WOOTEN, CYNTHIA BROOKS, Ph.D. Multiple Case Studies of Literacy Practices Utilized by Intermediate Grade Teachers Which Enable African American Males to Become Literate Individuals—What's Going On? (2010)
Directed by Dr. Barbara B. Levin. 303 pp.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate ways in which six teachers in the intermediate grades at one urban and one rural school enabled their African American male students to be successful in their literacy efforts. It was my assumption that successful teachers of African American males would also be teachers who integrated culturally relevant teaching practices into their literacy instruction; therefore, I also examined the ways in which these teachers designed instruction that was culturally relevant (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b).

The six teacher participants in this study were purposefully selected because they were identified as demonstrating the ability to aid their African American males to be successful in reading. Qualitative, case study methodology was selected because it allowed me to collect multiple forms of evidence about the beliefs and practices of these teachers in the context of their actual classrooms. Data collection for this study included one-on-one teacher interviews, six classroom observations during teachers' literacy instruction across two weeks, post observation interviews following each observation, and the teachers' completion of a diversity questionnaire. Data collection spanned nine months and included numerous follow-up interviews to clarify my interpretation of the data collected.

Both within- and cross-case analyses were conducted to understand the literacy and culturally relevant practices that the six teachers in this study associated with the

success of their African American males. Within case analysis revealed general teacher beliefs and specific literacy practices and classroom environment factors associated with the success of their African American males. Literacy practices that were found to be most successful for African American males included their participation in guided reading groups, read alouds, and writing activities because these practices were targeted to the specific needs and interests of the teachers' African American males. Whole class, teacher directed reading was seen by the teachers to be the least successful literacy practice for the African American males in their classrooms.

The cross-case study analysis suggested that successful teachers of African American males demonstrated these four characteristics: compassion, consistency, connectedness, and collaboration. Additionally, teachers' efforts to become culturally relevant were found to hinge on teachers' willingness to explore their own sociocultural consciousness. Having sociocultural consciousness enabled three of the six teachers to view their diverse student population from a positive perspective. Teachers with less developed sense of sociocultural consciousness tended to view students from diverse populations from a deficit perspective.

Based on what was learned from the teachers in this study, several recommendations for schools of education, school administrators, and teachers are provided. Suggestions for future research still needed to study culturally relevant literacy teaching practices that promote the success of African American male students are also provided.

MULTIPLE CASE STUDIES OF LITERACY PRACTICES UTILIZED BY

INTERMEDIATE GRADE TEACHERS WHICH ENABLE AFRICAN

AMERICAN MALES TO BECOME LITERATE

INDIVIDUALS—WHAT'S GOING ON?

by

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Barbara B. Levin
Committee Chair

To my mother, Ola Holt Brooks, and my father, the late Willie J. Brooks, who was unable to see this task through to completion on the Earthly side; however, who smiles down upon my dedication to finish the task I began, just as I was taught. Both my parents have been instrumental in this pursuit as my first teachers. They instilled education in me as a sense of ownership as I fondly remember the phase, "Once you get knowledge in your head, no one can take it away."

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I would also like to dedicate this to my children (*Natasha Donshe', Brooke Ashley, Juan Eric, Jr.*), and to my grandchildren (*Deja' Brijae'* and the two awaiting arrival in summer 2010), as I want to continue the legacy and model the importance of education to them.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. (John 10:11-14)

This scripture was selected by my pastor as the basis for a recent sermon. It occurred to me as I read that some teachers of African American males[1] are like the good shepherd because they know their students and their students know them. On the other hand, some teachers of African American males are like the hireling who flees or fails to meet their educational needs, leaving them in despair. In today's classroom, a teacher hireling's lack of understanding of the African American male and the students' lack of understanding of the curriculum being taught places both at a disadvantage. As a result of this disconnect, teachers often fail to recognize the academic potential of African American males causing an overrepresentation of these males in special education remedial classes (Noguera, 2008; Reed, 1988; Whiting, 2009) and their absence from advanced or gifted and talented classes (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Whiting, 2009). Black males are also referred to the principal for disciplinary action more frequently than any other group (Sheets, 1995). Inappropriate behaviors in many cases are the result of

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[1] The terms African American and Black male are used interchangeably.

students and teachers not relating to each other interpersonally (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Teachers may manage African American males in a manner different from Caucasian students due to stereotypical beliefs about inadequate discipline in the home by parents (McCadden, 1998). Gibbs (1988) reports that the African American male is stereotyped as being dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. These negative beliefs and practices become obstacles that teachers must overcome as they learn to successfully interact academically with African American males.

Allington (2005) and other scholars argue that the teacher is the common denominator in their students' success (Allington, 2005; Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Duffy-Hester, 1999; Grosso de Leon, 2001; Hattie, 2003). In fact, Sanders, Wright, and Horn (1997) found that successive years with effective teachers created an "extreme educational advantage" (p. 3). On the other hand, successive years with ineffective teachers can retard students' progress for at least four years (Sanders et al., 1997). In 2002, deCourcy Hinds made a similar statement that "several bad teachers in a row can derail a child's education . . ." (p. 3).

I believe that the role of the teacher in their students' success is important to study because too many times during my teaching career I heard teachers blame parents, the home environment, or their students' socioeconomic status as causing the lack of student success and the achievement gap. Further, these are all factors that teachers feel are out of their control. In fact, in my experience such "*comfort comments*" have become clichés circulating throughout schools to console teachers for their students' failures. One that still haunts me today is, "you have to remember, if God didn't do it, you can't." Such

"*comfort comments*" are words some teachers hide behind to further validate their beliefs that teaching certain groups of students is not possible. Because our school was a Title I school, I was in agreement with my colleagues that many of our students came to the classroom as products of an environment that is saturated with inequalities; however, in my experience the teacher could be the catalyst and the one who could empower students through their choice of pedagogical practices. Ultimately, I believe teachers have the power to impact their students' success and narrow the achievement gap when they align their instructional practices with the needs of their students.

In searching for research about the literacy development and African American males, few studies exist dealing with the literacy development of adolescent African American males (Tatum, 2005). The research literature about African American students is rich with research about language, urban teaching, and multicultural education to name a few, but the literature falls short of providing ways in which teachers successfully engage pre-adolescents African American males in the intermediate grades (3-5) in the literacy process.

The intermediate grades are, in many cases, the first encounters students have with standardized testing in North Carolina, which is known as End of Grade testing, or the EOGs. Therefore, I believe that studying teachers' literacy practices, possible incorporation of cultural referents congruent with culturally relevant teaching into their balanced reading instruction, along with their beliefs and understanding of African American male's would be insightful and would add to the literature.

Additionally, engaging African American males in literacy can have long term rewards and help them to become productive, contributing citizens in their communities. In fact, Tatum (2007) makes the following claim about the literacy needs of adolescent African American males: "If we fail to address the literacy needs of these young men, we will have more destabilized communities and a weakening of democracy because of lack of participation of this segment of society" (p. 40). This statement is also important to my belief about the importance of studying teachers who are successful in supporting the literacy needs of preadolescent African American males (in grades 3-5). School practices of some teachers may fail to account for the knowledge, cognitive abilities, culture, and values of African American students, but I propose that effective teachers of African American males know how to make use of their students' knowledge, cognitive abilities, culture, and values. Tatum (2005) makes claims of existing barriers to closing the reading achievement gap between adolescent African American males and other students. These barriers are important to my argument for studying teachers who are successful with preadolescent African American males in grades 3-5 as well. These barriers include the fact that we currently have (a) no clear strategy for accomplishing the goal, (b) no clear definition of the role of literacy for African American males, (c) the fact that educators disagree on how to provide effective reading instruction for struggling readers, and (d) a limited of understanding of the role of culture in pedagogy (Tatum, 2005).

When our schools assess their students' success, a gap in achievement is often discovered among various ethnic groups. This gap has existed for over 50 years as African American students continue to score lower than European Americans on

standardized tests (Coleman et al., 1966; Rothman, 2002). Many years ago the 1966 Coleman et al. study results revealed that increased school resources, such as teacher salaries and lower class sizes, were found to have no effect on students' test scores. Other research indicates gaps in the achievement of African Americans are even apparent in students before they enter kindergarten and can persist into adulthood (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). However, other studies demonstrate that the gap has narrowed although it has never closed (Educational Research Services, 2006; Rothman, 2002).

The achievement gap between majority and minority populations has been variously explained by some theories as being the result of poverty, race, parenting styles, availability of school resources, peer culture, and ethnicity (Coleman, 1969; Rothman, 2002; US Commission on Civil Rights, 2004). Still other theories allude to disparities in teacher preparation programs, and the absence of multicultural teaching and curriculum alignment as being part of the problem (Delpit, 1995; Thompson, 2007). Also, Thompson (2004) argues that a cultural mismatch exists between teachers and students of color because a high percentage of teachers are under-prepared to work effectively with students of color. According to Darling-Hammond (1999), this cultural-mismatch problem directly impacts the performance of students. Darling-Hammond also reports that unqualified teachers hinder the achievement of low socioeconomic status students of color. This can be traced back to the teachers' college preparation program or to the fact that teachers in poorer schools are least likely to be fully licensed and have adequate teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

How teachers are prepared is important because it is teachers, guided by their personal and professional beliefs, who are positioned in the classroom to be able to effect change. Any possible changes are based on teachers' beliefs about African American males, as well as their own preparation for literacy instruction. In my 19 years as an educator I have found that teachers who lack understanding of diverse students, such as African American males, and place blame on students' home lives, lack of abilities, and poor motivation look on Black males from a deficit perspective. The media also plays a role in promoting these wayward beliefs. Awareness and understanding of these theories can be an advantage for teachers because they are in a position to shift their thinking from a deficit model to one that empowers the learner. This is important as we think about the total development of the African American male from home to school to adulthood.

The reality is that the African American male's ability to read is not only important for navigating through school but is also a life skill much needed as an adult. Hale (personal communication, March 2006) says as a nation we pay up front or pay in the end for the educational inequalities in schools that our students endure on a daily basis. I agree with this line of thinking and consider the fact that African American males are learning to read at a less successful rate is an inequality, even when their instruction mirrors that received by their majority counterparts. Hale is an advocate for preschool programs for marginalized populations that expose children to reading and math skills. She believes that programs of this nature help level the playing field between marginalized and non-marginalized groups. Head Start, a national program, and Every Child Ready to Read, a local program sponsored by the Greensboro Public Library, are

examples of literacy programs designed to give students an early start on skills that can equalize the playing field that Hale conceptualized. On the other hand, incarceration is an example of the "pay in the end idea." Hale may have had in mind. In my discussions with law violators who have consequently served a prison sentence I learned that after these individuals were released back into society that in most cases their basic privileges as citizens were revoked (i.e. voting rights, employment opportunities, civic responsibilities, etc.) for a lifetime.

I agree with Hale, as she advocates for equal access for all students, which should be the concern of policy makers, educators, and any other persons able to effect change for marginalized populations. As a nation we cannot afford to have our youth give up on their ability to learn because it has the potential to destroy an already marginalized population, and affect future leaders in our communities.

Haberman (1995) states, "For children and youth in poverty, this is a high stakes game. Success is, in fact, a matter of life and death. Success in school is the African American male's only means for realizing a better, decent life" (p. 25). Interpreting Haberman, I would say success in school is a prerequisite to becoming a productive citizen in this democracy. The teacher shoulders that responsibility. Haberman refers to teachers who are able to fill these shoes as *star teachers*. *Star teachers,* according to Haberman, make up only 8% of the total teaching population who work with seven million diverse learners. Haberman distinguishes *star teachers* by their persistence, physical and emotional stamina, caring relationships with students, commitment to acknowledging and appreciating student effort, willingness to admit mistakes, focus on

deep learning, commitment to inclusion, and organizational skills. Star teachers also "protect student learning, translate theory and research into practice, cope with the bureaucracy, create student ownership, engage parents and caregivers as partners in student learning, and support accountability for at-risk students" (Haberman, 2004, p. 53).

Conceptual Framework

I propose that the following three components are relevant to my study of teachers in grades 3-5 who have been identified as being successful in meeting the literacy needs of their African American males: (a) their literacy practices employed, (b) their understanding and use of culturally relevant teaching, and (c) their understanding of African American male (see Figure 1).
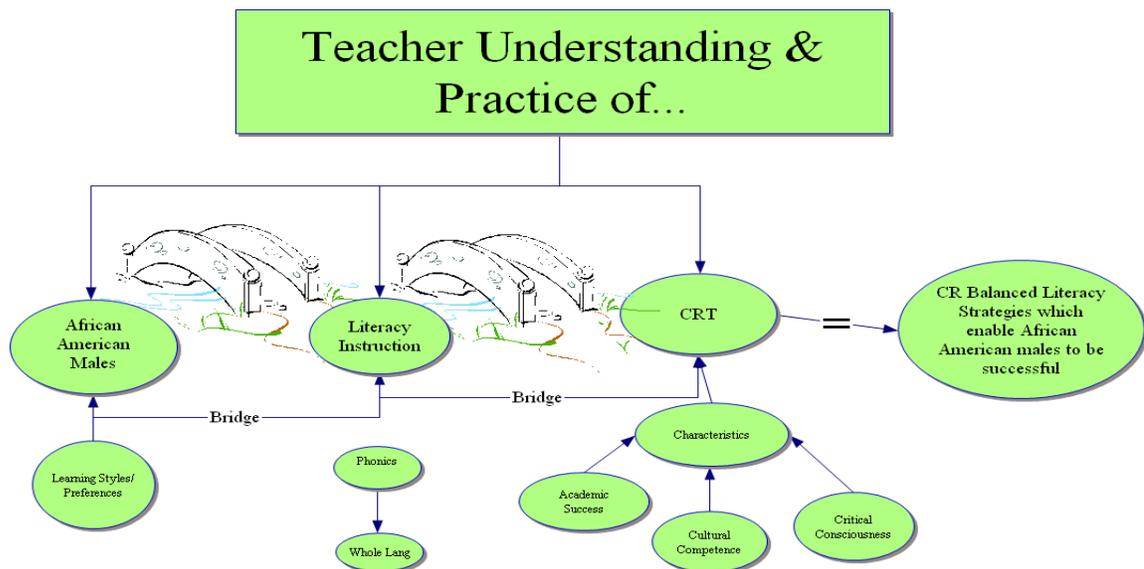
Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

Appropriate literacy instruction and culturally relevant teaching stand out in the literature as practices that when implemented properly empower students in their efforts in reading attainment, so these are the first and second concepts in my conceptual framework. The third concept relates to the knowledge that individual teachers may have about African American males and how that knowledge is reflected in their instruction. Therefore, the focus of this study is on how literacy teachers in grades 3-5 successfully bridge these components to enable African American males in their literacy efforts.

Reading Instruction

Not only is teachers' understanding of the African American males relevant to matters of success but also how teachers approach reading instruction is equally important in enabling African American males to be successful. It is my assumption that instruction must be more inclusive of lessons that African American males can relate to in order for teachers to impact the achievement levels of these males. Looking at past reform efforts reveals a number of efforts have been attempted to close achievement gap in reading between majority and minority groups. These reform efforts include, but are not limited to, phonics instruction (Erhi, 2000), whole language (Goodman, 1967), the use of "best practices" (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993), and evidenced-based instruction (NCLB, 2001). After many years of back and forth between phonics instruction and whole language, current research supports a balanced or comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. A balanced approach to literacy instruction consists of modeled reading (reading aloud) and modeled writing, shared reading and shared writing, guided reading and guided writing, independent reading and independent writing.

According to Pressley (2003), balanced or comprehensive literacy instruction includes explicit, systematic teaching of the skills necessary to read and write in a classroom environment that is saturated with lots of reading of authentic literature reflecting all genres, as well as those composed by students. This approach is more inclusive of all students as opposed to approaches to reading instruction that take only a phonics-based or a whole-language approach.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

The conventional manner in which teachers meet the literacy needs of students has worked well for some learners (and teachers) but not for others. Gay (2000), a proponent of culturally relevant teaching, claims that conventional paradigms for improving the achievement of students of color are doomed to failure mainly due to the deficit orientation some teachers possess. Valencia and Solorzano (1997) report that many teachers even believe families of color place little value on education and consequently are not interested in the educational advancement for their children. On the contrary, Cooper (2003) conducted a study of African American mothers and found that all mothers reported that they valued education and were adamant about their beliefs related to its importance. In addition, they associated a lack of education with a dismal future. Ullucci (2008) claimed that Eurocentric thinking lessens the academic chances of African American males and causes them to be overrepresented in special education programs (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Frasier-Trotman, 2002; Perry, Steel, & Hilliard, 2003; U. S. Department of Education, 2000), which in many cases puts them on the *school to prison pipeline* track.

On the other hand, the inclusion of culture as a part of teachers' instructional practices holds promise for academic success for students of color. Gay (2000) views the use of Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) as a teacher using students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles in a manner which makes learning more appropriate and effective for students. Gay refers to Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) as empowering because it teaches to and through the strengths of students, which is important to my research for African American males.

Ladson-Billings (1994), also a proponent of culturally relevant teaching, reports the way to impact the achievement of African American males (and other groups the achievement gap effects) is by recognizing students' culture as a basis for instruction. This idea, recognition and incorporation of culture as a part of instruction, should be easy for teachers to embrace because teaching has always been about the act of creating and utilizing strategies and best practices to foster an understanding for students so as to make learning relevant. In reading instruction, making learning relevant is the whole idea behind using comprehension strategy such as activating prior knowledge and making relevant connections to give students a reference point for learning (Zimmermann & Hutchins, 2003). Instruction that builds on students' cultural knowledge is beneficial for creating understanding; however, it is a lesser-used strategy by many teachers. In combination with the use of culture, strategic practices, and awareness of one's teaching style, plus having high teacher expectations of students (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and quality of instruction, have also been found to influence academic achievement of African American males (Allington, 2006). Furthermore, this is not a recent revelation

because in 2001 Grosso de Leon reported that ". . . good teaching is the single most important element in determining student achievement" (p. 2).

Cultural recognition and culturally-sensitive teaching practices come from the works of researchers in the field of culturally relevant teaching (Banks & Banks, 1995; Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2003; Irvine et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1994, 1992; Nieto, 2005; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b). Culturally relevant teaching is "an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 62). In my view, all of these factors have implications to a successful future for African American males.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to study classroom teachers who are successful in elevating or maintaining the reading achievement of African American males in their 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade classrooms in order to explore their literacy practices, possible use of culturally relevant teaching practices, and their beliefs about and understanding of African American males. My proposition is that exploring the beliefs and practices of successful teachers African American males will provide other educators with strategies which can be used to impact the literacy achievement of their African American males. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the personal and professional beliefs of teachers who have been successful with teaching African American males?

2. What are the literacy practices of teachers who are successful with African American males?

3. How do teachers who are successful with African American males use culturally relevant teaching practices?

Study Design

The research design selected for this study is a series of six individual case studies, followed by a cross-case analysis. A qualitative case study design enables the researcher to investigate contemporary phenomena within a real-life setting (Yin, 2003). In this study I observed six teachers (contemporary phenomena) in their classrooms (real-life setting). I selected the case study design because it allowed me to describe, analyze, and interpret (Creswell, 2005) the philosophies, practices, and teaching strategies of teachers who were identified as successfully impacting the literacy achievement of African American males in the intermediate grades (3-5). Case study research, as stated by Yin (2003), allows the researcher to gather in-depth and firsthand data from settings (authentic/real-life sites) to conduct observations, and to gather other data sources. The classrooms of the six teachers in this study served as the authentic/real-life setting for gathering the in-depth data related to literacy instruction. Multiple sources of data, including observations, interviews, and a survey were employed to collect data on how these teachers merge culturally relevant teaching with their literacy instruction and their beliefs. To minimize validity threats I used triangulation of my data sources and member checking. The results of this study are presented in detailed descriptions of each case (within-case analysis) followed by a thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case

analysis). Following these analyses during the final interpretive stage I report what my analyses revealed, or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) term "lessons learned." Although case study designs lack population generalizibility, it was generalizable to the theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003) that made up my conceptual framework for this study.

Definition of Terms

Within the context of this study, the following definitions were used:

Achievement gap: The academic disparities that exist in reading and math scores between majority (white students) and minority students (students of color) as determined by standardized measures.

Acting white: The belief that students of color who are doing well in school are acting like they are *better* than their peers is termed acting white (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986).

African American male: A male member of a racial/ethnic group also referred to as Black, and historically referred to as Negro and Colored. In this dissertation I will use African American males and Black males interchangeably.

Balanced literacy instruction: An approach to reading that incorporates guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, modeled and shared writing, interactive writing, independent writing, and working with words (a balance of whole language and phonics instruction). Balanced literacy instruction includes the explicit, systematic teaching of the skills necessary to read and write in a classroom environment saturated with lots of reading of authentic literature of all genres as well as those composed by students (Pressley, 2003).

Best practices: Current instructional practices teachers use that are reflective of sound, solid, reputable, state of the art work in the teaching field (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993).

Culture: The customs, beliefs, traditions, religion, learned behaviors, and way of living for a group of people.

Culturally relevant teaching: An approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), some of the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching are: positive perspectives on parents and families, communication of high expectations, learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, culturally mediated instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and teacher as facilitator (as cited in Brown University, 2006).

End of Grade (EOG): The annual, high-stakes, summative assessment used in North Carolina schools to measure proficiency levels of students in Grades 3-12. EOG is an acronym for End-of-Grade testing.

Effective teacher: Instructional leaders who are knowledgeable about and use an accumulation of a number of instructional strategies to enable African American males to be successful in the literacy process. Effective teachers use the right strategy with the right student at the right time to get the desired student outcome. Specific teacher behaviors related to preparation, personality, and practices which contribute to students' achievement help to define an effective teacher (Stronge, 2002). In this study, effective teachers are also referred to as *exemplary teachers*.

Evidence based instruction: Instructional practices/best practices are supported by empirical research results. According to Whitehurst (2002), evidence-based instruction is "the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction" (p. 3) that is considered to be evidence-based practice.

Literacy instruction: Teaching which includes both reading and writing instruction.

Proficient: A student who is reading and performing on grade level is considered proficient.

Preservice teachers: Individuals enrolled in an educational program where they will earn a teaching degree.

Successful African American male students: A successful student is defined in one of three ways: (a) a student who performs at a level three or four on summative test like the EOG, (b) a student who earns a passing grade in formative assessment, and (c) a student who earns an A or B in reading on Report Cards.

