overtly taught. In this study, neither of the campuses where the teachers worked had character education integrated in the

curriculum. At campuses where it is being utilized, it will be important to determine if it helped give teachers a broader view and larger goal when educating children of color, particularly African American students.

Educational Approach Development. Investigate how successful teachers of African American students develop their educational approaches over time. Four of the five teacher participants in the study had more than a decade of practice in the classroom; three teachers had at least two decades. In a longitudinal study, track how teachers' approaches change over time to accommodate the needs of their African American students. Another idea is to conduct a comparative study of teachers at varying levels of experience to determine how their educational approaches change over time after reflecting on their interactions in the classroom.

Missions of Elementary and Middle School Teachers. Further research of successful teachers of African American students at the elementary and middle school levels is needed. Since the logical next step for the students of these successful high school teachers would be college or the work force, additional studies to determine if elementary teachers also develop educational approaches with their African American students would be informative to practice. It would be interesting to know if these teachers develop a 'sense of mission' and if so how it informs their praxes.

Summary

The teachers in this study demonstrated a level of success that required them to 'begin with the end in mind' for their African American students. This study was designed to focus on a small, selective group of teachers – those being successful in the classroom teaching African American students. The care demonstrated by the teachers toward their students, the development of an educational approach that informed their instructional practices and the focus on successful affective outcomes, as well as successful academic outcomes all contributed to the accomplishments teachers had when working with African American students.

The three male and two female teachers identified for the study all displayed a high level of efficacy and care when working with their students, particularly African American students. This created learning environments where students felt secure and worked toward teacher goals. Care allowed teachers to build relationships with students that required students to work at higher levels of rigor and meet more demanding expectations for performance. Care in relationship permitted teachers to chastise students when needed, but also guide them through recovery. Care was the foundation laid by the teachers.

The teachers knew they needed a secure foundation for their relationships with students if they were to accomplish what the teachers considered their bigger goal, or sense of mission. Through practice, teachers formulated an educational approach that informed what they did in the classroom and how they

carried it out with their African American students. The educational approach contained goals for success which correlated with principles of character education. The successful teachers also focused on the affective outcomes of student learning just as intently as the focus is usually on academic outcomes. African American students learning decision-making skills, learning soft-skills for the workplace, learning to care for peers and the next generation, learning to maintain positive relationships and learning to view themselves with esteem all foster success academically.

As I combed through the data, I recalled the engrossing and insightful interviews I conducted with the teachers. They shared private interactions with students that only they, and others observing in the classroom, would know. They allowed me to peer inside a very private place – their mind. A person’s thoughts are ‘the final frontier’. It is not until the thoughts are released to the world through words that another person can begin to understand what a person feels or thinks about situations, how a person perceives the world or what it tells us about the motivations for their actions.

The findings of the study contributed to the conversations surrounding African American student achievement and it un-muted the voices of successful teachers. The findings validated their classroom practices and will lead to further research surrounding teacher learning and development as it pertains to African American students.

Through our interviews, I recognized characteristics and experiences that I shared with the successful teachers. It is with passion and a sense of mission that I work as an educator. My interactions with students, teachers and parents are guided by principles that I think move the students toward successful outcomes in the educational setting.

My story as an African American student shaped by views on the importance of Bryttani and Jerrad being prepared for college through positive K-12 experiences. Bryttani and Jerrad went on to have successful school experiences. Bryttani graduated in the Top 10% of her senior class. She was Student Government president, a saxophone player in the high school band, National Honor Society member and a member of other campus organizations. Bryttani graduated from the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. She is currently back in the Houston, TX. area pursuing a graduate degree in Public Administration. Jerrad graduated in the Top 10% of his senior class also. While in high school, he was co-captain of the varsity football team, vice-president of the National Honor Society and a regional debate champion. Jerrad graduated from University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, TX. He is currently pursuing a MBA.

It is because I care about the success of that other 'little brown girls' that remind me of myself, or other 'little brown children that look like they could be my children, that I look forward to continuing to undertake this research.