Assumptions

Based on many years of experience as a teacher and my review of the research literature on African American males, best literacy practices, and culturally relevant teaching, I have five assumptions that guide this research study. The following assumptions are based on experiences, interactions/collaborations, peer observations and conversations with teachers and staff within the professional teaching community during my 19-year tenure as a teacher. First, there are educators who are successful with

teaching African American males in spite of the environmental inequalities these males face. Second, education is not the same empowering experience for all students. Third, incongruent instructional practices impede the performance of minority groups. A fourth assumption is that there are teachers who employ strategies consistent with culturally relevant teaching. Lastly, I assume that schools should be institutions that are obligated to prepare all students for life experiences, not just for the next grade.

Significance of the Study

While No Child Left Behind was implemented in 2001 to address the academic achievement of all students, there is little research that African American males are being taught in ways that impact the gap in their achievement. While some literacy practices utilized by teachers seem to have merit, the reading achievement gap for African American males continues to persist and is an area of concern as educators work to find alternative ways to increase the proficiency levels of pre-adolescent Black males. Therefore this research study explores how successful/exemplary teachers of African American males design instruction to meet the literacy needs of the young Black males. Because reading achievement seems to be the metaphorical *key to freedom,* educators must persist in developing ways to engage African American males until this gap is no longer a problem. My contention is that in order for African American males to develop into able adult forces in their communities structures must be in place in the elementary grades to assist in that development prior to the adolescent stage. Results from this study will be of particular benefit for preservice and inservice teachers of African American

males in the intermediate grades as they work to find instructional strategies that effectively engage them in the literacy process.

Limitations

This research study was limited to one year. A total of six teachers were selected for this study, two teachers each from the intermediate grade levels, from both high and low poverty schools in the Southeastern region of the USA. Studying the practices of this small number of teachers in these school districts precludes the generalizability of the findings. However, studying the practices of these teachers may reveal a range of practices and experiences, which opens the doors for further research on literacy and culturally relevant teaching.

Conclusion

Just as the shepherd knows and loves his sheep, one of my passions is flower gardening. Nothing pleases me more than to busy myself for hours at a time planting, transplanting, and nurturing nature. I have considered myself a gardener since beginning my gardening endeavor years ago. One particular day, as I was weeding in my garden and I dug up some earthworms. Without thinking of myself, I picked up the worms and placed them back into the soil in a safe place, assisting them to do the job they were put on this earth to do. As I stood there and watched the earthworms burrow back into the soil, I began to reflect on earlier times when I merely called myself a "flower gardener" even though I was terrified of touching the worms. Just the sight of these "miniature snakes" would cause panic in me as I called out to my family to come and rescue me. If no one was able to rescue me I would take the shovel and flick them far away only to find

more worms seconds later. It was not until sometime later when I took a class on composting which transformed my thinking that I began to accept, understand, and appreciate the complexity of the earthworm and its duty in my garden. In addition to this transformation I now view their existence and cohabitation with my flowers as a symbiotic relationship. I have passed the "earthworm test!"

It is my belief that teachers of African American males must make the same transformation by understanding factors that shape the African American male self-concept and identity in order to become effective teachers who are able to adequately impact the literacy development of these individuals and pass the African American male test. Just as I considered myself a good gardener, although I would not touch worms or felt the need to have them in my garden because of a lack of knowledge, some teachers may lack knowledge of African American males. My proposition in this study is that teachers who take a proactive approach to African American males transform their understanding and practices and therefore become more effective teachers for them. It is this digging deep that leads to a teacher's understanding and transformation and their ability to pass the "earthworm test" with African American males. Therefore, another proposition underlying this research is that successful teachers of African American males will possess knowledge and act on it.

This analogy of a worm test came to me as I tried to differentiate between teachers who are successful and teachers who are not as successful in teaching African American males (Researcher Memo, 1-24-09). It remains with me as I try to understand differences between the shepherd and the hireling and how they care for their sheep.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I is an introduction to the study. Chapter II reviews the literature relevant to this study, including an overview of literacy attainment struggles of African Americans, societal issues confronting the African American male, exemplary teaching, and culturally relevant teaching. Chapter III explains the design of the study provides information about the case study methodology utilized in this study including participant selection, context of the study, data sources, data collection procedures, data analysis procedure, validity and reliability, researcher bias, and study limitations. Chapter IV presents case studies of each participant and cross-case analysis of the findings. Chapter V provides a discussion of findings, recommendations for schools of education, school administrators and teachers, limitations of this study, challenges to conducting this research, and future research needs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II serves as a review of relevant literature in four major sections: (a) educational history of African Americans, (b) the state of the African American male, (c) exemplary literacy teachers and their practices, and (d) culturally relevant teaching theory. The first section provides an educational history of the many years of struggles that African Americans endured as they demonstrated desires to be educated. These struggles include rules, laws, court mandates, etcetera, which were put into place to prevent or permit educational access and/or attainment. This section will begin with the slavery era in the United States and end with the achievement gap era. The second section offers an overview of research associated with the achievement or lack thereof for African American male. The third section synthesizes research associated with exemplary/effective teachers and instructional practices in teaching reading and writing that are common among exemplary/effective teachers. The final section provides a review of the literature on culturally relevant teaching focusing primarily on the research of Ladson-Billings (1994, 2000), Gay (2000), and Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b).

Throughout history, since the unintended arrival of the African Americans to the United States, a number of names have been used to collectively identify their race. For purposes of this literature review, and to use the names signifying specific time periods,

African Americans will be referred to as Colored, Negro, Black, Afro-American, and/or African American.

Educational History of African Americans from Slavery to the Achievement Gap

This section of the literature review examines the educational opportunities historically extended to African Americans. Periods included for review are slavery; Negro/Colored schools; and Greensboro City Schools, following Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education decision; the Coleman Report issued in 1966; the achievement gap; and No Child Left Behind. In researching the literature pertaining to literacy attainment and treatment of slaves, it was revealed that practices used to regulate the behaviors of slaves varied between those living in the North and the South, from state to state, town to town, and plantation to plantation. Therefore, it was necessary to limit this section of the literature review to specific accounts occurring in Chatham County and Greensboro, North Carolina, which are where the teachers in this study teach. Historian John Hope Franklin (1988) was a major source used in compiling the overall historical accounts during these periods.

Slavery: Minds Set on Freedom

Events reported about the literacy achievement of slaves will focus chiefly on actions occurring in the southern states, where the majority of the United States' slave population existed. Reports indicate that around the time that George Washington was president there were about 790,000 slaves in the United States of which 89% lived in southern states (Franklin, 1988). No matter the location, slaves all over the United States shared in the dream of one day being free. Literacy and education for the slaves (African

Americans) was viewed by many as the route to freedom. This sentiment is echoed

clearly in the voice of Nightjohn, a character portrayed by actor Carl Lumbly in the

movie based on the book by the same name. During a conversation in the slave quarters

about the power of reading Nightjohn says, "*Words are freedom . . . cause that's all*

slavery's made of, words, laws, deeds, passes, all tey are is words, White folk got all the

words and they mean to keep 'em, you get some words fo yo'self you be free" (Burnett,

1996). Similarly, historian and educator Fredrick Douglas, a central figure in the fight for

freedom said, "*Once you learn to read you will be forever free.*" Gadsden (1992)

acknowledges, "*For African-American learners, in particular, literacy has been an*

especially tenuous struggle, from outright denial during slavery, to limited access in the

early 1900s, to segregated schools with often outdated textbooks well into the 1960s . . ."

A number of rules existed to regulate the behavior of slaves from plantation to

plantation, which were known as slave codes (Franklin, 1988). Although these rules were

established to regulate the educational attainment of slaves, the plantation master had the

final say as to who would be educated (Franklin, 1988; Woodson, 1915). For example, a

North Carolina law passed in 1830 made it a crime to teach a slave to read or write. This

law was passed out of fear that if slaves learned to read they may lead revolts against the

plantation owners (Coon, 1908; Aptheker, 1983; Rodriguez, 2007; The University of

North Carolina at Chapel Hill, n. d.). Being a free slave during these times did not exempt

one from the slave laws (slave codes). Because plantation owner had fears of slave

revolts (Franklin, 1988), it was important to control the actions of the free slaves.

Therefore, in 1835 North Carolina supported a law which prevented free blacks from

voting, attending school, or preaching in public (Coon, 1908; The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007a).

According to the writings of John Hope Franklin (1988), in spite of such laws in the South which stated that Negroes (African Americans) could not "absorb educative experiences," education in many areas was allowed. In fact, some slave masters, mistresses, and masters' children taught their slaves to read. This was the case with Fredrick Douglas who was instructed in his literacy attainment by his mistress. In 1847, slaves in Louisville, Kentucky were allowed to attend schools with the permission of their masters (Douglass, 1960; Franklin, 1988). A poet and the first African American female to become published, Phyllis Wheatley was born in Africa in 1753 and came to America as a young slave girl at the age of seven. She was the personal maid of Susannah Wheatley. Phyllis Wheatley learned to read, a result of her owner's teaching of the Bible. Through reading Phyllis developed a love of history, astronomy, geography, and Latin classics (Franklin, 1988).

Overall, the instruction of one or two slaves was an act that many times was overlooked as an offense against laws prohibiting the education of slaves; however the instructing of slaves in any organized manner, such as schools, was prohibited (Franklin, 1988).

Negro Schools: Infamous Separate but Equal

Events occurring in this section happened following revisions to the United States Constitution. The first happened in 1865 with the passing of the 13th amendment which abolished slavery in the United States. The second was the 14th amendment, passed in

1866, which recognized all persons born in the U. S. as citizens of the nation and stated that no state could make or enforce any law that would abridge their rights of citizenship. Additionally, no state could deny any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, as well as no state had the power to deny any person equal protection under the laws. The final event was the passing of the 15th amendment in 1869 which made it illegal to deny voting rights based on a persons' race, color, or past servitude. In theory the passing of these amendments was thought to recognize all humans as citizens and improve life for African Americans in the United States. However changing the actual rights of individuals would take more than the passage of amendments. After all, during slavery African Americans were considered the property of their master, which not only made them inhuman but granted them no rights. The end of slavery did not alter the attitudes and actions of plantation owners and others in opposition to the abolishment of slavery. In fact, in the South the most ludicrous of rules called Jim Crow Laws and/or Black Codes/Laws began to dictate the actions of the freed Negroes (African American) and kept them separate from Whites for many years (DuBois, 1903; Franklin, 1988). Jim Crow Laws were clear as to the behavior codes of newly freed slaves and the fraternization with Whites (Rodriguez, 2007). One such law mandated that Negro and White children be educated in separate schools. With such clear stipulations Negroes began to establish schools in various areas. These children were taught in one-room buildings with poor lighting, and generally no instructional supplies other than second-hand readers discarded from White schools were available to teachers. Many of these schools may have been a part of the Negro church (Franklin, 1988).

One such Negro school existed in Chatham County, North Carolina. Fikes School, located next to the Fikes church, was located in the Hickory Mountain area of Chatham County (W. Brooks, Personal Communication, December, 2008; J. Greene, Personal Communication, December 31, 2008 and January, 13, 2009; and Museum Curator J. Pyle, Personal Communication, December 31, 2008). Actual written documentation of the school are non-existent; however, in talking with individuals who attended Fikes, as well as citizens in Chatham County, we know that Fikes School served the educational needs of students for a number of years until it was mysteriously burned down in 1940 or 1941 (W. Brooks, Personal Communication, December, 2008; J. Greene, Personal Communication, December 31, 2008 and January, 13, 2009). Brooks reminisces about days at Fikes:

> I remember walking to school on rainy days in the cold, snow, and the hot sun. Mr. Richardson was the teacher and the principal. He had to walk to school too. He live with Mama Cordelia [Brooks' grandmother], she rented a room out to him. The White children rode the bus and boy on a rainy day when that bus rode by if you didn't get out the way the bus driver would run in the mud puddles and mess you up. I remember walking down the road many a time, you could hear the bus coming way before it got to you. I knew some of the children on the bus and they knew me. We played together. Sometimes the children [on the bus] got their kicks by calling us niggers and spitting at us when the bus passed. It didn't matter what time you got to school, the teacher didn't say nothing, you just sit down. When we got to school I remember that school house [only one room] was cold, I would freeze to death. We didn't have no books and pencils. I don't remember having lunch, but sometimes a man would come to the school house and give us apples.
>
> After Fikes burnt down they sent us to Pittsboro to school. They gave us a bus then, boy it was raggedy. That bus would break down and then you would get to school and school would be over, then the bus would break down again on the way home. Shoot, we would get off the bus most of the time and have to walk to school. (W. Brooks, Personal Communication, December, 2008; January, 2009)

1954: A Time of Jubilee

It appeared as if conditions were about to change in order to increase the quality and standard of education for African American students throughout the United States with the historic Supreme Court decision announced by Chief Justice Earl Warren that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" in the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education court case of 1954. This decision handed down by the high court created a time of celebration for African Americans; however school desegregation was slow to emerge. In fact another 17 years would pass before the transition would take place in the Greensboro City school system located in North Carolina. This section provides a timeline of events that serve as evidence of the delay in the desegregation of schools.

Early resistance to the Supreme Court decision happened in 1955 with the passing of the *Pupil Assignment Act* intended to evade the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in North Carolina. The act removed control for education from the state to local school boards preventing a statewide desegregation suit by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

A short two years later in1957 the North Carolina General Assembly adopted a resolution opposing the integration of North Carolina's public schools. Other acts of opposition were taking place simultaneously in local municipal government. For example, City of Greensboro officials sold public swimming pools to avoid integrating the facilities. In the midst of this social unrest and opposition to desegregation, integration finally began in 1957 as Josephine Ophelia Boyd, a former Dudley High School student, became the first African American student to attend Greensboro High

School, now Grimsley High School (Bradley, 1995; Chafe, 1980; McVey, 2008). Sadly for African Americans, in anticipation of the opportunities of equal education that desegregation might bring, full integration of the Greensboro City Schools would not take place for another 14 years until 1971.

As late as 1958, four years following Brown vs. The Board of Education decision, the Greensboro school system appeared to have come to no consensus towards bringing racial segregation to an end because the system defied orders to admit two African American students to Caldwell Elementary School—not by denying admission but by moving White teachers and students to other schools. This act is an early case of trend known as *white flight*. Reactions to these oppositional episodes caused African American citizens to continuously organize and plan courses of action to counter segregation. Such an event happened when the Greensboro Citizens Association (GCA), an organization devoted to civil and human rights matters, presented two petitions to the Greensboro Board of Education in 1961 asking them to integrate schools. It would take 10 more years for integration to be realized in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Another two important actions in the history of the United States would take place to move the Greensboro Public Schools towards becoming a desegregated system. One was the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act by President Lyndon B. Johnson and, five years later, the 1969 United States Supreme Court order requiring school systems to ends racial segregation *"at once."*

The very act of bringing about racial equality was not limited to adults in the Greensboro community. Students attending substandard schools also shared in the vision

of social justice and racial equality. In 1969, Claude Barnes, a junior at Dudley High

School, was dissatisfied with the unequal distribution of resources and facilities at

Dudley as compared to White school in this same district. He decided to run for student

council president. His campaign platform addressed issues such as the school's unequal

facilities and resources as well as the need for curricula concerning African American

culture/studies and cultural resource materials. The forward thinking of Barnes was in

direct conflict with school administrators who viewed Barnes as militant. Barnes was met

with opposition by disappointed Dudley students who organized a write-in campaign

which resulted in Barnes winning. However, administrators dissatisfied with election

results proclaimed the second-place candidate as the winner. This administrative act

provoked students to boycott classes in protest of the decision, and consequently Barnes'

name was not put on the election ballot. This ban did not end his leadership aspirations

and attempts to silence him. As many as 400 Dudley students participated in the protest

and as the word spread to nearby North Carolina Agriculture &Technical College (now

North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University, or NCA&TSU) many

students joined the protest. Protests progressed to violent stages as police officials shot

tear gas into the crowd in attempt to end the protests.

The Barnes protest came about as result of one student's valiant efforts to

challenge the status quo and make administration aware of the fact that substandard and

unequal conditions existed with regard to the education of students attending Dudley.

Furthermore, Barnes had the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education federal court

decision determined fifteen years prior as a basis for his argument. It goes without saying

that desegregation efforts were slow to come about. In fact during that time period (1969-1970), 49% of the public school in Greensboro remained segregated, 40% had less than 18% minority students and only 11% of the school had between 18-50% minority students (http://www.ictj.org/static/GTRC.FinalReport.annexes.contexttimeline.pdf). Such statistics demonstrate very little progress towards ending racial segregation in the Greensboro School System, and perhaps prompted the 1971 Supreme Court ruling that the busing of students may be ordered in an effort to achieve racial desegregation. With this ruling Greensboro schools were compelled to begin desegregation via busing. However, there was an increase in "white flight" as parents opposed to the changes occurring within the public schools.

Coleman Report: A Turning Point

The events reported in this literature review have revealed how African Americans in the United States sought opportunities to be treated as equal citizens and granted the rights outlined in the United Constitution. Therefore it should not be surprising that deficits and disparities exist in the levels of academic knowledge of African Americans as compared to their European American (White) counterparts due to many years of unequal educational opportunities. The most influential study aimed at making inquiries into the inequality of educational opportunities of students based on race, religion, national origin, etc. was the 1966 Coleman Report. The final report was also known as "Equality of Educational Opportunities Study" (EEOS). The Coleman Report involved 600,000 children in 4,000 schools in the United States. The findings of this report revealed that differences in the funds received between African American and

White schools did not negatively impact achievement. This finding is in contrast to

schools in the North Carolina Guilford County School system where identified schools

receive additional funding due to such disparities (Coleman, 1969). Another important

finding revealed that minority students' achievement levels were improved when they

attended school with middle class students, while attending schools with students in

poverty was found to be a less productive education environment for minority students

(Coleman, 1969; Evans, 2005). Undoubtedly, the current disparities and inequities in the

education of African Americans must be understood within the socio-political and

historical context as it relates to the history of education. History uncovers that the fight

of personal and collective freedom were interconnected with education. The upcoming

discussion regarding the achievement gap will highlight the current disparities in

education post Brown v. Board of Education.

The Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is defined as

> A persistent, pervasive, and significant disparity in the educational achievement
> and attainment among groups of students, as determined by a standardized
> measure. When analyzed according to race and ethnicity, achievement disparities
> negatively impact educational outcomes for poor children and children of color on
> a consistent basis. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n. d., p. 2)

The gap in the educational achievement of European American students and

African American and Latino students continues to be a persistent dilemma (Chubb &

Loveless, 2002). Studies show that the average African American 17-year-old performs

at the same level as the average European American 13-year-old (NAEP, 2004; Rothman,

2002). Rothman stated that the gaps actually lessened in reading and math during the 1970s and 1980s (Educational Research Services, ERS) following the full desegregation of United States' schools. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the gap in reading test scores shrank by 22 points on a 500-point scale, the equivalent of two grade levels, from 1970-1990. However, in the late 1980s, NAEP reported that 8% of African American fourth graders were able to write at proficiency level compared to 27% of European-American fourth graders. During the decade of the 1990s the gaps remained constant or grew slightly in math and reading (NAEP). These gaps are apparent in students before they enter kindergarten and persist into adulthood (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Are schools to blame for these gaps? If our nation's schools are mini institutions reflective of the broader society, where the majority population is privileged, then perhaps yes. It is my assumption that schools may make matters worse as they fail to account for student differences by expecting all students to enter kindergarten at the same readiness level. Also, curriculum requirements dictate that all students achieve mastery by the end of kindergarten in spite of the fact that not all students entered school demonstrating the same abilities. In the sense that curriculum requirements, grading systems, and grade leveling privilege certain students, schools are likely to be a target of blame for these gaps.

Factors Contributing to the Achievement Gap

Depending on the stream of research, a number of theories exist as to why there is an achievement gap between the academic performance of African American and European-American (White) students. The research points to such factors as disparities in

available school resources, parenting styles, and peer culture. In addition, teaching style and teacher expectations of students are also known to influence student achievement (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994), and the quality of instruction is found to influence academic achievement. Rothman (2002) also names poverty as a disparity in school performance. However, Rothman feels poverty is not the only factor that contributes to this gap. A correlation was also found by the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2000) between higher numbers of students qualifying for subsidized lunch and lower test score performance on students' fourth grade mathematics assessments (NCES, 2000). According to a report by the United States Commission on Civil Rights (2004), poverty, race, and ethnicity are found to be important factors in student achievement. This report further states that high-poverty schools in which 75% or more of the students receive free or subsidized lunch, have increased numbers of African American and Latino students, increased student absenteeism, less parental involvement, and more negative attitudes toward academic achievement. Still another factor stands out in viewing students' racial achievement statistics: African American males are at opposite extremes when compared to White students. Stated differently, the range between African American male reading and math scores and the scores of White students is wider than any other minority group. Problematic is the reality that African American males are performing at levels lower than White males, females, and all other males and female minority groups (NCES).

The Education of Today's African American Males

Nieto (1996) says that no educational philosophy or program is worthwhile unless it focuses on two primary concerns:

- Raising the achievement of all students and thus providing them with an equitable and high-quality education.

- Giving students an apprenticeship in the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a democratic society. (p. 9)

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to explore bodies of knowledge associated with practices and theories that enable African American males to achieve success in literacy, which I see as primary in their becoming productive members of the communities in which they live. The remainder of this literature review will focus on the current state of the African American male, best practices in literacy instruction, and culturally relevant teaching.

State of the African American Male

Today, in Anywhereville in the United States of America, the African American male is born into a life of inequalities. Inequalities exist even before the doctors have determined his sex, before the umbilical cord has been severed allowing him to breathe for himself, and before the APGAR test is administered and the score delivered to the mother. Statistical inequalities report the likelihood of African American males' inability to matriculate from childhood through adolescence to adulthood in a productive manner according to society. Below are some trends which Kunjufu (2002, 2005) recently compiled on the African American (Black) male:

- If an African American is placed in special education, 80% of the time the child is male.

- 63% of Black fourth-grade students performing below grade level in reading.

- 61% of Black eighth-grade students performing below grade level in math.

- SAT averages: Asians, 1083; Whites, 1063; Latino, 903; Blacks, 857.

- Only 56% of Black people graduated from high school by the age of 18.

- Only 21% of Black high school graduates are able to take college-level courses.

- 21% of Black high school students between the ages of 14 and 17 perform two years below grade level.

- 27% of Black people earned their GED by the age of 25.

- 46% of all Black college students were in community colleges.

- 13% of all Blacks between the ages of 16 and 24 have not earned a high school diploma or GED.

- 34% of all Black adults in the country had not completed high school and 52.4% of all Black adults had not completed high school.

- 35% of all Blacks between the ages of 18 and 24 were high school dropouts.

- 25% of African American adults live below the poverty line

- 40% of African American males 16-65 are unemployed

- 6% of America's teachers are Black, 1% are male.

- 33% of Black males are involved in a penal institution and the projection for 2020 is about 66%.

Of all African American males in high school:

- 1 in 200,000 will play in the NBA

- 1 in 3,700 will earn a Ph.D.

- 1 in 766 will become a lawyer

- 1 in 395 will become a doctor

- 1 in 95 will become a teacher

- 1 in 20 will be incarcerated

- 1 in 12 will have a sexually transmitted disease (STD)

- 1 in 9 will use cocaine

- 1 in 3 will drop out of high school

These statistics should not only startle African American males, but society at

large. A look at the way we are educating these males for success holds promise for

reducing these statistical percentages. Helping African American males to become

literate is one area of focus and a good starting place that provides the most promise for a

productive future for these males. Another equally important starting place is with

teachers' knowledge and understanding of African American male dispositions and other

historical matters associated with the success or lack of success of African American

males. This knowledge is especially helpful for middle class, White teachers who

dominate classrooms in our schools today because effectively educating African

American males will impact the social, economic, and political competence of the society

(Reed, 1988). Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) make claims about existing race, social

class, and language background gaps between teachers and students in K-12 settings who

are not prepared to teach the diverse populations in our schools today. It is the

responsibility of educators to equip African American males with skills which enable

them to overcome the negative statistics that hang over them. As a result of all of these

statistics and discussion about the achievement gap society sometimes views African

American males in a pessimistic manner.

Identity as Seen by Others: Perceptions and Theories

Identity is defined as the *sameness of essential or generic character in different*

instances (Identity, n. d.). This sameness as it relates to African American males has

caused these males to be seen and referred to as suffering from the *five d's*: dumb,

deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed (Gibbs, 1988). I agree with Gibbs that

African American males are viewed by their teachers through media images, portrayals,

and stereotypes. It has certainly been my experience during my tenure as an educator to

hear teachers make remarks like "I don't see color" and "I see students and treat them all

the same" as they reference how they relate to minority students in their class. Nieto

(1996) says that teachers who make these comments see themselves as being fair,

impartial, and objective; however, the opposite is true. The fact is that the media has

created an identity or profile of these males and society views them through those media

images (Gibbs, 1988). It is fair to say that what is written in the literature about African

American males may impact the academic success of the African American male in some

cases and impede success in other cases. Three such conditions/mindsets are discussed

below: "cool pose," "acting white," and "stereotype threat," which many African

American males struggle with as they try to fit into the educational setting.

Cool Pose

One such struggle is the constant *tough guy* role the African American male assumes at home and in his community that comes into conflict in the school setting. This form of masculinity is referred to in the literature as "cool pose" (Connor, 2003). "Cool" is steeped in the idea that African American manhood is a manifestation resulting from their need to demonstrate their inability to control their environment during the years of captivity, better known as slavery (Connor, 2003). Prior to slavery, manhood was established through conquering enemies as well as demonstrating strength and superior ability. Once outsiders captured the slaves and took them to foreign lands they were punished quickly and harshly if caught demonstrating anger or retaliation (Connor, 2003). The need to mask emotions and present a persona of calm, even as they watched their loved ones raped, lynched, and/or tortured, became basic to their very survival. This masking of emotions is the beginning of "cool."

Conner's (2003) analysis of "cool" states it is a "description of a collective lifestyle, a code of behavior that spoke very specifically to the Black experience, which evolved from a desperate need. And when cool changes, it changes out of need. Without need, there is no cool" (pp. 7-8). Coolness means poised under pressure and the ability to maintain detachment, even during tense encounters. Being cool invigorates a life that would otherwise be degrading and empty.

This coolness starts early as the African American male learns how to develop and establish his own particular style of "cool" in order to fit in or demonstrate his

masculinity. Consequently, the concept of coolness is key to the African American male developing a sense of dignity, confidence, and worth.

"Acting White" Theory

Educators equipped with the knowledge about "cool pose" understand that African American males can also trade in academic success in order to save face or avoid being viewed by their peers as *selling out* or *acting white* (Ogbu, 1986). Ogbu (1990) offers a compelling theory related to the success and/or lack of success of minorities as he sorts them into three categories (autonomous minorities, immigrant minorities, and involuntary or caste-like minorities). The first category, *autonomous minorities,* is composed of Jews and Mormons, or other victims of prejudice and pillory. The next category, *immigrant minorities*, are those individuals who have relocated to another land on their own accord, possibly for economic progress or other opportunities. *Involuntary minorities,* on the other hand, are those individuals who did not chose to take up membership in a particular society but were forced into such cultures via slavery, colonization and/or conquest (Ogbu, 1990). According to Ogbu (1990), African Americans, American Indians, Mexican Americans in the southwest, and native Hawaiians fall within the group of *involuntary or caste-like minorities*. These groups had no desires to abandon their established lifestyles and take up membership on foreign soils and as a result have viewed "social, political, and economic barriers erected against them as *undeserved oppression*" (Ogbu, 1990, p. 47). The practice avoiding success in school so as not to appear *acting white* is rooted in the concept of being an *involuntary immigrant*. *Acting white* is associated with *undeserved oppression* when viewed from the

perspective that education in today's schools is being delivered in a traditional manner and from the perspective of the teacher.

Stereotype Threat

Academic performance can take on still another dimension, referred in the literature as stereotype threat (Steele, 1997, 1999). Stereotype threat is a social-psychological predicament that stems from widely known negative stereotypes about one's group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele (1997, 1999) contends that students are highly prone to beliefs about prevailing stereotypes related to intellectual ability. Stereotypes are internalized by students and then lower the confidence levels of vulnerable students, which in turn negatively affect performance on tests as well as students' overall academic performance. Could this cool pose, acting white theory, and/or stereotype threat also be underlying reasons for the achievement gap? The issue of cool pose, acting white theory, and stereotype threat ultimately can affect identity and achievement.

This *Identity as Seen by Others* section serves as an overview of literature relevant for teachers of African American males as they attempt to provide these students with necessary and meaningful literacy instruction. Accomplishing this goal brings educators closer to the overall goal of education, producing individuals able to make positive contributions to society.

Effective Teachers

During my life as a student and tenure as a classroom teacher references made about "effective teachers" seem to have taken on many meanings. As I think back to the

period when the school I attended began the process of racial integration, effective teachers were referred to as "good" teachers. "Good teachers" during that time was code for White teachers. Early in my career as a teacher "effective teachers" were those who had good classroom management and had few student referrals to the principal's office. Today "effective teachers" and teaching has taken on an academic identity with the onset of NCLB which has resulted in the annual testing of students at various grade levels.

In the professional literature exemplary and effective teaching takes on different terms, all related to how teachers positively impact students. These terms include but are not limited to influential (Ruddell, Draheim, & Barnes, 1990), expert (Berliner, 2001), star (Haberman, 1995), outstanding (Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1995), successful (Sanders & River, 1996), effective (Allington & Johnson, 2002), highly qualified (NCLB, 2001), quality (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005), and accomplished (National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2002). Also in the literature are terms and theories like good teaching/culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995), culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally congruent (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), culturally responsive (Au & Jordan, 1981), culturally compatible (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), which are associated with effective teaching and teachers for diverse populations.

Gourneau (2005) conducted an eight semester research study on 210 undergraduate education students on the attitudes of "effective teachers." Student participants wrote essays about a teacher who made a negative or positive impression on their lives. Students were instructed to include thoughtful examples, descriptions, and

details of how they were treated by their teachers. Following the essay writing students formed groups of four and shared their stories. One group member recorded responses. Each group then reported their list. Responses were recorded on the chalkboard to compare similarities and differences among groups. The results of this study suggest five effective teacher attitudes and five ineffective teacher attitudes (see Appendix G).

Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley, and Vincent (2003) conducted a yearlong study with nine third-grade teachers in eight Catholic schools to determine how teachers motivated students to engage them academically. Data collection consisted of classroom observations, teacher interviews, and artifact collection of student work. Data were analyzed and teachers were sorted into three categories according to their ability to motivate/engage students (low, moderately, and high engaging). Effective teachers, also referred to as high engaging teachers, were found to have learning environments in which classroom management is optimal. They are teachers who work with happy children in highly productive classroom environments. These teachers provide caring communities where students are comfortable with learning and where respect and responsibility are evident.

Walker (2008) conducted a longitudinal, qualitative, quasi-research in which he asked pre-service and in-service teacher educators the qualities of their most memorable teacher who encouraged them to teach. Based on recurring themes, Walker concluded that effective teachers shared the following 12 characteristics (see Appendix H for more detail):

Characteristic 1: Prepared
Characteristic 2: Positive

Characteristic 3: Hold High Expectations
Characteristic 4: Creative
Characteristic 5: Fair
Characteristic 6: Display a Personal Touch
Characteristic 7: Cultivate a Sense of Belonging
Characteristic 8: Compassionate
Characteristic 9: Have a Sense of Humor
Characteristic 10: Respect Students
Characteristic 11: Forgiving
Characteristic 12: Admit Mistakes

Cobb (2004) studied effective practices of teachers in a few school districts who engaged in changing their approach to instruction. Results of this effort yield that schools which are needed in the new millennium require teachers that not only have the ability to revise their instruction but also teachers who can reshape their perspectives on teaching and learning. Such schools committed to this change, and as a result impact the academic achievement of all students, share four strategies/commonalities are referred to as DIME (differentiation, interaction, monitoring, and extended time for learning). Many of these effective teacher characteristics become important as we look at effective literacy teaching.

Literacy Instruction

One of many possible definitions of being literacy in the United States Literacy is defined as "the quality or state of being literate." A dictionary definition of literate states "one who is able to read and write; educated; lucid" (New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989). According to the National Institute for Literacy the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 states being literate means that one is able to read, write, speak in English, and also to compute and problem solve at proficiency levels necessary to function on a job, in the

family, and society. More recently the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) defined literate as

> the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and
> use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy
> involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to
> develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community
> and wider society. (2005, p. 21)

Along with this definition, Tatum (2005) argues that increased reading achievement and

literacy development increases opportunities for African American males and can lead to

higher levels of college enrollment, lower levels of unemployment, reduction in violent

crimes, and lower incarceration.

No one would argue that in order for African American males to become literate,

the implementation of effective strategies is most important. In 1998 the National

Reading Council (NRC) found that children of color and those raised in poverty were

continually at risk for academic failure. It further stated that one-third of children are at

risk of failure upon entering kindergarten due to socially and economically impoverished

conditions (NRC, 1998). African American male students are far more likely to be raised

in impoverished households as compared to White children (McGee & Richgels, 2003),

which contributes to a disparity in prior experiences compared to more affluent students

who have the benefit of more literacy experiences and exposure to concepts and ideas

that help develop background knowledge.

Children in our nation's schools who do not receive proper early reading

interventions may be doomed to harsh consequences. According to a report conducted in

1988 by Juel revealed that children who scored in the lowest quartile for reading comprehension at the end of grade one continued to score below the 50th percentile at the end of grade four. African American students who fail to develop early literacy skills fall even further behind as they progress towards graduation (Juel, 1988). This deficit in reading ability becomes a major problem as African Americans males transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," making comprehension difficult in other content areas and especially as they transition into adulthood.

Reading instruction has changed in the past 25 years due to four intertwined theories of learning language and literacy. The four theories are (a) constructivism, (b) interactive, (c) sociolinguistic, and (d) reader response theories (Boyer, 1995; Tompkins, 2003). One problem that seems to exist is teaching philosophies and not teaching students. In the past some teachers approached reading from either a phonics or a whole language perspective. For a while, phonics was important, then whole language; currently, a balanced or comprehensive approach is in vogue. Whatever the current theories and practices, teachers need to be effective literacy teachers for all students.

Rayner et al. (2002) state that learning to talk is automatic for the majority of students reared in regular conditions; however, learning to read needs intricate instructional strategies and conscious efforts. Surely most teachers understand that there is no one program that is responsible for the literacy growth of students (Allington, 2000), nor does the same instructional strategy or program work for all students (Allington, 2002b; Raphael et al., 2003). Duffy and Hoffman (1999) state that the one-size-fits-all method is fine for sorting students on an academic track, if that is truly the

goal. On the other hand, Baumann and Duffy (1997) state that the one-size-fits-all fails students miserably if the goal is high academic achievement. Duffy-Hester (1999) further states, "I am convinced that the teacher is more important and has a greater impact than any single, fixed reading program, method, or approach" (p. 492). There is a strong implication here that the teacher holds the power on effective literacy instruction.

Effective Literacy Teachers

Tompkins (2003) in her text book *Literacy for the 21st Century: Teaching Reading and Writing in Pre-kindergarten through Grade 4* offers eight principles of an effective reading program. These principles state what Tompkins thinks effective teachers should do in what is referred to as a balanced approach to reading instruction.

- Effective teachers understand how children learn

- Effective teachers support children's use of the four cueing systems (phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic).

- Effective teachers create a community of learners.

- Effective teachers adopt a balanced literacy approach to literacy instruction.

- Effective teachers scaffold children's reading and writing experiences.

- Effective teachers organize literacy instruction in four ways (literature focus units, literature circles, reading and writing workshop, and basal reading programs).

- Effective teachers connect instruction and assessment.

- Effective teachers continue to learn about reading and writing.

Morrow, Tracy, Wu, and Pressley (1999) refer to effective teachers as *exemplary* because essential components of their reading instruction involve a careful balancing of skills instruction within the context of real reading and writing and that teachers make it their quest to encourage student academic self-regulation and motivation. Such exemplary teachers differ from the ineffective "business as usual" teacher approach (Grant & Sleeter, 2003). In this setting, the teacher talking and the students listening, students working to complete worksheets, and teachers teaching to the test are a few of the business-as-usual strategies that ineffective teachers use. The classroom and the plans of the exemplary teacher are far different from the "business as usual" teacher.

Effective/exemplary literacy teachers possess a number of other common qualities (common in the sense that they share them with other exemplary teachers, not because the qualities are ordinary).

Trehearne (2005) states the primary factors that influence teacher effectiveness are their beliefs and understandings:

- Effective teachers believe in the potential of all students to be effective literacy learners. Excuses are not made nor are students blamed for not achieving.

- Effective teachers believe in themselves as successful literacy teachers. They are constantly learning and open to new ideas but do not jump on bandwagons.

- Effective teachers believe in the importance of what they are teaching. They recognize the importance of literacy learning as foundational knowledge

across the curriculum. This is reflected in both the time and effort put into their teaching.

- Effective teachers have clear understandings as to what developmentally appropriate teaching and learning looks like. Students' results speak for themselves. The most effective way to support teacher beliefs and understanding (as well as student achievement) is through ongoing professional development by establishing professional learning teams.

According to the International Reading Association (2000), effective teachers understand the "what" and "how" of effective reading instruction and include the following:

- Teachers use formative assessments as a means of instruction to monitor/measure/assess students' reading strengths and weaknesses,

- Teachers use structuring reading activities around an explicit instructional format,

- Teachers provide students with opportunities to learn and apply skills and strategies in authentic reading tasks,

- Teachers ensure that students attend to the learning tasks, and

- Teachers believe in one's teaching abilities and expecting students to be successful.

Topping and Ferguson (2005) argue the effectiveness of many literacy programs correlates more with teaching style than the program. They conducted a study of five highly effective teachers of literacy to explore teaching behaviors that were independent of any specific program. Teachers were selected based on expert nomination and high

pupil literacy attainment. Results demonstrate teachers used similar teaching behaviors.

Teachers were observed during shared reading sessions and in general reading sessions.

Shared reading lessons were very interactive with high levels of "turn-taking," peer-

learning with role allocation, games to maximize on-task behavior and brisk lesson

pacing. General literacy sessions involved the teachers working with varied group sizes,

with half the time committed to group teaching and half to whole group.

 Allington, Johnston, and Day (2002) studied effective teachers of literacy

instruction for some time. These studies were conducted in a number of elementary

grades schools where high poverty, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity were well

represented. In these studies, Allington et al. (2002) observed first and fourth-grade

teachers from six states (New York, Texas, New Hampshire, California, Wisconsin, and

New Jersey). Ten days were spent observing, interviewing, and videotaping teachers.

From this study, Allington et al. (2002) found six features common among teachers.

These features are called the six T's of effective elementary literacy instruction observed

in exemplary teachers. The T's are time, texts, teaching, talk, task, and testing. Data were

collected from the classrooms of basically two types of teachers: teachers successful with

students, and teachers who were less successful in their literacy teaching. Allington et al.

(2002) found that successful teachers maximized instructional *time* by engaging students

in actual reading and writing 50% of the school day compared to other classrooms where

engagement tended to hover around 10%. The number of *texts* (books) available for

students to read was also found to as a second feature of effective literacy instruction.

Teaching, still another feature, involves teachers modeling and demonstrating useful

strategies that good readers use as opposed to the assign and assess strategy, which

Allington et al. (2002) state was utilized by teachers in less effective classrooms. The

next feature, *talk*, was used at higher levels by effective teachers. These teachers used

student talk, including teacher-to-student and student-to-student talk teachers in this study

were also clever about the assigning of *tasks* (individual and in crafty ways to engage

students in higher-level thinking, effective group projects, content integrated projects,

etc.), which were purposeful as opposed to less productive classrooms where low-level

worksheet-type tasks were utilized (Allington, 2002a). The last feature *testing*, deals with

discrepancies found in the manner which teachers used student assessment. Effective

teachers used rubrics to evaluate students' effort and improvement in their work as

opposed to less effective teachers who used commercially prepared materials and focused

on test prep and summative assessments. Allington (2002a) makes clear that the six T's

are combined and that implementing one of the T's will only produce minimal progress,

if any. It is the implementation of these six Ts in combination that enables effective

teachers to impact literacy development, while the less effective teachers were found to

pick and choose among these essential components without combining them all for their

effectiveness.

The International Reading Association (2000) takes the position that all students

deserve an excellent reading teacher. They provide the following list of the qualities of

excellent reading teachers.

- Excellent reading teachers understand reading and writing development, and

    believe all children can learn to read and write.

- Excellent reading teachers continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.

- Excellent reading teachers know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program.

- Excellent reading teachers offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.

- Excellent reading teachers use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.

- Excellent reading teachers are good reading "coaches" (that is, they provide help strategically).

A study was conducted with first-grade teachers in five states across the USA (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998) where the research question was "*What is the nature of early exemplary instruction*?" The findings were that (a) teachers preferred a balanced approach for literature instruction; (b) children were exposed to direct and explicit instruction for skill development; and (c) teachers would build a community for learning that included cooperation, respect, and strong expectation for work and achievement. Teachers used a variety of instructional groupings: small group, whole group, paired and one-to-one. Teachers used developmentally appropriate experiences. Teaching was direct, explicit, and systematic (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Additional results show that students experienced literacy in a variety of ways: shared reading and writing activities, independent reading and writing, social

collaborative reading and writing and guided reading, and reading for skill development, oral and silent reading, writing and mini lessons modeled by the teacher, content subjects integration in reading and writing, meaningful opportunities to share reading and writing accomplishments. Teachers willingly pursued graduate degrees in education, attended professional conferences, and read professional materials to enhance their curriculum and instructional plans (Morrow et al., 1999).

Still another study conducted by Cambourne (2000) found similar results. Cambourne reports these finding in three broad categories: (a) *inanimate physical paraphernalia present in the setting,* which may include a writing center equipped with different types of paper, pens markers, tape recorders, etc.; (b) *human behaviors around the paraphernalia*, which includes the setting/classroom environment where student grouping is utilized to encourage verbal interaction among them; and (c) *programs* (routines and events) *typically occurring in the setting.* An important revelation from this study was that the teacher is responsible for creating a classroom climate that promotes reading and writing among students. Also important is the teachers' use of language, which is reflective of a number of questioning techniques to push students to acquire a deeper level of thought (critical thinking). Six basic expectation messages that teachers communicate were powerful in the development of independent thinkers. Cambourne (2000) categorized them into the following themes:

- Theme 1: Becoming an effective user of literacy is an extremely worthwhile enterprise that will further the purposes of one's life.

- Theme 2: All members of this learning community are capable of becoming effective users of literacy. No one can fail to do it.

- Theme 3: The best way to learn is to share and discuss your learning problems with others; "have a go," both as a member of a group and individually; approximate; and reflect on the feedback you get.

- Theme 4: All statements, comments, and judgments must be justified using plausible and sensible arguments and examples.

- Theme 5: It is safe to have a go in this setting. Delpit (1998) states that a great deal of literature deals with African Americans' dispositions and literacy development prior to entering school.

- Theme 6: One can be said to know and understand when one has made that which is to be known and understood one's own way.

However, there is little research evaluating the effectiveness of literacy programs developed specifically for African-American students (Lee, 1995; Thonis, 1989). Also reported in the literature is a need for appropriate literature for African American males.

Tatum (2005) claims that African American males are too preoccupied with thoughts of their own mortality and energy associated with survival to see literacy as a bridge to the future. I have found this to be my experience with African American males in my class. One example of this survival mentality stemmed from a discussion during a guided reading group lesson that dealt with loud noises. I asked students what they did when they heard a loud noise. I was perplexed when one student said, "*we hit the deck*, no matter where we are, upstairs or down." As the other students in the class nodded in

agreement, I went on to question the student about his use of *hit the deck*, not sure that he understood the meaning of the idiom. I asked, what do you mean by you hit the deck? The student replied, "We get down on the floor." Again the other students in the class nodded as they started to engage in sidebar conversations. Out of genuine curiosity I questioned why, and the student replied, because it might be a "drive by." Again, the other students in the class nodding their heads in agreement and another sidebar started. This is what Tatum refers to as the daily turmoil that students are dealing with that prevents them from taking part in literacy.

Strickland (1998) compiled a list of themes from her literature on literacy instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students that parallel the characteristic of previous researchers (p. 51), but Strickland is not referring only to the literacy needs of African American males:

- Variability exists within and across linguistic and cultural communities.

- A student's conceptual framework and background experiences are critical to literacy learning.

- Both learning and teaching are enhanced when context is acknowledged and used.

- The use of language for real communication enhances learning.

- The use of materials and experiences to which student can relate helps establish and expand their conceptual framework.

- A focus on high-level thinking and problem solving is critical for all children.