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APPENDIX A

Research Introduction Letter and High School Principal Nomination Form



Fall 2012

Dear Sirs:

I am Rhonique Jefferson, a doctoral student at Texas A&M University. To fulfill the dissertation requirements, I must design and conduct a full research study. I am soliciting your help in identifying participants in my research study. I am seeking to interview teachers who demonstrate success in providing learning opportunities for African American students in their classrooms. The results of the study will help contribute to the scholarly dialogue surrounding African American student achievement in middle class urban schools.

I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Norvella Carter, Professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture at Texas A&M University. It has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board; as well as your school district's Office of School Improvement and Research. If you have any questions or would like to meet with me prior to making teacher nominations, please feel free to contact me at 832.228.6283 or rjefferson2012@tamu.edu.

Please take a moment to nominate great teachers from your campus. The nomination form can be faxed to me at 281.758.5343 or returned in the self-addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you,

Rhonique Jefferson

Enclosures

Principal Nomination Form

Principal Name: _____ Campus: _____

To obtain the best representation of participants, please nominate teachers from a variety of content areas, grade levels and experience levels. Criterion includes the following:

- Male or female teachers
- Any ethnicity
- Any age
- Employed as a classroom teacher at least three (3) years minimum
- Traditional or alternatively certified
- Successfully teaches African American students...should be evidenced by any combination of the following:
 - Mutual caring relationships in the classroom
 - Low number of office referrals
 - Differentiated and/or culturally relevant teaching strategies utilized
 - High class attendance
 - Good communication with parents
 - High standardized test scores
 - Significant number of African American students in their advanced placement or accelerated courses
 - Students receiving scholarships for post-secondary study with his/her help
 - Students under his/her tutelage serving in student leadership roles

TEACHER NAME	GRADE/CONTENT AREA	OFFICIAL E-MAIL ADDRESS
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

APPENDIX B

Study Participant Demographic Information Form

Name: _____

Age: 20-30 years old 31-40 years old 41-50 years old Over 50 years old

Ethnicity: _____ **Education Background:** urban suburban rural

Years Experience as a classroom teacher: _____

Previous school districts: _____

Previous work experience: _____

University/Highest level of education: _____

Major/Certification Route _____

Grade level taught: _____ **How long?** _____

Content area taught: _____ **How long?** _____

<p><i>Special Notes:</i></p>

APPENDIX C

Study Participant Consent Form



Project Title: Successful Teachers' Beliefs And Practices Regarding African American Students In A Middle Income, Urban School District

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Rhonique Jefferson and Dr. Norvella Carter, researchers from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers create learning opportunities for African American students in the classroom. I seek to find out the personal characteristics of successful teachers of African American students. We will research what actions the teachers undertake that ensure learning takes place and how they interpret, or explain, those actions.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you have been identified as being a successful teacher of African American students. You have met the criteria for participation (below). The only exclusion is that the participant has a minimum of three years teaching experience.

Participant criteria are as follows:

- male or female,
- of any ethnicity,
- any age
- traditionally or alternatively certified by the State of Texas, and
- employed a minimum of three years in the classroom

Attributes of teachers considered successful educators of African American students should be evidenced by a combination of the following:

- mutual caring relationships in the classroom,

- low discipline referrals for classroom infractions,
- implementation of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy,
- high class attendance,
- good communication with parents/community members,
- high standardized test scores
- significant number of African American students in their advanced placement or accelerated courses
- students receiving scholarships for post-secondary study with their help
- African American students under their tutelage serving in student leadership roles

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

A maximum of ten (10) people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

No, the alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

You will be asked to participate in a 60 minute semi-structured interview. Your participation in this study will last up to one month and includes a maximum of two visits.

Visit 1 (Week 1)

This visit will last about 60 minutes in length. During this visit you will participate in a semi-structured interview concerning your classroom practices with African American students. It will take place in a meeting room at the local library.