To examine what counts as effective literacy teaching in urban classrooms Scott and Teale (2009) conducted a study on three urban educators. These educators were asked to respond to five issues: (a) needs of urban learners; (b) principles/theoretical framework for literacy teaching; (c) literacy instructional practices; (d) evaluating outcomes; and (e) change. Findings reveal a need for urban teachers able to meet the holistic needs of the diverse student populations represented in today's schools. Findings also reveal the importance of accelerating student achievement to the greatest extent possible and employing constructivist principles. Issues of authenticity, motivation, and differentiated instruction were the instructional practices appropriate for urban children. The use of on-going student assessment was also a common theme among teach participants. Lastly, professional development opportunities were noted as valuable to teachers as they worked to meet the literacy needs of urban students.

In summary, to this point I have discussed the literature on exemplary literacy practices. Research shows that these practices are useful to teachers and administrators as they grapple with the complex nature of teaching, but that they are not specific to African American students and in particular African American male students. Holistically, these practices have been shown to be effective if educators can move from a deficit perspective to a more culturally relevant perspective in the education of African American students. I will now discuss the concepts and processes related to multicultural education, and specifically to culturally relevant teaching, which does speak specifically to teaching African American students,

Multicultural Education

Tatum (2005) also suggests that literature instruction must be appropriate for African American males and that appropriateness means that African American males are reflected in the text. Other means of appropriateness will be discussed next as I review the literature of multicultural education and more specifically culturally relevant teaching.

Banks and Banks (2001) call *multicultural education* being reflected in the text (mentioned in previous paragraph). Multicultural education is in the least three things: (a) an idea or concept, (b) an educational reform movement, and (c) a process. Multicultural education, a byproduct of the civil rights movement, which impacted schools by requiring that schools reform curricula to reflect the experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives of various ethnic groups (Banks & Banks, 2001). They view multicultural education as a multidimensional concept consisting of (a) content integration, (b) knowledge construction, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure. They also make clear that education should be transformative allowing all students to become empowered to participate effectively in a democratic society. Therefore it is important for teachers to understand multicultural concepts in educating African American males as theory that exists to improve the achievement of these males.

It has been reported that about 50% of new teachers in urban schools leave the profession after the first five years of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996). This is mainly due to the fact that many have few life experiences to prepare them to relate to the

realities of inner city communities and receive minimal academic preparation or internship exposure to these schools. High attrition rates and lack of cultural literacy complicate the schools' ability to provide students with quality committed teachers so essential to student learning (Brookhart & Loadman, 1999). Teachers who are most successful in multicultural urban schools tend to be:

- Involved in the schools' community and have an understanding of students' lives outside of school (Cook & Van Cleaf, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994);

- Culturally competent and have a socio-political consciousness in the context of the school, community and nation (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001); and

- Integrate technology into a student-centered classroom (Sandholtz, Ringstaff, & Dwyer, 1997).

STAR Teachers

Haberman (1995) discusses ways he has been successful in teaching students in urban settings. Haberman conducted research on urban teachers to study the qualities of a star teacher. This is included as a part of the literature review because African American males are represented in these types of settings, and multicultural education is an important part of empowering teachers to teach African American males. Haberman (1995) states that "star teachers" share common attributes and philosophies such as (a) persistence, (b) protection of learners and learning, (c) application of generalizations, (d) approach to at-risk students, (e) personal vs. professional orientation to teaching, (f) burnout, and (g) fallibility (Haberman, 1995). Haberman (2008) states that star teachers have a sense of "decency."

- *Star teachers tend to be nonjudgmental*. As they interact with students and adults in school settings, star teachers try to understand the motivation behind a given behavior rather than judge the behavior.

- *Star teachers are not moralistic*. Star teachers know that preaching and lecturing do not equate to teaching and that those approaches neither influence behavior nor increase students' desire to learn.

- *Star teachers respond as professionals and are not easily shocked*. Horrific events occur in urban schools with some regularity. Star teachers ask themselves, "What can I do about this?" If they can help, they take action. If not, they get on with their work and their lives. They respond to emotionally charged situations as thoughtful professionals.

- *Star teachers hear what students and adults say to them*. Star teachers listen and understand. They have exceedingly sensitive communication skills. They regard everyone in the school community as a potential source of useful information.

- *Star teachers recognize and compensate for their weaknesses*. Star teachers are aware of their weaknesses in terms of a lack of knowledge or skills or in terms of their own biases and prejudices. They strive to overcome them.

- *Star teachers do not see themselves as saviors*. Star teachers have not come to rescue the system. Actually, they do not expect much from the system— except for the likelihood that it may worsen. They focus on making their students successful in spite of the system.

- *Star teachers do not work in isolation*. Star teachers know that burnout can affect everyone. They network and create their own support groups.

- *Star teachers view themselves as successful professionals rescuing students*. Star teachers see themselves as "winning" even though they know that their total influence on their students is likely to be less than that of the society, neighborhood, or even gangs. They take pride in turning students on to learning and making them educationally successful in the midst of failed urban school systems.

- *Star teachers derive energy and well-being from their interactions with students*. Star teachers so enjoy being with students that they are even willing to put up with the irrational demands of the system. Rather than always feeling exhausted, they often feel vitalized and energized from a day at work.

- *Star teachers see themselves as teachers of children as well as of content*. Star teachers want to encourage their students to become better people, not just higher achievers.

- *Star teachers are learners*. Star teachers are models of learning for students because they are vitally interested in some subject matter or avocation that keeps them continually learning.

- *Star teachers have no need for power*. Star teachers derive their satisfaction from effectively teaching diverse low-income students.

- *Star teachers recognize the imperative of student success*. Star teachers see the need for diverse low-income students to succeed in school as a matter of life

and death for the students and for the survival of society. (Haberman, 1995, p.

777)

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Nieto (2005), in her book *Why We Teach*, interviewed 21 teachers and identified

five core qualities shared by these teachers: (a) a sense of mission, (b) solidarity with and

empathy for students, (c) the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge, (d)

improvisation, and (e) passion for social justice. Social justice is also important to my

argument for African American males because social justice is defined as both a

philosophy and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and

generosity. Belief in social justice often separates teachers into two groups (Nieto &

Bode, 2008). Group one is composed of teachers that who are good at preparing students

for the next grade. Group two teachers are the social justice teachers who are interested in

preparing students for life. Group two teachers are aware of how culture shapes identity.

Teachers' abilities in making the reading-to-learn process (mentioned earlier)

happen are important because motivation and student interest are key. This may also

explain the wealth of literature available on the relevance and importance of culturally

responsive teaching. Proponents of culturally responsive teaching (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-

Billings, 1992, 1994; Lee, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b) state that learning is

most efficient when students are able to draw upon knowledge of concepts, procedures,

and strategies they know well. Culturally responsive teaching enables students to more

effectively construct mental representations of new concepts, procedures, and strategies

(Ladson-Billings, 1994). Studies have shown that when a student's home language is

devalued within the classroom, students' abilities to learn to read and write are negatively

affected (Heath, 1983; Lee, 1995). These results have propelled some scholars to use a

sociocultural lens to examine and rethink how students are taught to read and write.

Sociocultural theorists view society and culture as mediators through which students

make sense of the world (Rogoff & Lave, 1984), which means they are more likely to

unearth practices that are sensitive to the cultural needs and aspirations of particular

cultural groups.

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural

knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make

learning more appropriate and effective for them. Culturally responsive teaching teaches

to and through the strengths of students. Gay (2000) also describes culturally responsive

teaching as having the following characteristics:

- Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural

  heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students'

  dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be

  taught in the formal curriculum.

- Culturally responsive teaching builds bridges of meaningfulness between

  home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and

  lived sociocultural realities.

- Culturally responsive teaching uses a wide variety of instructional strategies

  that are connected to different learning styles.

- Culturally responsive teaching teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages.

- Culturally responsive teaching incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 29)

Using these characteristics to improve culturally responsive teaching would involve considering the classroom environment. For example, literature in the classroom would reflect multiple ethnic perspectives and literary genres. Math instruction would incorporate everyday-life concepts, such as economics, employment, and consumer habits of various ethnic groups. In order to teach to the different learning styles of students, including African American males, activities would reflect a variety of sensory opportunities—visual, auditory, and tactile (Gay, 2000).

Ladson-Billings (1992) explains that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning by "using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 382). Culturally responsive teachers respond to the needs of the whole child (Gay, 2000). Hollins (1996) adds that education designed specifically for students of color incorporates "culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally valued knowledge in curriculum content" (p. 13). Culturally-mediated activities are portrayed by the use of symbols, thoughts, and mental process derived from the individual's culture. In culturally relevant teaching, students are encouraged to engage in culturally mediated activities specific to their own experiences (Jones, Pang, & Rodriguez, 2001). Culturally responsive teachers

realize not only the importance of academic achievement, but also the maintaining of cultural identity and heritage (Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b).

Culturally-mediated activities result in an additive process in which students and teachers develop an array of behavioral, cognitive, and cultural orientations. For example, as described in Pang (1998), Sarah, an African American fifth-grade educator who teaches in a school with a majority of African American students, observes that many of her students are kinesthetic learners. She states:

> They need the opportunity to get up, to move about. They need the opportunity to construct their knowledge, to construct those things that they're learning. We were learning about economics and different types of advertising. So what the kids decided to do was to make their own cereal boxes. They constructed their own cereal boxes and made prizes to go inside. They wrote riddles describing the prize that was inside the box and from reading the riddles their partners or classmates had to guess what the prize was. And actually because they measured how much the cereal weighed, they took percentages of grams of fat and things like that, so we tied math and science into the unit. (Pang, 1998, p. 37)

In this activity, Sarah engaged students in active learning based on their common interest in cereal. She also knew that students enjoyed demonstrating their wit with each other. Social interaction, wit, and active engagement are cultural elements that appeal to many children, but have been found to be particularly effective in the education of African American students (Irvine, 1990).

When students' cultures are ignored by teachers, student may suffer from low achievement because they perceive that the school environment to be incompatible with their own culture. As Medicine Grizzlybear, a member of the Seneca and Cherokee Native American tribes, stated in a letter to his child's teacher, "what you say and do in

the classroom, what you teach and how you teach it, and what you don't say and don't

teach will have a significant effect on the potential success or failure of my child" (Lake,

1990, p. 53).

Therefore, what are the responsibilities of teachers to ensure that they are

responsive to culture and recognize the impact of culture on teaching and learning?

Ladson-Billings (1994) observed instruction delivered in elementary classrooms in which

she witnessed these values being demonstrated. She observed students being a part of

collective efforts designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence in which

expectations were clearly expressed, skills taught, and interpersonal relations were

exhibited. In this setting she stated that the students behaved like members of an extended

family by assisting, supporting, and encouraging each other. Students were held

accountable as part of a larger group, and it was everyone's task to make certain that each

individual member of the group was successful. It was obvious that by promoting this

academic community of learners, teachers responded to the students' need for a sense of

belonging, honored their human dignity, and promoted their individual self-concepts

(Gay, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b).

Culturally responsive teaching empowers students to become better human beings

and more successful learners (Gay, 2000). Empowerment can be described as academic

competence, self-efficacy, and initiative. Gay stresses the importance of students

believing that they can succeed in learning tasks and persist until the task is

accomplished. Further, teachers must demonstrate ambitious and appropriate expectations

and exhibit support for students in their efforts toward academic achievement (Villegas &

Lucas, 2002a, 2002b). This can be done through attribution retraining, providing

resources and personal assistance, modeling positive self-efficacy beliefs, and celebrating

individual and collective accomplishments (Gay, 2000). Gay provides an example of this

idea of empowerment when an elementary school teacher who uses a culturally relevant

approach in a lesson related to the United States Constitution would likely discuss bylaws

and articles of incorporation that were employed to structure a local African American

church. While students learn the meaning of such documents in forming institutions, they

also gain understanding that their own people are institution-builders.

Culturally responsive teaching does not incorporate traditional educational

practices with respect to students of color (Gay, 2000). It means respecting the cultures

and experiences of various groups and then uses these as resources for teaching and

learning. Culturally relevant teaching capitalizes on the existing strengths and

accomplishments of all students and develops them further in instruction. This is an

application of the Vygotskian theory of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky,

1978). For example, the verbal creativity and story-telling that is unique among some

African Americans in informal social interactions is acknowledged as a gift and

contribution and used to teach writing skills. Other ethnic groups of students prefer to

study together in small groups. More opportunities for them and other students to

participate in cooperative learning can be provided in the classroom.

Banks (1991) asserts that if education is to empower marginalized groups, it must

be transformative. Being transformative involves helping "students to develop the

knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective

decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action" (p. 131). That means that teachers encourage students to challenge knowledge and arguments of others.

Culturally responsive teaching is liberating (Asante, 1991/1992; Au, 1993; Lipman, 1995). It helps students to understanding that no single version of "truth" is total and permanent. It recognizes the fact that there is "more than one way to skin a cat."

Culturally responsive teachers are teachers who demonstrate culturally responsive pedagogy (Brown University, 2003; Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems, 2006; Nichols, Rupley, & Webb-Johnson, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b) as follows:

- Communicating high expectations. There are consistent messages, from both the teacher and the whole school that students will succeed, based upon genuine respect for students and belief in student capability.

- Use of active teaching methods. Instruction is designed to promote student engagement by requiring that students play an active role in crafting curriculum and developing learning activities.

- Facilitation of learning. Within an active teaching environment, the teachers' role is one of guide, mediator, and knowledgeable consultant, as well as instructor.

- Teachers have positive perspectives about the parents and families of culturally and linguistically diverse students. There is ongoing participation in dialogue with students, parents, and community members on issues important

to them, along with the inclusion of these individuals and issues in classroom curriculum and activities.

- Demonstration of cultural sensitivity. To maximize learning opportunities, teachers gain knowledge of the cultures represented in their classrooms and translate this knowledge into instructional practice.

- Reshaping of the curriculum. A reshaped curriculum is responsive to students' interests and backgrounds.

- Teachers provide culturally mediated instruction. Instruction is characterized by the use of culturally-mediated cognition, culturally-appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally-valued knowledge in curriculum content.

- Teachers facilitate and promote student-controlled classroom discourse. Students are given the opportunity to control some portion of the lesson, providing teachers with insight into the ways that speech and negotiation are used in the home and community.

- Teachers incorporate small group instruction and cooperative learning. Instruction is organized around low-pressure, student-controlled learning groups that can assist in the development of academic language.

Ladson-Billings, in her 1994 book *The Dream Keepers*, studied the practices of exemplary teachers of African American students and their approaches to culturally relevant teaching. She considers these teachers to be exemplary because:

- Culturally-responsive teachers see their teaching as an art rather than as a technical skill.

- Culturally-responsive teachers believe that all of their students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some.

- Culturally-responsive teachers see themselves as a part of the community and they see teaching as giving back to the community.

- Culturally-responsive teachers also help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural and global identities.

- Culturally-responsive teachers establish relationships with students which are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom.

- Culturally-responsive teachers demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students and encourage that same connectedness between the students.

- Culturally-responsive teachers encourage a community of learners,

- Culturally-responsive teachers encourage their students to learn collaboratively.

- Finally, Culturally-responsive teachers are identified by their notions of knowledge: They believe that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike. Culturally-responsive teachers view the content of the curriculum critically and are passionate about it. Rather than expecting students to demonstrate prior knowledge and skills they help students develop that knowledge by building bridges and scaffolding for learning. (p. 25)

Preparing Culturally-Responsive Teachers

Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) have focused their research efforts on pre-service teachers, specifically ensuring teacher preparedness and ability to meet the educational needs of ever-increasing culturally and linguistically diverse student populations reflected in today's classrooms. The demand of these students requires that teachers foster a novel approach and way of viewing students. Villegas and Lucas (2007) state that successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—especially students from historically marginalized groups—involves more than just applying specialized teaching techniques. "It demands a new way of looking at teaching that is grounded in an understanding of the role of culture and language in learning" (Villegas & Lucas, 2007, p. 29).

Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) compiled a list of six qualities that serve as a sound framework for teachers and/or schools interested in and searching for an effective means to impacting and acknowledging their growing diverse student population. These qualities serve to outline the characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher:

1. Teachers recognize that the ways people perceive the world, interact with one another, and approach learning, among other things, are deeply influenced by such factors as race/ethnicity, social class, and language. This understanding enables teachers to cross the cultural boundaries that separate them from their students.

2. Teachers have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to be solved.

3. Teachers have a sense that they are both responsible and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schooling more responsive to students of diverse backgrounds.

4. Teachers are familiar with their students' prior knowledge and beliefs, derived from both personal and cultural experiences.

5. Teachers see learning as an active process by which learners give meaning to new information.

6. Teachers design instruction that builds on what students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b, pp. 21-26)

Summary

Outlined in the above literature review is an overview of research about the early beginnings of educational attainment for African Americans and the denial of such educational attainment by the majority power structures. The educational history of African Americans serves as background information about the present state of the African American male, which details the social and educational inequalities impacting their ability to develop into successful students and citizens who are able to function in a democracy. This literature review concludes with a review of literature in two additional areas; exemplary/effective teachers and their implementation of effective literacy practices, and exemplary/effective teachers and their implementation of culturally

relevant pedagogy. The research describes bodies of knowledge and practices that can potentially impact the achievement of the African American males involved in this research study. The conceptual framework developed for this study is centered on teachers' understanding and knowledge of (a) African American male dispositions, (b) literacy best practices, and (c) culturally relevant teaching. My proposition is that teachers who positively impact the literacy achievement of African American males in grades 3-5 use combined knowledge in these three areas.

Chapter III will provide an explanation of the qualitative, interpretive research paradigm selected for this study, which makes use of case study as methodology. Also included is a detailed explanation of participant selection procedures, data sources, data collection and data analysis procedures, and issues of validity and reliability involved in this research study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative multiple-case research design was used in this investigation to study teachers in the intermediate grades whose literacy practices enabled African American males to be successful readers and writers. Six teachers were purposefully selected who demonstrated the ability to aid these males in reading success. Success was defined as having 75% of their African American males who regularly made a year's growth, and/or scored a level 3 or 4 on the North Carolina End of Grade (EOG) Reading Assessments and/or earn an A or B in reading on their report cards. This chapter discusses the design of the study, procedure used to select participants, context of the study, data collection process, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedure. It also accounts for issues of validity, reliability, researcher bias, and study limitation.

Research Design

Assumptions and Rationale

Since the purpose of this research was to understand how teachers impacted the literacy growth of African American males, I selected a qualitative multiple-case study design. I selected this paradigm as a means to studying in-depth the beliefs and literacy practices of successful teachers of African American males. As stated by Creswell (1994), one of the methodological assumptions of qualitative research is the study is

inductive and focused on patterns and theories which can be developed for better understanding of the process. This study met named assumptions.

An assumption of this study is that teachers who are successful with African American males are those who have the ability to develop genuine relationships. They are teachers who are concerned with not only the academic success of African American males but also their holistic development and are concerned with preparing African American males to become contributing members of society. To aid in the success of African American males such teachers extend themselves to meet needs beyond the school day. This assumption is based on my years of experience as a classroom teacher working in schools where African American males were represented. This study is designed to investigate the beliefs and literacy practices of teachers who successfully impact the literacy development of African American males in the intermediate grades and determine how and why teachers are successful in preparing these males.

Qualitative research methodology was selected because it was appropriate for studying problems where little is known about the problem, and a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon is desired. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 43), which was another reason for choosing qualitative research methods for this study. This choice allowed me to conduct in-depth and detailed inquiry (Patton, 1987) into the literacy practices of the teacher participants and gain that understanding of teachers' literacy practices in the field/natural setting as it evolved.

Although the inability to make any generalizations is a problem associated with qualitative research, choosing this research paradigm allowed me to collect a wealth of detailed data from six teacher participants in grades 3-5 using interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, and artifacts. The use of multiple sources of data is another strength of the qualitative paradigm in that it offers the opportunity for triangulation.

I also found Creswell's (2005) criteria useful in making the decision to conduct qualitative research. Creswell states that as qualitative researchers, we recognize that we need to (a) listen to the views of participants in our studies; (b) ask general, open questions and collect data in places where the people live and work; and (c) understand that research has a role in advocating for change and bettering the lives of individuals.

This means that as a qualitative researcher, I am able to study the literacy practices and possible use of culturally relevant teaching practices used by successful teachers of African American males using the voices of the teacher participants whom I selected using purposeful sampling, more specifically homogeneous sampling (Patton, 1990). According to Creswell (2005) to best understand a phenomenon the researcher purposefully or intentionally selects the study participants or site. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select information rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1990). Homogeneous sampling was appropriate as my focus intent was on studying teachers of African American males and I wanted to be in an environment where these males were chiefly to moderately represented. Additionally, conducting research from the participants' perspective not only gives the participant a voice but is also consistent with establishing validity in qualitative research. Choosing to collect data in a natural setting

(a characteristic of qualitative research) was valuable to me because I am a visual and tactile learner myself. I involved myself in this type of research to observe and learn from participants about literacy and possible culturally relevant teaching implementation and to help me describe these teachers' implementation in a manner visible and valuable to others. Consequently, it was important to observe the natural setting to capture the participants' varied teaching styles, gestures, body language, as well as to study how teachers interacted and decided on lesson materials and manipulatives. I was also interested in capturing how they made impromptu decisions (related to teachable moments) and other adaptations in their instructional lessons to meet the needs of their African American male students. Stated another way, I wanted to observe how teachers merged lesson planning and knowledge of their African American male students into a model unique to that teacher. Therefore, observing and interviewing teacher participants gave me a window into understanding and allowed me to interpret their actions for others. This is not characteristic of quantitative inquiry. With all of these factors in mind, a qualitative multiple case study method was employed to gather data from six teacher participants during this study.

Case Study Design

The study of literacy and culturally relevant practices was explored using a series of case studies and using both within-case and cross-case analyses. A qualitative case study design is an in-depth study that enables the researcher to investigate contemporary phenomena within a real-life setting (Creswell, 2005). In this study I observed classroom teachers during their literacy instruction block (contemporary phenomena) within their

classrooms (real-life setting). I selected the case study design/strategy because it allowed

me to describe, analyze, and interpret (Creswell, 2005) the philosophies/beliefs, literacy

practices, and teaching strategies of teachers who positively impact the literacy

achievement of African American males in the intermediate grades 3-5. See Table 1 for

the dimensions for comparing five research traditions in qualitative research.

Yin (2003) views case study research as

an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident . . . and relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (pp. 13-14)

Additionally, Merriam (1998), Yin (2003), and Stake (1995) all agree that a case

study can provide a thorough examination of a setting, single subject, single set of

documents, or a particular event. Smith (1978) refers to these groups as a single unit and

Stake (1995) as a bounded system. The bounded system in this study was defined as six

individual case studies of classroom teachers who planned and implemented reading

instruction for their students that succeeded in yielding academic success for African

American males in their classes.

Three key questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the personal and professional beliefs of teachers who have been

   successful with teaching African American males?

2. What are the literacy practices of teachers who are successful with African

   American males?

Table 1

Dimensions for Comparing Five Research Traditions in Qualitative Research

Dimension	Biography	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Case Study
Focus	▪ Exploring the life of an individual	▪ Understanding the essence of experiences about a phenomenon	▪ Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	▪ Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group	▪ Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases
Discipline Origin	▪ Anthropology ▪ Literature ▪ History ▪ Psychology ▪ Sociology	▪ Philosophy ▪ Sociology ▪ Psychology	▪ Sociology	▪ Cultural Anthropology ▪ Sociology	▪ Political Science ▪ Sociology ▪ Evaluation ▪ Urban Studies ▪ Other Social Sciences
Data Collection	▪ Primarily interviews and documents	▪ Long interviews with up to 10 people	▪ Interviews with 20-30 individuals to "saturate" categories and detail a theory	▪ Primarily observations and interviews with additional artifacts during extended time in the field (e.g., 6 months to a year)	▪ Multiple sources: documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts
Data Analysis	▪ Stories ▪ Epiphanies ▪ Historical content	▪ Statements ▪ Meanings ▪ Meaning themes ▪ General description of the experience	▪ Open coding ▪ Axial coding ▪ Selective coding ▪ Conditional matrix	▪ Description ▪ Analysis ▪ Interpretation	▪ Description ▪ Themes ▪ Assertions
Narrative Form	▪ Detailed picture of an individual's life	▪ Description of the "essence" of the experience	▪ Theory or theoretical model	▪ Description of the cultural behavior of a group or an individual	▪ In-depth study of a "case" or "cases"

Source: Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

3. How do teachers who are successful with African American males use

    culturally relevant teaching practices?

Units of Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the case is defined as "a phenomenon

of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, 'in effect, your unit of

analysis'" (p. 25). In this research undertaking, the beliefs and instructional practices of

the six teacher participants represent the cases for this research served as the sole units of

analysis.

<div align="center">

Participants

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Much consideration was given to selecting participants for this study. I wanted to

study teachers and the practices they used to help African American males to be

successful in their literacy efforts. After deciding that my definition of *successful African*

American males included males who performed at a level three or four on summative

testing like the EOG and/or a student who earned an A or B in reading on their Report

Card, two problems continued to persist: (a) a process for identifying those males within

the school setting, and (b) a process for identifying teachers who would serve as the

participants in my research.

I developed a selection process in which I solicited the professional knowledge of

the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) School of Education staff/team

leaders who work as supervisors of interns and student teachers in partnership schools to

serve as informants in the selection process. The UNCG School of Education has a

partnership with a number of elementary, middle, and high schools in counties

surrounding the university. Team Leaders who served as informants for the purpose of nominating exemplary literacy teachers of African American males were themselves former classroom teachers now employed by the university to supervise preservice teachers during the practicum stage carried out in the partner schools. UNCG works collaboratively with over 20 partner schools. Team leaders were experienced in placing preservice teachers with qualified classroom teachers, called On Site Teacher Educators (OSTEs) in this study. OSTEs are K-12 classroom teachers who agree to take on the responsibility of providing authentic settings where preservice teachers can further their learning about the art of teaching in a practical sense. Team Leaders are experienced at selecting OSTEs for placement of preservice teachers who are experts and exemplars in various licensure areas. Many OSTEs are experts and exemplars in the sense that they utilized instructional practices aligned with research/best or exemplary practices for optimal student learning.

Requests for nominations were solicited from UNCG staff/team leaders via email and through direct contact. A sample population was created as the nominations were received from UNCG staff/team leaders. The first line of consideration in sorting potential study participants was given to the geographic locale in which teachers worked. Accordingly, nominees were grouped into one of two categories: urban or rural. African American males are highly represented in urban settings, a remnant of white flight, so this was a suitable place to conduct a research study. However, I did not want to exclude qualified study participants who worked with these males in areas where they were fewer in numbers; therefore I chose to collect data in schools located in rural areas as well.

After the necessary approval to conduct research was obtained from school district and university administration, nominated teachers were contacted by email or phone, given an overview of the project, and asked to volunteer to participant in this study (see Appendix A for Post-Nomination Teacher Contact Protocol). Following the selection of potential participants, a meeting was held with each principal where an overview of the research study and the potential involvement of teacher(s) on their staff was requested (see Appendix B for Conversation with Principals Protocol). I then met with teachers to solicit their consent and set up schedules relevant to the research project. From the group of nominees three teachers were selected from each category (urban and rural) to yield a total of six case study participants. Of the six participants, two of the teachers had teaching assignments in the third grade, two in the fourth grade, and two in the fifth grade (see Table 2).

Role and Potential Researcher Bias

It is not my intention to *go native, but* as I established trust I became an empathetic researcher. Guba and Lincoln (1981) report empathy as a hallmark of anthropological and sociological studies in establishing rapport. Therefore, in conducting this research I became a participant observer (minimizing validity threats), as opposed to nonparticipant observer. Establishing this trust also aided in minimizing the Hawthorne Effect, in which participants change their behavior and work to meet the expectations of the research study. Lastly, being a participant observer enabled me to be less obtrusive in the classroom (Spradley, 1980).

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Race	Number Years Tenure	Elementary School Assignment	Average Number of African American Males
Third Grade					
Mae	Female	Caucasian	7	Russell	9
Octavia	Female	Caucasian	3	Marsh	3
Fourth Grade					
Augusta	Female	African American	9	Russell	8
Julie	Female	Caucasian	5	Marsh	4
Fifth Grade					
April	Female	African American	19	Russell	10
June	Female	Caucasian	4	Marsh	3

Wolcott (1999) states the manner in which we view things influences what we know and believe. According to Berg and Smith (1988), as a researcher it is important to investigate ourselves as we investigate others. Stated in a similar manner Peshkin (1988) argues the importance of the researcher making their subjectivity/biases conscious as subjectivity/bias is invariably present in research. He states that "when their subjectivity remains unconscious, they [researchers] insinuate rather than knowingly clarify their personal stakes" (p. 17). For that reason and as another means of guarding against validity threats I have stated my assumptions, beliefs and biases. These assumptions, beliefs and biases are deeply-rooted in my early years growing up in southeast

Greensboro, NC (city life) during the school year and with my fraternal grandmother in the summer time in Siler City, NC (rural experiences), I have grown to understand that I functioned in a manner associated with the constructivist theory in both my career and daily living. I attribute that city life style to growing up with two working parents and four siblings (three younger) where we all learned to work together to get the job done.

Being second in the birthing order and the oldest girl, many times I assumed the roles as babysitter and caregiver for my two younger sisters. I had lots of experiences such as learning how to cut up a chicken and gut fish, or learning to work on cars, and even being taught by my daddy how read maps in preparation for family vacation times. It was this type of purposeful/hands-on engagement and on-the-job-training that informed my learning.

Additionally, my summers were spent with my grandmother who lived on a farm and in her words, she taught us to "live off the land." In other words learning was a means of survival, or better yet, "survival was our means of learning." We were taught to make soap, can vegetables, milk cows (by hand), etc. These prior leanings became a part of me as I became a wife, a mother and a formal educator. My best meals, even today are not truly planned; however they are dictated by what I find in the cupboards (learning to live from the environment).

Additionally, I reared three children by the social constructivist theory to make meaning of their environment. For example, during church services my children sat with my husband and me in the sanctuary and learned how to behave/conduct themselves in this setting. When appropriate, they also spent time in the nursery and/or Children's

Church for socialization skills and learning in that particular setting the appropriate behavior in another cultural setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Stigler and Hiebert (1999) say we learn how to teach indirectly, through years of participation in classroom life. However, my experience indicates that we also learn how to teach through our daily lives and experiences. My summers on the farm taught me many science concepts as we engaged in daily and seasonal chores. For example, I was able to understand concepts about pressure after learning how to can vegetables and fruits yielded from our summer harvest. This also taught me to be patient with students and their diverse levels of abilities. All crops don't yield at the same pace, and some crops may be more bountiful one year than its previous year.

As a researcher studying effective literacy practices, my frame of reference is heavily situated in the constructivist thoughts of social learning. Two pieces of literature guide and ground me in this line of thinking, including the poem by Dorothy Law Nolte titled *Children Learn What They Live* (. . . If children live with acceptance, they learn to love. If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves. If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal. If children live with sharing, they learn generosity. If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness . . .), and the Biblical scripture for the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter three, verses 1-6. (To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted. A time to kill, and a time to heal. A time to break down, and a time to build up. A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones. A

time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to gain, and a time to lose.

A time to keep, and a time to throw away . . .) Both literary pieces remind me as a mother

and educator that I need to provide positive learning experiences for my children and

students that are reflective of their individual learning preferences.

Additionally, as s graduate student I have served as a graduate assistant, more

specifically, a co-team leader for the past two years. Those two years were spent working

at Marsh Elementary where I collaborated with the staff and teachers who served as

OSTEs for interns and student teachers. I also planned and implement, along with the

Marsh administrative staff, professional development opportunities for teachers. I used

member checking as a means to ensuring my biases had no influence on the manner in

which data was collected and interpreted.

Context of the Study

Teacher participants in this study were employed in the Ford County School

System (FCSS) and the Mitchell County School System (MCSS). FCSS is the third

largest school district in North Carolina. FCSS has 120 schools located in both urban and

rural areas (67 elementary, 22 middle schools, and 26 high schools). This system employs

more than 10,000 full and part-time personnel; of that about 5,000 are teachers (about

2,500 at the elementary level), therefore qualifying this system as the second largest

employer in a twelve county area. FCSS serves a very diverse student population of more

than 71,000 students who originate from 109 countries and speak eighty-six languages.

Russell Elementary School, named for the Russell community in which it is

located, is situated on the southwest tip of the city. The school is one of several

segregated schools built in 1924 for White students. Russell's doors have welcomed a lot of change over the years. Although Russell served students in first grade through grade eleven when it initially opened. After some time necessity dictated a major change. The changes occurred as Russell became a middle school (grades 6-9) for a number of years, then a K-2 school, and at the present time a K-5 school. The demographic make-up has completely changed also since its inception. The school serves over 550 studen ts. A racial breakdown reveals 60% African American, 12% Caucasian, 20% Latino. Russell Elementary School, like many other schools in certain areas within the United States, is experiencing shifts in its demographic make-up as its Latino student enrollment increases. Russell is recognized as a Title 1 school which means the school is a high poverty school eligible for federal funding to aid at-risk students.

In addition to the diverse staff employed at Russell, all are highly qualified teachers (a mandate by No Child Left Behind, NCLB), 11% of teachers hold advance degrees, and three teachers are nationally board certified. Although the school has struggled to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for the last couple of years (26 of 27 targeted groups passed) the school was recognized as one of sixteen Most Improved Schools in the district. Russell was recognized by the state as a School of Progress, High Growth during the 2008-09 school year as it had 60% of its students performing on grade level according to EOG assessments. High growth is achieved when a school's growth goes above 10 % of the school's expected growth. In years past, Russell has focused on implementing school wide initiatives to improve student achievement. Literacy attainment has remained at the top of such initiatives. Russell has an administrative team

staffed by the principal, two curriculum facilitators, and reading teacher which plan such initiatives. This team is instrumental in collaborating to provide literacy theory and practices appropriate for students and then overseeing the implementation of such practices by teachers in their individual classrooms. Such initiatives include the incorporation of team teaching and collaboration, building a literacy library stocked with multiple copies of student texts which teachers utilize during instruction and maintaining/updating a professional library stocked with literacy related literature. Russell also implemented a Saturday tutorial program to offer additional instruction to ESL (English Language Learners).

Russell also employed the professional guidance of a literacy consultant. This consultant provides a) staff development instruction in which evidence based best practices associated with literacy attainment are modeled and discussed, b) conducts classroom observations of teachers during literacy instructional blocks, c) collaborates with the administrative team to provide feedback related to classroom observation, and d) makes recommendations related to the literacy needs of the school. About 60% of the student population is minority, making minorities the majority population of students. Eighty percent of the student population at Russell is eligible for free or reduced lunch.

The MCSS is located in a rural, piedmont region of North Carolina. The system is made up of 16 schools (10 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, 3 high schools, and 1 alternative school) serving about 7,700 students. The demographic makeup is reflective of three major groups: Latino (71.3%), African American (13.8%), and Caucasian (11.8%). The Latino resident population has increased exponentially in the past ten years

as immigrants have relocated to the area seeking job opportunities in manufacturing, food processing, and textiles. The student population of this school district is reflective of the growing Latino population. Ninety percent of the Marsh Elementary student population is eligible for free and/or reduced meals.

Marsh Elementary School, named after the township, open 1977. It served as the only elementary school in this township for many years until very recently when another elementary school was built to accommodate the increasing population growth of families migrating to the area. Marsh Elementary is located in rural North Carolina. In the early morning, when moving between main building and pods it is very natural to hear the sounds of roosters crowing, cows mooing and an occasional toot of a train horn off in the distance. The school has a main building which houses the school's administrative offices, media center, cafeteria, and a multipurpose room. This building is encircled by four pods that house classrooms. The school serves over 560 students in grades K-5. Marsh, like Russell, is recognized by the state as a School of Progress with High Growth. Unlike Russell, Marsh achieved AYP as 25 of 25 targets were met. Although there are no African American certified teachers currently on staff at Marsh there are a number of VIF (Visiting International Faculty) ESL teachers and Spanish speaking teachers to adequately serve the Latino students population which represents the majority population at Marsh. Demographic disaggregation by race reveals 66% Latino, 20% Caucasian, 11% African American, .06% Multi-Racial, and .01% Asian representation at Marsh Elementary School. There are 51 teachers employed at Marsh of which 98% are fully licensed, 100% of classes are taught by a teacher that is Highly Qualified. Twenty-eight

percent of the teachers hold advanced degrees and eight teachers have earned National

Board of Professional Teaching Certifications. Marsh is also recognized as a Title 1

school and receives federal dollars to be used to increase the academic achievement of at-

risk students.

In an effort to meet the literacy needs of all students Marsh Elementary has

implemented three programs relevant to this study. The first is a tutorial/enrichment

program for students in grades 3-5 in which each grade level has a protected block of

time during the school day which is intended to be a unique opportunity for teachers to

work with students in small groups based on the students' assessed needs and or interests.

Groups are fluid and change quarterly or as frequently as necessary. A number of faculty

members (curriculum facilitator, media specialist, reading teachers, tutors, etc.)

participate in this instructional endeavor which aids in lowering student-teacher ratios

within the groups.

The second initiative is afterschool tutorial sessions design to supplement the

education needs of students identified as at-risk. These tutorial sessions were provided, in

past years, by outside agencies not affiliated with Marsh Elementary. Instructional

planning and teaching are carried out by certified staff.

Another initiative at Marsh Elementary is the formation of 10 Professional

Learning Communities (PLC). Members within each PLC group completed self-

assessments in the area of literacy instruction then created SMART goals (a strategic

plan) for professional growth in the area of literacy attainment which is used to fortify

future literacy lessons for students. SMART is an acronym that stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-based.

Data Sources

To gather information to answer my research questions and learn from teacher participants about their literacy practices, possible implementation of culturally relevant teaching, and their knowledge of the African American males in their classroom, this research study used the following data sources: (a) an initial teacher interview (see Appendix C for Initial Teacher Interview Protocol) and post-observation teacher interviews, following each classroom observations (see Appendix D for Post Observation Interview Protocol), (b) classroom observations of literacy instruction (see Appendix E for Classroom Observation Protocol), (c) Questionnaire, and (d) Follow-up interviews (see Table 3). Protocols were used for observations and interviews as suggested by Yin (2003) as an effective way of increasing study reliability.

Data Collection Instruments

Four data collection instruments were used to gather the perspectives of teacher participants. A description of each instrument follows.

Teacher interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) recognize interviewing as a way of gathering descriptive data from each participant to provide insight into how the participant interprets some piece of the world. An initial interview meeting was used to reintroduce myself and to get acquainted with the teacher participants. In addition, initial interview provided data related to the teacher's beliefs and practices about teaching, literacy, and African American males.

Table 3

Data Sources

Source Of Evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Interviews (Initial and Follow-up)	- Targeted—focused directly on case study topic - Insightful—provides perceived causal inferences	- Bias due to poorly constructed questions - Response bias - Inaccuracies due to poor recall - Reflexivity—interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear
Questionnaire (Diversity)	- Targeted—focused directly on case study topic - Insightful—provides perceived causal inferences	- Bias due to poorly constructed questions - Response bias - Inaccuracies due to poor recall - Reflexivity—interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear
Observations (Classroom)	- Reality—covers events in real time - Contextual—covers context of events - Insightful into interpersonal behavior and motives (in participant observation)	- Time-consuming - Selectivity—unless broad coverage - Reflexivity—event may proceed differently because it is being observed - Cost—hours needed by human observers - Bias due to investigator's manipulation of events (in participant observation)

The Initial Teacher Interview Protocol (see Appendix C) consisting of a grand tour

question and probes were used during this meeting to gather background and

demographic information about each teacher participant. This information was an

important data source used in creating a biographical narrative for each teacher

participant. Following each researcher observation, audiotaped interviews were

conducted with each teacher participant to discuss literacy matters related to the

previously observed lesson. For this purpose, a second more open-ended interview

protocol (see Appendix D) was used to guide each post-observation interview session. Questions on this protocol were designed with the intent of allowing teacher participants the opportunity to elaborate and reflect on the lesson that was previously observed. The initial interviews took 30-60 minutes and each post-observation interview ranged from 5-30 minutes.

Classroom observations. Observations offered the researcher the opportunity to record information as it unfolded in each particular setting (Creswell, 2005) during two weeks of instruction. Observations for this study took place in each teacher's classroom during their scheduled literacy block. Considering the fact that I wanted to be viewed as an *insider* I assumed the role of *participant observer* (Creswell, 2005). Gans (1982) refers to this researcher participant role as an investigator "who participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved, so that he can function as a researcher" (p. 82). An observation protocol (see Appendix E) was used to record notes during each researcher observation. During times when I was participating, notes were recorded shortly after leaving the research setting.

Questionnaire. A diversity questionnaire was used as a data collection source to gather information related to the teacher beliefs and practices. The diversity questionnaire, adapted from a questionnaire originally designed by Brown, Cooper, and Baber (2004), was divided into sections. Questionnaire items consisted of multiple choice items, ordinal style responses, multiple response items, open-ended response, dichotomous style responses, and Likert-type responses. Completion of the questionnaire ranged from 20 to 45 minutes.

Follow-up interviews. Patton (1987) and McNamara (1999) report the value of follow-up interviews stating they are useful in clarifying and build on data previously collected. A number of follow-up interviews were conducting with teacher participants as needed to gain a better understanding of data collected from observations, interviews, and questionnaires.

Data Collection Procedures

The first phase of data collection involved my engaging the participants in an initial interview (see Appendix C). The interviews gave teacher participants the opportunity to provide information related to their beliefs, literacy practices, and knowledge of African American males. These interviews were later transcribed. Patton (1990) states,

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe . . . We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 196)

A semi-structured interview guide or protocol was used as a guide *to enter into the other person's perspective* (Patton, 1987) for the initial interview.

Classroom observations, which served as the second phase of data collection, were scheduled to occur a short time after the initial interviews. Each of the six teacher participants was observed six to seven times over a two week span of time (see Appendix F, Data Collection Schedule). All observations occurred during the first semester of

school during each teachers scheduled literacy block in Fall 2009. Literacy instruction blocks lasted from one to two and one half hours. An observation protocol was used as a method of recording field notes about the physical setting, events, activities, and my reactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) during each lesson/observation session (see Appendix E). As my researcher role was participant observer, I was formally introduced to students in each classroom of teacher participant once I arrived for my first researcher observation. Thirty-six classroom observations were completed over the data collection period; a total of six observations conducted during teachers' literacy instruction block completed this phase.

During the third phase of data collection, one-on-one audiotaped interviews were conducted with the six teacher participants following each observation of that teachers' literacy instruction.

The fourth phase of data collection involved conducting a number of follow-up interviews with teacher participants as needed to gain a better understanding of data collected from observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Patton (1987) and McNamara (1999) report the value of follow-up interviews stating they are useful in clarifying and build on data previously collected. Table 4 displays the connection between the data sources and research questions, and triangulation at the time of data collection.

Table 4

Crosswalk of Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

Research Questions	Data Collection Methods			
	D1 Teacher Questionnaire	D2 Teacher Observations	D3 Teacher Interviews	D4 Follow-up Interviews
1. What are the personal and professional beliefs of teachers who have been successful with teaching African American males?	X		X	X
2. What are the literary practices of teachers who are successful with African American males?	X	X	X	X
3. How do teachers who are successful with African American males use culturally relevant teaching practices?	X	X		

Data Analysis Procedure

During the school year the literacy practices of six teachers were studied. Multiple interviews, questionnaire, and observations were used as data sources. Maxwell suggests that the data analysis process is "the most mysterious aspect of qualitative research" (2005, p. 95). I trump Maxwell's reference and argue/confess that the data analysis process for me was labor intensive, grueling, an individual experience, and a continuously emerging/changing process. With that said, I will present the procedures

that lead to the manifestation of the results of the data collected over one year on the

beliefs and practices of the six teacher participants.

Creswell (1998) states that case study analysis involves the process of making a

detailed description of the cases and settings within the research study. As a way to

accomplish this task a within case and cross-case analysis was used. In analyzing the data

the researcher used the procedure outlined below.

1. Data were organized and prepared for analysis. All interviews were

    transcribed for the six teachers studied. All data was properly handled and

    stored to create a chain of evidence by placing all documents related to each

    teacher in a notebook and in separate computer folders.

2. The first phase of data analysis began with analysis of the diversity

    questionnaires completed by each teacher. Each questionnaire was read to get

    an understanding of teacher participants. Since the diversity questionnaire

    responses were already organized into predetermined subheadings additional

    coding was not needed. A chart was created for each subheading and all

    teacher responses were transferred and placed accordingly. The six

    subheadings/categories were: (a) teaching the whole child, (b) equity and

    excellence, (c) developmentally appropriate, (d) identity and achievement, (e)

    student-teacher relationships, and (f) school climate.