Visit 2, if needed (Weeks 2-4)

This visit will be a maximum of 20 minutes. It involves you previewing the member check and giving feedback to the researchers interpretation.

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the interview data can be transcribed. It will also be used during analysis for coding purposes. If you do not give permission for the audio recording to be obtained, you cannot participate in this study.

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the interview data can be transcribed, only if you give your permission to do so. Indicate your decision below by initialing in the space provided.

_____ **I give my permission** for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

_____ **I do not give my permission** for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

Are There Any Risks To Me?

The things that you will be doing are no more risks than you would come across in everyday life. The most risk involved would be concern for confidentiality if something unflattering to the campus or personnel on that campus is discussed.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Dr. Norvella Carter and Rhonique Jefferson will have access to the records.

Information about you will be stored in computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Norvella Carter, PhD, to tell him/her about a concern or complaint about this research at 979-862-3802 or ncarter@tamu.edu. You may also contact the Protocol Director, Rhonique Jefferson at 832-228-6283 or rjefferson2012@tamu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions,

complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your employment or relationship with Texas A&M University.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name

Date

Please select your preferred method of communication:

Phone number

E-Mail Address

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Printed Name

Date

**Please return completed forms in self-addressed stamped envelope to:
Rhonique Jefferson, M.Ed.**

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide: Individual Session

Introduction by researcher: Thank you for allowing me to interview you for my study. The purpose of this interview is to investigate your insights into issues surrounding learning opportunities for African American students in the classroom. I am interested in finding out your thoughts about issues of teacher care, race, and equity as relevant to African American students learning and achieving in the educational setting. I will ask you a few background information questions then go into your classroom experiences with students. This interview is being audio taped, which you have consented to, and will later be transcribed. At that time you will be presented the interview to read for accuracy. Do you have any questions? Again, thank you and let's get started.

General Questions to begin:

1. First, let's review the information given on your demographic questionnaire.
2. Talk a little bit about your childhood, especially as it relates to education and schooling experiences.
3. Do you feel that you teach students who resemble your socioeconomic background? How do you relate to these students who may be similar/dissimilar from yourself?
4. Describe some of the differences (if any) that you have observed in academic performances African American and European American students who come from families of middle income earners?

Concept #1	Teacher Beliefs
	<p>1A. Describe the beliefs you have about the African American students you serve. How have these beliefs influenced your effectiveness as their teacher?</p> <p>1B. How would you describe your African American students in your class, what are some of the things you feel they need? What are their strengths? What areas need improvement?</p> <p>1C. A parent you met at your school's open house call you and says she is going to send her African American child to another school because "nobody here cares anymore". What story might you tell, either from your own experiences or that you heard about, to help her decide what</p>

	to do?
Concept #2	Student Perceptions
	<p>2A. If your student could describe several characteristics of you as a successful teacher, what five words do you think they would use?</p> <p>2B. Have you ever been frustrated due to a communication gap between yourself and your African American students? Is it your perception that they were frustrated as well?</p> <p>2C. How would you describe your classroom management system?</p> <p>2D. Tell me about the seating arrangement in your classroom for your students.</p> <p>2E. Please share some of your experiences with your African American students that are prominent in your mind.</p>
Concept #3	Learning Opportunities
	<p>3A. Do you teach any advanced placement classes or accelerated classes? What is the racial make-up of those classes?</p> <p>3B. How does your students' culture inform your practice?</p> <p>3C. What are your thoughts about the curriculum you're required to teach? Is there a need for it to be supplemented in any way?</p> <p>3D. How do you define success for your African American students? What do you feel your students need to be successful?</p> <p>3E. If you could change something about your teaching abilities that you feel would make you more successful with the students you serve, what would that be?</p>
	Additional Questions for Follow-Up
	<p>4A. How does the racial make-up of your class influence your instructional practices?</p> <p>4B. Tell me more about</p> <p>4C. What story do you think you might tell your grandchildren about your best moment as a teacher? Does it involve any of your African American students?</p>