3. The next step of analysis involved open coding of all initial interviews one at

    a time. Open coding occurred after interview data was read through as I

    attempted to gain a sense of the information and overall meanings of what

each teacher participant shared during the initial interview. To ensure consistency with coding I used the left side of each transcript for the coding of units or potential themes. The right side of the transcript was used for recording my ideas, hunches, etc. that emerged for me as the researcher and interpreter of the data. I used underlining and highlighting within the transcripts to identify phases and quotes connected to my initial codes. Also, as I read data sources, potential answers to my research questions began to emerge. Although I was willing to be surprised by my data results I was also seeking to gain an understanding of the specific literacy practices and possible use of culturally relevant teaching practices that teachers used as well as their knowledge of African American males. Therefore, I coded and categorized appropriate responses related to my research questions as (a) beliefs, (b) literacy practices, and (c) culturally relevant teaching. These same coding procedures were also used to code all post-observation interview data.

4. Following the coding of units from participant interviews (both initial and post-observation), units were transferred to a chart which I titled Categories and distributed between three headings (*who the teacher is, how teachers teach* and *African American male learning*). This chart was later collapsed into themes.

5. The next step involved coding observation field notes/raw data collected while observing teachers during their literacy instruction block. As data was in its raw state, the first procedure used in coding interview data was not used.

However, I was able to use the second procedure, explained above in #3 for coding possible answers to my research questions, to code and categorize practices and beliefs observed. Observation field notes were read thoroughly before coding began. Again units were recorded under appropriate headings on the Categories chart.

6. As I prepared to write each of the within case narratives it was necessary to organize data by individual participants. Therefore a chart titled Within Case was created for each participant that included data from the questionnaire, interviews, and observations related to each participant. These data were also coded based on my research questions for each participant's (a) beliefs, (b) literacy practices, and (c) culturally relevant teaching. These same coding procedures were also used to code all post-observation interview data.

7. Member checking was conducted after each written case summary was taken back to respective teacher participants to be reviewed for accuracy. Additional data collected during member checks was analyzed and added to the case narratives.

8. Following the member checks, Within Case charts were then created based on the individual case narratives written for each teacher participant in order to complete the within case analysis. The purpose of the cross-case analysis was to find the commonalities in the beliefs and practices of teacher participants with regard to their (a) beliefs, (b) literacy practices and (c) culturally relevant teaching.

9. In completing this analysis, I used the framework of Villegas and Lucas
    (2002a, 2002b), which contains six characteristics of a culturally relevant
    teacher. Data were analyzed for relevant practices for each category followed
    by a written narrative of the results found for each teacher participant.
    Following this analysis a written narrative of the cross-case findings was
    completed.

A detailed description of each case and themes across cases is provided (within-case analysis), followed by a theme analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis) in Chapter IV. Following these analyses, during the final interpretive stage, I report on what the analyses revealed or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) term "lessons learned" in Chapter V.

Validity and Reliability

Establishing validity (credibility) and reliability (trustworthiness) of a study has to do with an examination of component parts of the research (Merriam, 1998). Yin (2003) makes the researcher aware of four tests (construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability) which are commonly used to develop the quality of empirical research (trustworthiness/reliability, credibility/validity, confirmability, and data dependability) of a research study. This study employed the following steps to establish validity and reliability in this research study.

Construct validity, or credibility, was established through the use of multiple data sources (questionnaires, classroom observations, and teacher interviews). All data sources were seen as equally important sources in answering my research questions. The findings

were based on the convergence of these data sources. As a means of establishing

credibility (construct validity), member checking was utilized when case summaries were

returned to the teacher participants for their review and approval. Lastly, construct

validity was also established by creating a chain of evidence of data sources. Yin (2003)

states that a chain of evidence allows the reader (or external observer) ". . . to follow the

derivation of any evidence, ranging from initial research questions to ultimate case study

conclusion" (p. 105). In other words to minimize validity threats and strengthen

credibility I used different data collection methods to find the answers to my research

questions. The data sources were helpful in verifying, or cross-checking (triangulating),

the responses of the teacher participants. Triangulation was an important means of

establishing the validity (credibility) of my interpretation of the data I collected.

Prolonged work in the field was also used to guard against validity threats. A minimum

of 126 hours was spent in the field collecting data for this research study.

Internal validity, according to Yin (2003), concerns issues of whether empirical

data presents information about the theoretical concepts (literacy practices and culturally

relevant teaching), which is achieved through using pattern matching to known theories

of culturally relevant teaching and best practices in literacy to make certain that case

study data cannot be explained by rival theories. To establish internal validity data, was

matched to existing theories related to literacy practices and culturally relevant teaching.

This occurred both during the development of the questionnaires, interview, and

observation protocols as well as during data analysis and interpretation.

External validity deals with the degree or extent to which study results are relevant outside of the research context. The research is said to have external validity if it can be generalized. Although case study designs lack population generalizability, they can be generalizable to theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003). According to Yin, generalizability is established through *replication logic*; therefore, it was important to follow rigorous research procedures that are established and followed in the event this study is replicated by researchers in the future. However, each case study is not generalizable to other teachers in other contexts, but stands alone as a descriptive case of successful teachers of African American males.

Yin (2003) states that the goal of *reliability* is to minimize the errors and biases in a study. Researcher biases are addressed in the next section. Protocols were created for the questionnaire, observation, and follow-up interviews to minimize documentation errors and establish consistency in the collection of data. These protocols were followed with all six teacher participants in this study. Also, two other researchers, fellow doctoral students in my department, participated in an audit of my analysis process. Having the benefit of this audit during data analysis helped in establishing a type of trustworthiness called inter-rater reliability. Having the benefit of this audit gave me an opportunity to compare my coding of units with the unit coding of others and confirm the accuracy of my coding, which was an important developmental marker to me as a novice researcher.

Limitations

In addition to any personal biases as a participant observer and former teacher, this study was limited to a one year study of the teachers in only six classrooms. A total

of six teachers were selected for this study, two teachers each from the intermediate grade levels, from both high and low poverty schools in the Southeastern region of the USA. Studying the practices of teachers in two school districts also limited the generalizability of the findings. However studying the practices of these teachers has provided a range of practices and experiences which opens the doors for further research on literacy and culturally relevant teaching practices of teachers who work with African American males.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed explanation of methodological procedures consistent with qualitative case study research paradigm. Much consideration was given to study design procedures, participant selection, data collection and analysis procedures. This study involved six classroom teachers selected from two school districts (urban and rural) in the piedmont region of North Carolina. The purpose was to study the literacy practices of these teachers for the purpose of identifying literacy practices, possible culturally relevant practices and teacher beliefs about African American males in grades 3-5. Three data collection sources were used (questionnaires, observations, and teacher interviews). Analysis of these data sources involved both a within and case cross-case analysis of all data sources from the six case studies after which a summary was prepared of the findings. Findings serve as the focus of Chapter IV. In concluding this chapter, treats to validity and reliability, researcher bias, and study limitations were explicitly stated.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

This chapter presents a review of the data collected from the six elementary

classroom teachers selected for their instrumental role in aiding the African American

males from year to year in being successful in the literacy process. The data collection

period began at the onset of the 2009-2010 school year. Teachers were selected from two

schools (one urban and the other rural) in two different geographical settings located in

North Carolina. This research study was conducted to examine the beliefs and literacy

practices of teachers in the intermediate grades who have been successful in their efforts

to teach African American males. The findings in this chapter are the results of a survey,

classroom observations, teacher interviews, and artifacts analysis that answered the

following research questions:

1. What are the personal and professional beliefs of teachers who have been

   successful with teaching African American males?

2. What are the literacy practices of teachers who are successful with African

   American males?

3. How do teachers who are successful with African American males use

   culturally relevant teaching practices?

Six classroom teachers (2 third-grade, 2 fourth-grade, and 2 fifth-grade) served as participants for this study. The results presented next involve both within and across case analysis of these six teachers presented in no particular order.

Julie: Fourth-Grade Teacher

Julie (a pseudonym) is a single, Caucasian female who resides in the same town where she teaches. Julie is a graduate of a university located about an hour from Marsh Elementary where she majored in elementary education and minored in history. She has been teaching in an elementary setting for five years. Julie recently completed a master's program at the same university where she completed her undergraduate studies earning a degree in reading education. Her teaching assignment this year as a fourth-grade teacher is different from last year where she had a combined class of third- and four-graders. She is also working on National Board certification. She has also served on a number of committees during her tenure at Marsh Elementary. Currently she is on the Response to Intervention (RTI) team. RTI is an intervention model, designed to prevent academic failure of all students. It equips the teaching and/or administrative staff with a means to identify struggling students early for the purpose of providing appropriate and more differentiated instructional intervention. Julie worked collaboratively on a math vocabulary project during the summer. With this project, Julie and her colleagues made student-friendly math vocabulary cards that included the math term, a definition, and visual representations. A set of cards was distributed to teachers in all grade levels which teachers posted on their word walls to impact students' math literacy.

She is an active member/volunteer of the Marsh Elementary PTA. Additionally, Julie's

professional commitment has been noted by her peers as she was nominated and now

represents Marsh Elementary School as their 2009-2010 Teacher of the Year.

Julie's Classroom Design

The walls and bulletin boards in Julie's classroom are used for displaying student

work and other theme assignments reflective of her Julie's instructional focus. Julie

admits that there are times, even with the best of lessons, when students' learning is

interrupted and their minds wander. When this happens she says that learning is still

taking place as students' attention is on reading the classroom walls. Julie told me the

following about the bulletin board and wall space in her classroom,

> . . . about the walls in the classroom, I try to fill it with color to catch their
> attention so even if they students zone out or lose focus with the instruction there
> are things around the room that are educational so that they are getting something
> . . . and I also like to make sure that it's something that we are doing, not just like
> a filler, I don't like to fill my space so that I can have that bulletin board covered.
> I want it to be appropriate, like instructional, or showing their work, or relevant.
> (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Julie says that sometimes this is the case with her African American male students. She

went on to say,

> . . . they [African American males] in particular, often lose focus especially if the
> instruction is not kinesthetic at the moment, if there's not movement it's more of a
> lecture style at the time, there is something visual for them to see . . . something
> educational. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

One large bulletin board contains each student's biographical writing as they

introduced themselves to their fellow classmates. A picture is also posted alongside each

student's writing providing the reader a visual image or face that can be used to connect as well as a way to allow visitors in the classroom an opportunity to acknowledge and even praise the authors and their work individually. Julie uses student pictures in this way in a number of places around her classroom. For example, as classroom jobs are assigned weekly, Julie places student's picture beside the job selected. Students' cubbies and other personal spaces have pictures also. A number of word walls and theme word charts, reflective of each content area, are displayed around Julie's classroom. A math vocabulary word wall, the result of the collaborative summer project mentioned earlier, occupies another bulletin board positioned in the back of Julie's classroom. This is a well used instructional tool for both Julie and her students. Julie says that she uses the wall space in her classroom to reinforce content area learning.

Julie has three literacy libraries in her classroom. Her largest library is at the front of the classroom, where literature selections are displayed upright on a bookshelf, while others are stored in baskets and other bookshelves. Books placed in baskets are labeled by genre while other books are simply stored on bookshelves in a traditional manner (spine first). Two bulletin boards, one titled *Book Review* and the other titled *Reader's Club*, are situated above the books in this area. Across the front of the classroom, opposite the first library is an additional library area equipped with leveled literature selections which can be checked out by students for nightly, at-home reading. These books are stored in brightly colored baskets which makes the area more inviting to the eye. Also located in this area and available for check out are a number of kids magazines. The last literacy library area is located next to the take home readers. Stored in this

library are print and audio taped copies of books, (stored together in Ziploc bags)

earphones, and CD players. Materials in this area are for classroom use only. Julie says,

> I've noticed that this year and in the past a lot of males and African American
> males in particular like the listening center because a lot of times they don't
> always get enjoyment out of reading on their own. They like peer interaction, they
> like listening to it, I have some iPods, they like iPods because it's a little more
> engaging for them. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Student desks in Julie's classroom are assembled together in groups of four and

five students over the classroom. She told me,

> I tried my [student] desks in rows and I just didn't, I couldn't, I didn't like it. I
> like the pods [cluster groupings] because then they can collaborate and they can
> talk and there is room and it's not . . . I just don't like the rows, it changes the
> environment, makes it feel sterile and more dictator like instead of whole and it
> doesn't have the right feel. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

A teaching station equipped with an Elmo and projector and a number of other

teaching materials are located at the front of the classroom. When students are not

receiving instruction at their desks they gather at the back of the classroom on a small

carpeted area. The teacher sits in a beanbag styled chair with legs. To the right of the

chair, located within Julie's reach, is a white board should the need arise for her to

need/use it. To the left of the chair is an area where Julie hangs charts and other visuals

(poetry selections, song lyrics, etc.) which are used for choral readings. There is also an

area under the charts where Julie displays the selected read aloud for the day. Julie also

keeps a list of books that she has previously read posted on the white board located at the

front of the classroom.

Theme 1—Teacher Beliefs: *All I Am and Hope to Be*

Julie trusts that as a teacher, she plays a vital role in the success of her students, as she states, "teaching is not a job, but a serious commitment." In order for her students to be successful, she claims to "give my best each day." She feels it is her responsibility to stay well informed about the latest best practices by attending workshops and reading the latest research, and being dedicated to her students often means "putting in extra time needed to implement the new strategies" she learns (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10). Julie also said during another interview about the value of learning from one of her most professional development endeavors. She says,

> The most recent and most valuable professional development that I participated in was my master's. So the stuff that I got from there about best practices instruction related to literacy . . . one of the best practices was a class that I took about comprehension strategies and read alouds and connecting all your literacy instruction, guided reading, teacher directed, read aloud, fluency, all that stuff to a comprehension strategy and reinforcing it in all aspects of your teaching . . . and I say that because specifically because African American males that I have worked with tend to enjoy read aloud more than independent reading because they like listening . . . they tend to enjoy tasks like read aloud so I think through that I can still be teaching them reading strategies, how to be a better reader without them having to go through the laborious task of trying to do it all on their own, like a team effort. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Though others may deem it labor intensive, Julie finds "joy in trying new practices," and updating her own techniques often, in order to best meet the needs of her students. She believes that being a life-long learner aids her, in staying knowledgeable of current best practices, as well as her students who benefit from the innovative ideas she challenges herself to implement (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10).

Julie prides herself in taking the time to build relationships with her students, as she says that

> . . . students will be more willing to accept what I am teaching if they realize that I love and care about them. I want my students to know that I aspire to see them be successful. I believe that by knowing my students well, they will show growth in their academic performance as well. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10) I've noticed with my African American males in particular that socialization, socializing, peer friendships, and things like that are important to them, it's like valued in their culture or family or structure . . . they like a relationship, if they have a relationship with you and feel comfortable with you, you are going to get more from them, they are going to give you more, they get more from you, it's going to be mutually give and take . . . I think that because they are more social creatures, they are not culturally like Caucasian females, they a lot of times are able to sit and listen quietly, speak at the right time . . . African American males are, males in general, they are just more verbal, they just want to talk, play, move . . . so having that relationship with them I have found is helpful when disciplining and instructionally . . . I guess it's respect, mutual respect is built knowing that I care about you and you care about me and we are working together on this [task]. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

This act of respect was observed by me as Julie redirected one student [African American male] who was off task, by calmly stating, "I don't want you doing that right now . . . you can do it later." The student replied by saying, "Ok" and put the materials away (Julie, Observation, 11-23-09).

Julie reports that she "[takes] time daily to try to discover how my students learn best, what interests, motivates, and excites them to learn, and their individual strengths and weaknesses" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10). Julie gets to know her students each year through the use of informal inventories, formative assessments, parent contact, daily observation, and most of all, individual conversations with students. She believes in using methods such as looping (when a group of students move to the next grade level

along with their teacher) to further develop relationships and increase knowledge of

students' distinctive abilities.

> About building relationships and looping, I think that not only has it helped me with students, knowing my students better but parents as well . . . In my experience since the parents are more comfortable with me and the routines they are more willing to come in for conferences or call or send notes, they are not as nervous or apprehensive to communicate with the teacher or intimidated by the school environment . . . especially if the parents are less educated or didn't enjoy school, or struggled themselves they are often not as interested or comfortable coming into the school environment and to talk academically about their child's progress and such . . . An African American male that I had last year [and was placed in another classroom this year] he is EMD and receives special education services but this year he was in a different homeroom class and was switched back into my homeroom after the first quarter because the structure of the class and such was not working out for him and he was having some problems. He was switched in here [Julie's classroom] and since then I feel like he's made a lot of progress and I was actually shocked that his reading level after the third quarter when I assessed because I had no idea he even had that potential, I mean I knew he had it in him but I didn't know it would happen so quickly, I thought he's EMD, it's gonna take him longer, he really has shocked me with that but . . . I also attribute that not only to instruction, me knowing him, and knowing what kind of instruction to provide for him, but also a particular parent meeting I had right after he moved back into the classroom . . . [Meeting with Mom and Dad] was a very honest meeting and . . . they support him more at home . . . and I attribute a lot of his success too to his Mom and Dad who's helping him at home. So I think since I knew him so well and was comfortable with the parents, we all knew each other was a lot easier to talk and a lot more open, honest discussion happened than if it had been the first parent meeting at the beginning of the year, I don't know you, you don't know me situation. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Julie also spoke during another interview about the value of learning from one of her

most professional development endeavors. She says,

> The most recent and most valuable professional development that I participated in was my master's. So the stuff that I got from there about best practices instruction related to literacy . . . one of the best practices was a class that I took about comprehension strategies and read alouds and connecting all your literacy

instruction, guided reading, teacher directed, read aloud, fluency, all that stuff to a comprehension strategy and reinforcing it in all aspects of your teaching . . . and I say that because specifically because African American males that I have worked with tend to enjoy read aloud more than independent reading because they like listening . . . they tend to like tasks like read alouds . . . (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Julie states that this year was not a full loop, in that she did not have all of her students. Some students were placed with other teachers and the principal makes the final determination as to the best placement for students.

Julie teaches under the premise that "all students can learn when provided with differentiated instruction, through differing styles and on various levels" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10). All students can make growth when they are effectively taught the prerequisite skills they need" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10). In order to meet each student's unique needs, she provides individualized/differentiated instruction through the use of small, flexible guided reading groups, flexible math skill groups, literacy centers, leveled book baskets, and various degrees of scaffolding (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10). Preparing her students for life beyond her classroom is another goal of Julie's; therefore, she finds incorporating various grouping and competition to be useful strategies and beneficial to student growth, as she prepares her students for the future (Julie, Questionnaire, 8-25-09).

Julie views completion and social skills as a needed skill for the future. She says,

Any kind of completion, if I can make it a game or call it a game then they [African American males] are more interested in doing it, they want to win, if there is not a winner they say tell me who was the winner . . . and the grouping is for the socializing, they like that interaction. So I do the clock partners, they don't always work with the same partners I can get them interacting with different kinds

of peers not just their best friends or the same partner each time . . . so different partners, small groups, groups of three, groups of six, different size groups, different purposes for the group, turn and talk, different structures, shoulder buddies. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Julie makes a concerted effort to bridge the gap between home and school. She is cognizant of the fact that parents are the child's first teachers. In this belief she finds that in order to increase student achievement, it is imperative to keep parents well informed of their child's academic progress. When parents are well informed of the instruction that is taking place in the classroom they can support learning at home as well. She builds relationships with student's parents by inviting them into the classroom frequently, hosting parent nights, planning activities for parents to be involved in, and openly communicating with parents consistently. Julie told me the following about communicating with parents: "I feel like the more communication that I have and the more I initiate then the more comfortable they [African American families] become and the more I get back from them" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10).

She sees her students' year spent in her classroom to be beneficial in that every student will have made progress in some way. Through building relationships and knowing her students well, Julie is able to plan instruction that meets students' unique needs while also stimulating their learning.

Theme 2—Teacher Practices: *What I Do & Why*

Julie had the following to say about her approach to literacy instruction, what she does and why.

I believe in a balanced literacy approach, so all the elements of literacy instruction together to maximize success, so read alouds, independent reading at school and at home, guided reading, teacher directed reading, strategic read alouds, strategy instruction word study writing, all that together, balanced, to meet their needs. I also believe that all students can learn to read so I try my hardest with every single student to try to figure out what their strengths and weaknesses are and then tailor my instruction to meet those needs. I also believe in finding what motivates students to read, I think that's especially important for African American males, like finding what interests them and provide them literature that will make them want to read and make them want to pick up a book. Oh, I also think for any student, immersing them in literacy, like having it everywhere, in lots of different forms of media, magazines, books, audio, computer, you know, not just traditional, but lots of choices of literature to read. (Julie, Interview, 7-21-09)

Data collection for Julie was different from the other five research participants in that it began in her room on the first day of school. Observing her approach to literacy instruction that day, I noticed that she kept near her a self-compiled document titled *First Day of School* which outlined a list of first day essentials important to her. During different times of the day Julie referenced her list of essentials and placed a mark beside certain items indicating she had completed the task. Read aloud, reading interest survey, reading informal assessment, spelling inventory administration, and writing (procedures and engagement) were all literacy essentials on her list to occur on the first day of school. Below is an explanation of how the literacy related essentials, taken from the list, were incorporated These structures [essentials] are significant to my research study as they demonstrate how Julie lays the foundation for what she feels to be important literacy knowledge for students in fourth grade.

Read alouds (oral reading of a literature selection to students) were incorporated on the first day of school not only to establish routines but also as a way for Julie to set the classroom climate and promote her desires to build positive and productive

relationships with her students. She chose to read *Grade Four Students Are Special* and *The Recess Queen*. These read aloud selections had themes that related to what she was teaching. Julie stated that her African American males favor teacher read alouds times. She says that read aloud times are opportunities for her to:

> Grab their [African American males] attention usually they are more interested in listening more often than reading themselves . . . So it's a way for me to expose them to literature as opposes to them doing it on their own which is not their favorite . . . they usually enjoy the read aloud so that's enjoyment and reading at the same time. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Teacher-Directed Instruction for Julie was actually whole class mini-lesson instruction. On the first day of school Julie administered both a reading interest and spelling inventories during this teacher-directed time. Additionally, Julie taught a mini-lesson which involved modeling the procedure for students to follow in organizing and labeling their reading strategies notebook, reading folder, writer's notebooks, and math notebook. These notebooks were to be used during the school year to record various content related to literacy and math (the two content area subjects which are formally assessed at the end of the year by the state).

> With teacher-directed reading [instruction] I use the reading strategies notebook as often as possible for them to record their strategy usage . . . sometimes it's more teacher modeled or guided and independent but if I had them to write anything on a post-it or write a written response or make a chart or something I have them to copy it or write it into their [strategy] notebook . . . this helps them to be organized with their learning and a lot of times African American males, and males, are not the most organized, they have the messiest desk . . . so I try to get them organized and hopefully that will transfer into their future as well. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Writing Instruction—For writing engagement, Julie utilizes the writer's workshop framework in providing writing instruction to her students. That framework consists of five sequential stages (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing). During writing instruction on the first day of school, Julie introduced students to this writing process, as they completed *All About Me Books*. This activity began with a brainstorming mini-lesson (modeling pre-writing). The ideas generated from the brainstorming activator were recorded on a graphic organizer. Ground rules for writing were then established by Julie. Students were then on their own for about 20 minutes to complete this writing assignment. This writing was also planned as a baseline assessment to give Julie information about the writing abilities of the students. Following the allotted time, students were allowed to share their books with others as the lesson concluded. Julie commented on the *All About Me Books* saying,

> The *All About Me Book* I thought was another way that I use to get to know my students so that I can get to know their interests, and ability by observing and by assessing. Just observing how they write and how they operate on the first day of school . . . how they attack an assignment, helps me to kind of get to know them and their thinking processes and a little bit more about them. I try to get to know them and their ability and their interests so that I can tailor instruction to best meet their needs. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) were administered individually to a number of students as other students worked on various literacy activities in collaborative groups. This assessment was administered to gain information to be used in developing guided reading instruction and assigning students to appropriate leveled groups for reading. Julie says that for her African American males administering is useful in

providing necessary instruction. She told me, "A lot of times my African American males are not on grade level and assessing them early so that I can target instruction is really essential for them to make progress" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10).

Julie's organizational style offers her students a structured atmosphere for literacy learning. A look around Julie's classroom is an indication of her commitment to literacy learning for her students. Below is a summary of the literacy components and content following the first day of school on subsequent observations.

During teacher directed instruction Julie conducts mini-lesson instruction to her whole class. Comprehension skills taught during these lessons are recorded in students reading strategies notebooks, a handy tool which can be utilized by students later as a reference. Students are also given guided practice which includes peer collaboration as the teacher moves from group to group to monitor, assist and assess students' understandings. **Read aloud**—Julie begins her instructional day with self-selected reading followed by a strategic read aloud. This strategic read aloud is an introduction to the teacher directed mini-lesson. **Writing**—Julie uses writer's workshop method of instruction to help students develop their writing skills/ability. This approach allows students to develop their writing in a manner similar to real authors as they engage in a number of stages (pre-writing, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing). **Guided reading** and **literacy stations** take place concurrently in her room. During this time as Julie works with a guided reading group four other groups are engaging collaboratively in **working with words**, literature circles, reading/ listening station, etc. The EC and ESL teachers both have guided reading groups during this time. All groups are flexible in that

students move between groups as their instructional needs change. Julie has an

instructional assistant who works with the two highest groups as guided reading

instruction is going on. Julie says this guided reading structure is best for African

American males as it, "Is the best way to meet their individual [reading] needs, they tend

to be more focused when it's a small group and instruction is on their instructional level"

(Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10). **Self-selected reading (SSR)** is a daily occurrence

for students in Julie's classroom. SSR is an independent reading time for students to read

literature of their own choosing. Prior to self-selected reading Julie provides time for

students to select and or exchange books. She provides a very extensive collection of

reading selections for students. All books are organized by genre. Julie states that during

self-selected reading students have time built in to go to the library for book selection.

She says,

> I want them [students] to read something of interests so that they are motivated to
> want to read and so for my African American males previously I had to purchase
> books when I realized my [classroom] library was lacking in the sports books
> [African American males' interest] I had to go out and find some because they
> were exhausting the books in the library on that topic and I didn't want them to be
> discouraged to read. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Theme 3—Classroom Environment: *Safe, Friendly & Fit for Learning*

Teachers in this study recognize a connection between positive student-teacher

relationships and increased academic achievement. They understand that such

relationships positively impact the academic success of all students in their classrooms.

These teachers also understood the importance of establishing such relationships with

parents as a means to impacting student success. In this section I will describe how

teachers built positive relationships with students as well as became partners with parents to create a *safe, friendly and fit for learning* classroom environment.

Julie acknowledges that she knows it is important to bridge the gap between home and school, because parents are the child's first teachers. She expresses that "parent communication is crucial to student learning" and success is directly impacted when close parent-teacher relationships are developed (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 2-26-10). As a means to strengthen relationships with parents and impact/improve student learning, she sends home weekly reports (that inform parents of their child's progress), conducts parent conferences frequently, make both positive and corrective phones calls, invites parents to school for lunch, to prepare materials, and even read with students one-on-one, and sends emails as needed to parents all to keep them informed about their child's progress to make them a part of their child's education. One such occurrence happened when Julie had a writing celebration for her students. She told me,

> . . . we invited parents to lunch and then they came [to the classroom] for a little poetry writing celebration and share with their child what they had written, then we had snacks . . . it was very successful I felt like because they [parents] got to come to the classroom for something fun . . . and I think that helps to build a relationships for me to because it's not always the good and the bad, it's fun and it's open and they are welcomed anytime . . . So the African American males had like five people come from their family, mom, brother, sister, aunt, cousin, grandma, grandpa, you know they brought the whole family . . . I think the more opportunities like that the more comfortable parents get [about coming to their child's school] . . . it will be about positive relationships. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10)

Classroom newsletters are also sent home so parents are always informed of what is going on at school. Julie deems it quite necessary, and takes the additional time to

make sure all written communication with parents takes place in the parents' native language as a way to make them feel included, knowledgeable, and most importantly comfortable in the school community. Not only does she send them information, she also requests their feedback and input as there is a section on the weekly report (mentioned earlier) for parents to write questions or concerns which keep the lines of communication open. She encourages her parents to attend field trips as a way of being involved and learning the curriculum or serve as chaperones just for the fun of learning alongside their child. She states that her "parents are essential in making overnight field trips possible, as additional supervision is key for safety and her sanity. Julie also invites parents into the classroom as a way to improve their level of comfort. Julie told me in a follow-up interview that

> High poverty rates, demanding work schedules and discomfort in the school setting negatively impact [parent] attendance to school functions. Since this is reality for many parents, I strive to find ways to make communication easy. I make an effort to develop a welcoming classroom environment where families feel free to openly express their concerns, ask for information, and share their expertise about their child. Through frequent two-way communication, parents always feel welcome to discuss concerns or ask questions. (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 2-26-10)

Julie also works to help parents feel comfortable by hosting parent nights (that have a literacy focus), and/or planning activities for them to be involved in (other content area focus), and again keeps the lines of communication open. Julie also involves parents in the literacy development of their child by asking them to communicate reading progress by responding on the nightly reading log (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 2-26-10).

Julie views her classroom as a "welcoming environment where families feel free to openly express their concerns, ask for information, and share their expertise about their children" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 2-26-10).

Julie's Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) Analysis

Sociocultural consciousness. Julie seems to be a very dedicated teacher as she spends countless hours researching, planning, and implementing strategies and techniques she learned through attending workshops, staff development, and training and her personal reading related to best practices in the curriculum. Julie's beliefs about her position as the teacher parallel what I observed in her classroom during the research period. She says,

> I believe that as a teacher, I play a vital role in the success of my students. I believe that teaching is not a job, but a serious commitment. In order for my students to be successful, I have to give my best each day. I must stay well informed of the latest best practices by attending workshops and reading the latest research. Being dedicated to my students often means putting in extra time when needed to implement the new strategies that I am learning . . . I believe being a life-long learner myself will help me stay knowledgeable of current best practices. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 1-11-10)

Julie told me, "I look forward to trying new things and updating my own techniques often to best meet the needs of my students" (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 1-11-10). She accepted this challenge as she planned lessons for her students as a result of staff development focusing on culturally relevant teaching.

Holding affirming views about diversity. Julie, a Caucasian female realizes and affirms that students of diverse backgrounds are viewed by some individuals in a negative light; however she makes every attempt to create positive self images for her

students to encourage positive self esteem and propel them to higher levels of self-worth. During the researcher observation period in Julie's classroom I had the opportunity to observe a Social Studies lesson which focused on a passage that Julie read about a new student who spoke English as a second language. Although the new student was fluent in English she never spoke in class leaving the other students with the impression that she did not speak/know English. The class surprisingly discovers that she speaks English fluently after the teacher calls on her to read a passage. Julie used this story as a springboard to her lesson on prejudice and judging people's differences. One of her African American males stated that people think that "I am not smart because I am Black." Approaching the situation cautiously, it was Julie's empathetic response, and immediate treatment of the student that reassured him of his abilities and her belief in him. Julie's immediate response was to reassure the student that he was indeed smart and then named particular subjects where he excelled. She also indicated to me later during our post-observation interview that she would speak with the school counselor, have a separate conversation with him to affirm her beliefs about him. That made the student feel comfortable while also indicating to me that prior nurturing has been a way of operating in her classroom and students feel free to discuss personal and sometimes even disturbing issues openly.

It is Julie's positive relationship with students as well as her teacher empathy which enables them to feel comfortable in sharing their feelings such as the student above. Relationships are developed as Julie purposely learns about her students, and this is done in varied ways. Julie told me,

I believe in taking the time to build relationships with my students. The students will be more willing to accept what I am teaching if they realize that I love and care about them. I want my students to know that I aspire to see them be successful. I believe that by knowing my students well, they will show growth in their academic performance as well. I take time daily to try to discover how my students learn best, what interests motivate and excite them to learn, and their individual strengths and weaknesses. I get to know my students each year through the use of informal inventories, formative assessments, parent contact, daily observations, and most of all, individual conversations with students. I believe in using methods such as looping to further develop relationships and increase knowledge of students' distinctive abilities. By knowing my students well, I can plan instruction that will meet their unique needs and stimulate them to learn. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 1-11-10)

Skill to act as agents of change. According to Fullan (as cited in Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b), change agency is a moral imperative or stated simply an ethical act which teachers are duty bound to perform. Julie says this is sometimes an uncomfortable act for her especially in matters of race. She told me,

I am aware that I am often uncomfortable dealing with issues of race. [Although] sometimes I have to move out of my comfort zone to meet their needs or get to know them better. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 3-28-10)

It is apparent to me that she realizes the necessity to become an agent of change as she has tried to move beyond her comfort zone. That act in itself is progress however Julie has not made the necessary steps to qualify as an agent of change.

Constructivist views of learning. As Julies class is set up with students' desk clustered together, she has center areas around the outside, books are categorized by genre and stored in a number of tubs so students can move them from place to place and she even utilizes wall space to capture students' attention towards learning if they become disengaged with her during lessons. Julie provides opportunities for students to

engage in active learning associated with constructivist views. She creates opportunities

for students to construct their knowledge through use of various grouping and centers.

Although it is known that merely putting students in groups does not make it a

constructivist lesson it is what they do in those groups. She shares her beliefs about how

students learn below:

> I believe that all students can learn when provided with differentiated instruction.
> All students learn through differing styles and on various levels. All students can
> make growth when they are effectively taught the prerequisite skills they need. In
> order to meet each student's unique needs, I believe in providing individualized
> instruction. I work to differentiate my instruction through the use of small,
> flexible guided reading groups, flexible math skill groups, differentiated literacy
> centers, leveled book bins, and various degrees of scaffolding.

Julie uses regular assessment to check the progress of students in order to provide

appropriate engagement for learning. Her comments about assessment are:

> I try to do assessments regularly, formal assessments at least every quarter, and
> then informally as needed. But especially for African American males, figuring
> out the specific weaknesses are, the needs, and then really tailoring instruction to
> meet those needs so you're not just shooting in the dark with just blanket
> instruction, you're really trying to narrow. With the males, I think motivation is
> key, so assessing [to learn] what motivates them and what . . . their interests are
> and to keep them interested in the lessons so they can get the most out of it. (Julie,
> Interview, 7-29-09)

Learning about students. When Julie is aware of the students' home/cultural

experiences and utilizes them in her instruction, she is more likely to fully engage them

and make their learning more meaningful. One way she assumes the responsibility for

learning about the cultural lives of her students was through an activity she referred to as

Me Bags. She said the Me Bag sharing was one cultural activity she planned for students

and herself to learn about each other. Julie presented her Me Bag as well. Each Me Bag

contained objects selected by the student which represented them. Julie also told me,

> . . . I wasn't really thinking about learning about different cultures, but having the kids learn about their own cultures and the cultures that are present in our classroom and getting to know each other – where we came from and why we are the way we are as unique individuals. So I took the idea from a graduate class [at a local university] with Dr. Cheek, and she had us talk all about culture and exceptionalities and religion and how all those things about you makes you who you are, so I thought I could try it on a lower level, more simplified way, do that with these kids, 'cause I was seeing some cliques and the kids [were saying]some things that I thought were inappropriate, like racial comments, discriminatory, segregating themselves into little cliques and I didn't like that. So I thought they really needed to respect each others' differences. They're very alike in many ways, but they're also very different and they just don't know—they just don't have the knowledge. They haven't gotten it from home or anywhere else, so they don't understand each other because they don't know each other. I've tried to get to know them [my students] outside of school. I take them places [such as], McDonalds, or . . . to ballgames. [I even] try to build a relationship . . . so they're comfortable to tell me, [in class] "oh this is hard for me" or "this is difficult." [I try to] have that rapport with them and their family too. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 3-28-10)

Julie has even shared,

> Relationships appear to be very important to AA males, including families and friendships. I might go to a ballgame or attend a church service of a student. These might not be comfortable places for me, because I would then become the minority. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 3-28-10)

> I think males [both Caucasian and African American males] in general learn a little differently—not all, but just generalizing—more active, different interests as far as sports, or animals, snakes, and reptiles, dinosaurs, things that weren't of interest to me growing up as a child and aren't really of interest to me now, so, finding ways to change my own ways that I'm comfortable, or changing my own comfort level to meet their needs is difficult at times, and sometimes it's hard to move out of your comfort zone, but you have to, to meet their needs [African American males]. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 3-28-10)

Julie is also mindful of the importance of finding ways to interest African American

males in reading:

> I also believe in finding what motivates students to read, I think that's especially important for African American males, like finding what interests them and provide them literature that will make them want to read and make them want to pick up a book. Oh, I also think for any student, immersing them in literacy, like having it everywhere, in lots of different forms of media, magazines, books, audio, computer, you know, not just traditional, but lots of choices of literature to read. (Julie, Interview, 7-29-09)

Culturally relevant teaching practices. Julie utilizes her knowledge of her

students to help them gain success in the learning process. My time spent interviewing

Julie help to convince me of her views about student learning. Her teaching practices are

very defined beliefs and rules about student learning. She said,

> I believe that all students can learn when provided with differentiated instruction. All students learn through differing styles and on various levels. All students can make growth when they are effectively taught the prerequisite skills they need. In order to meet each student's unique needs, I believe in providing individualized instruction. I work to differentiate my instruction through the use of small, flexible guided reading groups, flexible math skill groups, differentiated literacy centers, leveled book bins, and various degrees of scaffolding. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 1-11-10)

During another interview she talked about boys and learning. Based on her experience

working with males, Julie speaks specifically about African American males. She says,

> I've noticed that AA males seemed to be typically interested in sports, music, pop culture, movement, video games, or other outside games. I have tried to increase the amount of text on these topics in my reading center and during read alouds. I also try to incorporate movement and games into learning tasks and activities as often as possible. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 3-28-10)

Julie also considers parents to be vital forces worth uniting with, in her aid to

educate students. She employs a number of techniques to keep parents informed of

students' progress and how they can assist their child with learning. She says,

> I believe parent communication is crucial to student learning and is directly
> impacted when close parent-teacher relationships are developed. To strengthen
> my relationship with parents and improve student learning I send home weekly
> reports, conduct parent conferences frequently, make phones calls, invite parents
> to school, and send emails and newsletters so they are always informed of what is
> going on at school . . . I also invite parents to school to improve their level of
> comfort. I encourage parents to communicate student reading progress by
> responding on the nightly reading log. All communication with parents takes
> place in their native language [via school interpreters or websites that translate
> written language] so they feel included and comfortable in the school community.
> (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 2-26-10)

Julie talks about the impact of parent communication as she discusses a situation about an

African American student. She told me,

> One example of how parent-teacher communication directly impacts student
> learning is a decision made about services provided to a struggling reader and
> writer. After several phone conferences with his mom, we jointly decided to
> change his learning plan; his mom would support his reading at home and a tutor
> would support [his] writing at school. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 2-26-
> 10)

Julie also understands that learning from parents is a culturally relevant practice. She also

makes effort to involve them and keep them informed of school related events. She says,

> In addition, parents are informed of school events, projects and ways to support
> the classroom through newsletters, which travel to parents by way of a Friday
> folder. Over the past several years, I have improved parent communication and
> involvement by inviting parents to lunch every Friday. This is one way I've
> helped parents feel more comfortable in the school environment, which translates
> into more academic meetings as well. Once parents feel comfortable, they don't

hesitate to discuss more critical topics. (Julie, Post-Observation Interview, 2-26-10)

Summary. Julie puts forth a lot of effort each day to impact student learning. She admits that being a White middle class female that she works extra hard to meet the needs of her African American males. She says,

> . . . there's so many obstacles. I think the main thing, when I thought about that, is the fact that I am middle-class, white female, and I'm trying to teach African American males of various socioeconomic statuses . . . (Julie, Interview, 7-29-09)

Nevertheless, Julie has learned from them many ways to impact their literacy attainment as she creates collaborative learning opportunities and differentiation.

June: Fifth-Grade Teacher

June is a Caucasian female. She is single and engaged to be married during the summer season. June is a second-generation teacher following in her mother's footsteps. June considers her mother, a high school English teacher, to be a valuable resource/mentor to her when it comes to teaching matters. Although June came to the field of teaching after abandoning her first career as a flight attendant she now feels teaching is her destiny. June attributes this latter career path to her own love of school and the academic success which she experienced as a student growing up. June states, ". . . I was one of those kids who loved school, so teaching was actually meant for me" (June, Interview, 7-22-09). June grew up and was educated in a rural town located in the northeast central piedmont area of North Carolina. June has taught in both urban and

rural settings. Both settings were schools in which the majority of the student population qualified for free/reduced meals, and are therefore called Title I schools.

June is a graduate of a university located in the piedmont region of North Carolina and has been teaching three years. June is currently a fifth grade teacher. June commutes daily across four counties to get to her work setting. She is also pursuing a master's degree in elementary mathematics education. At the time of this study she was taking a teacher research class and was engaged in a teacher research/inquiry project related to her students' mathematics literacy.

June has the unique experience of teaching three different grade levels during her four years of teaching. She taught third grade her first year and then decided to loop up with her students to fourth grade. After completing her second year of teaching she accepted the challenge of looping with her class to fifth grade. Although June found the looping to be a rewarding experience, which she believes impacted the academic levels of her students, she opted to remain in fifth grade during her fourth year of teaching. This decision was of a professional nature because June wanted to become more adept to the curriculum requirements of one grade level.

June's Classroom Design

June's classroom, along with eight other classrooms, is located in a building adjacent to the main building. Her small classroom is home to 26 fifth-graders. Students in her classroom are seated in desks grouped with four, five, or six other desks, leaving very little room for movement between each grouping. At the front of the room is a table that holds document camera and a projector, and other sorted teaching supplies. Also at

the front of the room is a bar stool that June uses when she reads aloud to her students. Two tables situated about one yard apart take up the space in the back of the room. Both tables are used for small-group instruction. This table space is needed as June is involved in co-teaching writing with her teaching assistant and one of the school's English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. June feels this collaboration has been beneficial in reducing the teacher-student ratio during writing instruction. June's classroom library is located at the front of the room and is equipped with a number of genres, picture and chapter books, as well as Accelerated Reader books. Accelerated Reader is a special, incentive-based program intended to increase the amount of reading, Accelerated Reader books are leveled and each one has a designated number of points students can earl toward rewards if they pass a computer-based test about details of each book. Genre posters are mounted on the walls above the bookshelves in the literacy library.

A desk sits at the front of the room in which book club notebooks are stacked. These notebooks are used for recording responses to literacy readings. The wall space is used for mounting instructional materials/posters related to literacy and math.

Theme 1—Teacher Beliefs: *All I Am and Hope to Be*

June believes that every child in her classroom is a learner and that it is her responsibility as the teacher to find ways to help them to be successful in the learning process. In our initial interview June said, "I believe that every child can learn and it is my responsibility to find the ways to reach them" (June, Interview, 7-22-09). June also told me much later, "You have to be open-minded as a teacher, period. You can't go into the teaching field thinking that everyone learns like you [the teacher] and that everyone is

going to be like you" (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10), which confirmed her belief

that children can learn when the teacher finds the best ways to help them learn. June also

told me during our initial interview that she takes her job seriously and believes that she

is the major entity in the classroom responsible for the education of her students. She

feels that she needs to learn about her students without the biases that previous teacher

may have developed about students and eagerly share with her. During that interview

June also stated,

> . . . I had an African American male in my class, and had heard not very good
> things about him from the year before and to be honest with you, I was very upset,
> to a point, 'cause he had been a discipline problem in another class and . . . my
> student teacher here—said, I never listen to what anyone else says about children
> because you can build a different relationship. And honestly, this child became
> my heart this year. I loved him, and just saw him totally turn around (June,
> Interview, 7-22-09).

June believes and stated explicitly that she loves and respects all of her students

and values the diversity they bring to the learning environment. She told me,

> I've been so fortunate to work in an environment that has allowed me to learn and
> experience about other cultures. I can genuinely say that I love every student that
> I have taught and I feel that my students know that I love them and that's
> important especially at a school like this. I want my students to respect me and in
> order for that to happen I have to respect them and I feel you have to build that
> relationship of love and respect. And in turn you get a lot more product in the
> classroom when you have that to begin. (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

One main consideration, which stems from her beliefs, is that June tries to plan

lessons that center students' learning major concepts. In designing such lessons, June

considers students' ability levels and background knowledge. It is also important to her

that her students work together as they interact daily; therefore, lesson activities are

planned that focus on relationship building (June, Questionnaire, 10-19-09). One way that

June is able to personalize student learning is by empathizing with students or putting

herself into her students' shoes (June, Questionnaire, 10-19-09). She credits a graduate

class in which she is currently enrolled with a recent epiphany related to her position in

society as a Caucasian, middle class female, which has impacted how she views some of

her students. She has discovered that because she grew up as a member of a privileged

culture, very different from the students in her class, that she was not aware of some of

the assumptions she had about students. She told me that her graduate studies have been

instrumental in developing favorable beliefs about students whose ethnicity is different

from hers. For example she talks about the decision that she made about students' home

language. She said,

> I talk about Will Smith, because there is that famous thing about his grandma said
> that he could use any language he wanted to on the basketball court but when he
> was in her house he would speak properly. And I tell them [her students] that
> there is language that you can use on the playground but then there is language
> that we use in the classroom and you [students] need to be able to code switch.
> We read a really good article about code switching in my grad school class. (June,
> Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

When thinking about the potential of her students she told me that she is confident

that by the end of the school year her students will have made academic and social gains

(June, Questionnaire, 10-19-09). June attributes social gains to her focus on building

relationships. Although willing to be a participant in this study, June preferred to be

observed as one of the last teachers in my observation cycle. She did not want to be

observed during the first two months of school so that she would have the opportunity to build community and establish relationships with her students.

When asked about her metaphor for teaching, June describes herself as a "copy machine" when she thinks of her position in the classroom. In describing herself as a copy machine, June says,

> Honestly, I think like, of myself to a point, like a copy machine, because there's that quote that we had, 'that we teach what you know, but you reproduce what you are,' and I've seen that and I think that when I give my children respect, that's why they copy that and that's why they're respectful the majority of the time to each other, and that . . . I get the care from them, or I give out the care and they give it back to me, and that's why you know, we have this thing, where, you know, it's being respectful for each other . . . (June, Interview, 7-22-09)

June also feels that through all of her learning, the personal and the professional come together to form the beliefs that she possesses that are then manifested in the classroom setting and in her teaching style (June, Questionnaire, 10-20-09). Continuous learning about students helps June to learn about students whose cultures are different from hers and helps her to maintain her belief that every child in her class is a learner (June, Questionnaire, 10-20-09). However, June told me that her African American males seem to be Americanized when they get to her. She says,

> For the African American males that I have, they seem to be so Americanized. That's the difference between them and my Hispanic students. The African American children are Americanized and I don't know if it's because they were born here and their parents were born here and their grandparents were born here and a lot of the Hispanics were not. Like Kwanzaa, I don't have any that celebrate Kwanzaa and things like that where I think I would be learning from their culture . . . (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

Theme 2—Teacher Practices: *What I Do & Why*

Based on my observations, the literacy components that June incorporates include

teacher-directed reading, guided reading, self-selected reading, shared reading, read

alouds, and writing. She had not implemented a working with words component into

instruction at the time of my observations in her classroom, although she said that she felt

it was a necessary part of a balanced literacy instruction. She expressed the need to obtain

more knowledge related its implementation and other logistics from her Professional

Learning Community (PLC) group members. After the researcher observation period in

June's classroom she began word study. She said this act is an opportunity for her

African American males as they engage in learning about words. She says the following

about the word study component,

> A lot of the children, especially the African American males, have not been
> exposed to a lot of vocabulary and I don't want these huge words to intimidate
> them. I want them to be able to chunk them up and see that they can find words
> within it [the bigger word] then I can sound it out . . . and they need to know how
> to chunk words on the EOG [end of grade test] so that they can pronounce the
> words . . . Learning about prefixes and suffixes helped to empower them to be
> able to do that . . . I would let them if they wanted to cut out [letters] with the
> making words. Some of the children didn't need that some did but the males
> [African American males] did, they seem to be more tactile, visual learners that
> they [like] moving around stuff. (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

Shared Reading—As stated previously, June is a strong believer in relationships.

This is true when it comes to the students in her class. Utilizing and integrating shared

readings into her morning meeting is an example of that community building. June's

morning meeting structure has four parts: a greeting, sharing, an activity, and news and

announcements. Shared reading was the activity part of morning meeting. Shared

readings were poems for both entertainment and content, both new and "stale" texted

readings, such as about Halloween, simple machines, or Chilly Willy. June said the

following about the benefit of shared reading for her African American males.

> It's beneficial for the African American males because it gives them an opportunity to practice their fluency in reading in a comfortable situation where they are not having to read aloud by themselves. The shared reading allows them to practice that fluency when they are not being put on the spot. Also this is a time when we do silly songs and it's kind of like a connection to them because they enjoy being able to sing and we use a lot of our content [science and math] because of the rhythm and them being able to make that connection . . . I have actually seen the kids trying to sing the songs during the EOG (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

Self-Selected—Self-selected reading in June's class is a designated time when

students are free to select the type of literature they prefer to read. As students transition

into independent reading June reminds them to practice the skills they are learning in

teacher-directed reading during their self-selected time. June also uses this self-selected

time to conference with students related to reading. "This is beneficial for the African

American males because it allows them to read what they want to" (June, Follow-up

Interview, 4-14-10).

Teacher-directed Reading (TDR)—Teacher-directed reading is instruction with

whole class. During this time June provides instruction related to a particular reading

comprehension strategy. One example, during one of my observations June, was working

on the comprehension skill known as visualization. This included making connections

text to self, text to text, and text to world, and using prior knowledge. Comprehension

skills that she reviewed before introducing visualizing were also practiced. June used a

strategic read aloud to introduce the skill of visualizing. June says the following about

teacher directed reading and her African American males. She said,

> I found that teacher directed reading, and this is also apparent in my African American males, is that it helps them to realize what they are doing in their reading. I think sometimes students may be using some of the strategies and never have thought about that's what they are doing, like visualizing or inferring. I know that my African American males are very visual learners and they watch a lot of TV typically and play video games typically and movies which they infer that they do it all the time but they don't do it when they read. I think it's because we don't make them aware that that's what they are doing when they look at TV. So I think that teacher directed reading actually points out the things they are doing [when reading] subconsciously that we might not realize in our everyday lives. With me modeling the strategies helps. (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

Read Alouds—June incorporates two types of read aloud using books by Kate

Dicamillo: strategic and pleasure. Strategic read alouds are a part of her teacher-directed

instruction where a mini-lesson is taught that is centered on a particular comprehension

skill. Prior to my observation period, mini-lesson instruction focused on using prior

knowledge and text connections. During my observations the comprehension mini-lesson

focus was visualizing. The strategic read aloud was a descriptive text designed to help

create images in students' heads. June also incorporated read alouds for pleasure and

sheer enjoyment. During the time of this research study she was reading a chapter book

titled *The BFG* by Roald Dahl. BFG is a story about a little girl named Sophie is taken

from her orphanage during the wee hours of the early morning by the BFG (Big Friendly

Giant). June uses read aloud time to expose her African American males to vocabulary.

She says,

What I strive to do with my read aloud for my African American males is to make them broaden their vocabularies is my main focus, show them a fluent reader, model that for them, model me thinking aloud. Typically when I do a read aloud it is above a fifth grade level or it might be a book that I think is of interest to them . . . That's what I like about children's books today [because] they are written with actual meaty, let's make the elephant in the room be known. I think reading about things like that makes it easier to talk about as well. I guess connections and modeling are how I use my read alouds. (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

June has 26 students in her class this year. Eleven students failed to demonstrate mastery on third grade end of grade (EOG) assessment in reading last year. Her aim is to provide guided reading instruction for these students, which is a structure that she did not have to use last year because her students were all above grade level.

Guided Reading—Guided reading groups are conducted regularly by June. She meets with two groups daily. As guided reading groups are meeting the other students are working in book club groups, or in other small group, or are engaged in individual literacy instruction. During guided reading June works with small groups of five to seven students on their instructional levels. During the observation period June worked with a guided reading group on the comprehension skill known as visualizing. She also built in other skills that students had learned previously as she introduced the text the students were about to read. After about 20 minutes June dismissed the students and asked them to return to their work areas with two assignments: (a) read the story and decide on the genre, and (b) identify any difficult words. June followed the same procedure with another reading group as she introduced the text, *Big Foot*. Students engaged in a discussion about the characteristics of a myth, then engaged in what June referred to as "what good readers do." She led students to make connections, make pictures in their

heads, etc. As students read the text silently June called on individuals to read to her. This

lesson ended with June assigning students to reread the story again before the next guided

reading meeting. June said the following about guided reading for her African American

males.

> Guided reading is another opportunity to model good reading strategies for them
> [African American males] also it gives me a chance to work in a small group
> situation so I can hear what problems they are having. Maybe they are not being
> able to visualize or chunk words properly and that's where I think for my African
> American males is really a good opportunity for me to work with them as readers
> and help them grow. (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

Writing—June also used writer's workshop during the time I observed.

Procedures were well established, which was evident as students moved about their

classroom to position themselves to participate in one of the writer's workshop

components. In June's classroom writer's workshop begins with a mini-lesson, which

may include a read aloud, followed by a restating of the writing expectations. Students

engage in various stages of the workshop process as June conferences with individual

students. Conferencing is a time which June tries to meet with individual students to

listen to their stories and provide assistance as needed. Writer's workshop ends with

some type of sharing and June's assessment of her students' progress and needs so that

she can plan subsequent lessons. This assessment time, which is referred to as checking

the status of the class, is a necessary time for June so that her writing instruction plans are

driven by students' needs.

As mentioned earlier, writer's workshop is a collaborative effort between June, an

ESL teacher, and June's instructional assistant. The ESL teacher and instructional

assistant both arrive at June's room on time daily ready to work with students one-on-one and to provide feedback to help them develop as writers. Students were writing biographies and working at various stages of the writer's workshop when I observed, and some students were even at the publishing stage. Previous writing instruction dealt with students writing about themselves, then about a member of the Marsh Elementary School staff. June says that her African American males enjoy writing. She said, "I have found that my African American males really enjoy writing stories about the past or even writing stories about their lives, like narratives" (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10).

Theme 3—Classroom Environment: *Safe, Friendly & Fit for Learning*

June was very frank about her beliefs about the power of relationships. However, she became a bit melancholy as she reflected on last year's level of parent involvement and this year's. She said,

> Before this year I feel like I was very involved. I would come to PTA, I would work many nights at the PTA thrift shop. With the commute this year, it's really a lot more difficult. I still think it [parent involvement] is important and that's why I'm looking for a school closer to home because that's a part of teaching that I think is very important. I think it is very important at a school like this because kids like to see you outside of the classroom . . . (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10)

In her analysis of this situation, June stated two conclusions about why she wasn't happy about the level of parent involvement: (a) this school year she commutes to work (across four counties), and (b) the fact that her last year's fifth-graders were also her fourth-graders, meaning that she looped with students to fifth grade. As a result of that two-year experience June told me that she knew her parents extremely well. June also

told me that she encourages parents to contact her by phone or email, as well as to visit

the classroom. June interacts in the community as she provides transportation for students

who attend afterschool tutoring when alternate transportation is not available. She also

attends community events in which her students and parents participate. June was excited

about a recent experience in which she attended her first Latino baby shower for one

parent and found it to be a pleasant and culturally enlightening experience. Another

experience she talked about was visiting the sports events of African American males.

She said to me,

> I like to show up at many of my students' games. I think that this shows that I am interested in them outside of school. I also enjoy seeing them do something they truly enjoy. This is just one way that I use to build relationships with my students. (June, Follow-up Interview, 3-23-10)

Thinking about still other relationship-building examples, June discussed the time

she willingly purchased a book for an African American male during the school's Book

Fair. She eagerly shared with me,

> I know at the Book Fair, there's this book he really wanted, it's a series, *The Warriors* series, with the cats., I've never read one, but there's another little boy in class that sat beside him and he was really into those books, so I just call him Jay, Jay started reading those books a lot too, and I knew those books were at the Book Fair, but it was $8 so he couldn't afford it. So I bought him the book and surprised him with it one day, and I knew it meant a lot to him, because he came into here, when we switched classes, and showed the other teacher, and said, "Oh, [Miss June] bought this for me," and I wrote him a little note in the beginning, like, "I hope you have a wonderful year next year like you did this year," and that kind of thing. And you know, I think it's just, it's not that I would have just done it for him, but I know how much he meant to me this year and how, he hadn't had the best year, and then you wish, oh I wish I had had him for two years, because then, you know, and I just hope, my fear is with sending them—all of them . . . onto sixth grade. I know how middle school is, and it's rough and you know, like

for him, he's got such a kind heart and everyone in the school has seen it this past year, and I just don't want him to go over there and feel like he's not loved, or feel like, you know, and go down the wrong path because of, because he doesn't feel like he has any other way. (June, Interview, 7-22-09)

June admits that she is a bit baffled about the fact that she was able to establish a positive relationship with this African American male and help him to be successful when previous teachers could not. She talked to me about an incident that occurred on the bus when one African American male trusted that June would advocate for him.

. . . I know, and I don't know how I did it, I mean, it's just like I said, knowing that somebody cares about you, and for him, I think he didn't want to disappoint me. I know one time he came in and he said, "Miss June, I need to talk to you in the hall for a second" and I said, "Ok" so I went in the hall and he said, I got in a fight on the bus, and I'm gonna get written up and he said, "I just wanted to tell you that so you know, this is why it happened and I just wanted you to hear it from me, and I'm sorry." That meant so much to be, because apparently last year, he lied a lot, and for him to come out and tell me exactly what had happened, it meant a lot to me. I know that's not really stopping problems, but, I just I think a lot of times, children need specific boundaries and they're happy when they have them. They might not think they are, but you know, kind of having a little bit of structure, and with him, and like I said, when I met grandparents, they were really nice, but knowing that someone outside of your family cared about you, I don't know if that made the difference, I really don't know. And solving problems, I think that just them knowing that I care about them and feeling like they can come talk to me, I might be disappointed, but I'm still gonna love you and I'm not gonna hit you, and that kind of thing. Being in a safe environment, I guess. (June, Interview, 7-22-09)

This sense of caring displayed by June and shown outside of class also carried over into the classroom and impacted her relationships with her African American male students.

June feels that creating a classroom environment that is safe for learning she shows her students that she cares about them. She elaborates,

> . . . I feel like, I like to show them that I care about them, because I think a lot of times, they can, especially children, they're like very good judges of character, and they know if you're putting on, you know, and I think that, I honestly do, it's not like I have to act like I care about them, I do care about them . . . (June, Interview, 7-22-09).

June's Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) Analysis

Sociocultural consciousness. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b), a teacher who is cognizant of the fact that students' ways of understanding the world are closely tied to their race/ethnicity, social class, etc. is said to be socioculturally-conscious. This process of becoming socioculturally conscious allows educators to become reflective about how their cultural and social identities and how these identities dictate their beliefs about their students as well as the practices and relationships they have with students. This sociocultural consciousness enables teachers to cross boundaries that separate teachers and students. June used a number of instructional practices to engage her students in the learning process; however, no data collected indicated that June had engaged in the type of self reflection to develop a sociocultural consciousness.

Holding affirming views about diversity. Teachers who fail to have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds are said to view them from a deficit perspective. Viewing students from a deficit perspective results in a teacher having low expectations of such students. June made a collaborative decision, possibly prompted by NCLB, to provide students with rigorous and challenging learning opportunities. This was also a way to divide students into flexible instructional groups. One of her three African American male students was placed in a high academic group as a result of her grouping strategy. He also received instruction from the school's accelerated learner's

teacher because of his academic ability. Other African American males were placed in groups reflective of their instructional levels. The fact that these groups were flexible can be interpreted to mean that June sees such groups being temporary, and only serving to meet the immediate literacy needs of students. Therefore membership is temporary for students, which is what the term flexible implies. Beyond grouping techniques that June uses there was no other data collected during classroom observations that indicated June's has an affirming attitude toward, or uses differing strategies with, students from culturally-diverse backgrounds.

Skill to act as agents of change. Teachers who act as agents of change challenge the inequalities that exist within the educational setting. June acted as an agent of change as she met with the school's counselor and principal to protest the placement of an African American male into her fifth grade classroom that had been previously retained twice. June contended that retaining the student twice before grade five was not in the child's best interest, but placing him in her class was also not in the best interest of this child. After investigating June's concerns, the principal told her that a decision was made to re-assign the African American male to a sixth-grade class at the middle school level. Therefore, his record will only indicate one retention as a result of her actions. Thinking of the holistic needs of this student was what allowed even the thought of the decision to move him to the middle school setting, which was a more appropriate academic environment.

Constructivist views of learning. Constructivists believe that new learning happens as a result of building upon an individuals' prior knowledge, as well as engaging

students in inquiry. Still another Constructivist belief is that learning is a social construction and happens as student engage in collaborative effort. An example of how June enacts these three constructivist beliefs is June use of the writer's workshop model. She started writing instruction at the beginning of the year by allowing students to write about themselves. The students used their writing to introduce themselves to their new classmates. Subsequent writing assignments and lessons which focused on biographies of people at Marsh Elementary and then famous people around the world, built on students' first writing assignments. After students completed their first drafts they engaged in collaboration with peers who provided feedback on the composition. Inquiry during writer's workshop occurred as students examined the compositions of their peers. This method of instruction is an example of June's constructivist views of learning.

Learning about students. June understands that in order to teach students in meaningful ways that she needs to know about her student's lives. One way to accomplish this is getting to know students beyond the school day. June admits that accomplishing that goal has been problematic for her this school year because she no longer lives in the same town where she works. Although she understands that parents are valuable resources, able to provide useful information about their child, she feels there are also barriers to making that type of involvement a reality because she is a commuter traveling across four counties to get to work each day. As a result, no data were found during this study to indicate that June engages with her students or their families beyond the school day. She discussed her inability to communicate with parents on a regular basis. She said,

> I really like having my parents involved and honestly wish that I could be more involved with my parents. I would love to send out a weekly newsletter on Fridays letting parents know what was happening in class; however, since I would have to have it translated, and I am a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants type person when it comes to that, it rarely happens. (June, Follow-up Interview, 2-27-10)

June also commented that this year, because she is a commuter that she is not as involved with her students beyond the school day. She told me,

> This year I feel like my parental involvement has not been as great as in my previous years and I relate this to two things: my commute and that I looped with my previous students. I knew my parents from the last class extremely well. I had cell phone numbers from dads (that I used) for both reprimanding phone calls and positive phone calls. The majority of my teacher initiated conferences were ones that were required by the school. (June, Follow-up Interview, 2-27-10)

To June's credit is her dedication to developing relationships with her students. One main way that she develops relationships is by incorporating daily morning meeting sessions. It is her goal during this daily activity to provide a structure that enables students to develop socially as they interact with her and their peers.

Culturally relevant teaching practices. No data were coded to indicate that June engages in the use of culturally relevant teaching practices as defined by Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) or other scholars in this field such as Gloria Ladson-Billings or Geneva Gay. She said the following about her willingness to use such practices:

> I do value culturally-based learning styles however I do not feel that I have enough background knowledge to implement this as much as I should. I feel that this should be a component of undergraduate elementary education studies. (June, Follow-up Interview, 12-29-10)

Summary. June believes that all of her children can learn. She has found that read aloud, guided reading, and shared reading opportunities are optimal learning times for her African American males. She admits that she grow up in an environment very different from her students. As she tries to meet the cultural needs of her students she feels that she was not adequately prepared and has requested more staff development in culturally relevant teaching as a result.

Mae: Third-Grade Teacher

Mae is a single, white female teaching third grade. She is planning a May wedding. Mae is beginning her sixth year of teaching. She is a graduate of a local college and is presently in the process of completing a Master's degree in elementary math education at another university in the same city. She is also a certified Montessori teacher. The Montessori method is a child-centered approach to learning which is guided by the teacher. Mae's Montessori grounding requires her to look at each child as an individual and plan instruction based on students' needs. Mae was a member of the Russell Elementary School PTA during the year of this study. She also serves as a volunteer teacher representative for the school's student intervention team. Mae is also involved with tutoring at her school on Saturdays.

There are five third-grade teachers at Mae's school. Four of the teachers have come together to form two teaching teams. Mae and one other third grade teacher make up one team. Mae teaches reading and social studies twice every day. All third grade teachers, along with the assistance from the school's curriculum facilitator, meet collaboratively on a weekly basis to plan lessons.

Mae's Classroom Design

Mae's classroom is located in a newer building. The building, constructed years after the original building, is attached to an older existing building. One obvious sign that there are two buildings under one roof is the size of the classrooms. Classrooms in the older structure are larger and those in the newer structure, like Mae's, are smaller. Mae's classroom has three entrance doors: one leading from the hallway, and one each at the front and back leading to adjacent classrooms and storage areas. There are only two slender windows that extend from the top to bottom of the exterior wall and open at the bottom. The roof has dropped ceilings with even florescent lighting.

Another sign that Mae is in a newer classroom is the limited number and reduced-size bulletin boards within her teaching setting. Mae makes use of the limited bulletin board space by placing instructional materials on the cinderblock walls. Most of the posters are about reading or writing. Her back wall contains a word wall that covers over half the area making it visible for students seated in any position in the classroom. The word wall is utilized by students as needed during writing and other instructional times deemed by Mae. Between the word wall and back door leading to the next classroom, a number of graphic organizers are displayed, serving as evidence of the school's literacy focus. The wall adjacent to the back door has two bulletin boards, one used for student writing and the other is what Mae refers to as a behavior board for keeping track of correct student behavior. Situated between these two boards hangs a pocket chart used for classroom center/stations management. The main focus across the front of the room is a large whiteboard, which is situated between two small bulletin boards. The first bulletin

board (closest to the main entrance door) has a large poster with a number of reading

strategies that students are encouraged to use should they get stuck on a word. The

bulletin board on the other side of the whiteboard is an information board containing a

calendar and a list of weekly special classes that her students attend. The teacher's desk

sits in front of this board. Beside this board is another door leading into a storage room

and then to another classroom.

Theme 1—Teacher Beliefs: *All I Am and Hope to Be*

Mae believes that every child is a different learner and as such they possess

different experiences that they take with them to school or into a learning environment.

Mae states:

> I definitely think every child is a different learner and they bring with them, not
> necessarily baggage, but different experiences to the table and that can really
> affect their learning background knowledge, and socioeconomic variables, things
> that can definitely make a person the kind of learner that they are. So every single
> person in my class is a different learner. Some people are visual and auditory
> learners, and some like interaction [thinking of the tactile learner] it just kinda
> depends on the kid. And knowing their experiences at home or out of school helps
> me to help them. (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09)

Mae told me in a follow-up interview that many of her African American males are more

visual and tactile learners. She added,

> [African American males] are definitely more visual and they are more verbal,
> you know, they really like to talk, and they like interaction and they like
> movement, it's really important for them . . . normally we don't have blocks that
> are longer than 40 minutes, but if we do, we always take a break, and 40 minutes
> is pushing it. (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

During our interview and also in Mae's responses to the questionnaire she completed for this study, Mae stated that she believes that each child should be treated according to his/her wants, needs, and experiences. To honor these differences Mae said that she believes it is important to provide instruction that is differentiated by content, process, product, language, culture, and race (Mae, Questionnaire, 7-27-09). She also expressed her belief that it is important for students to know they have a teacher who has high and fair expectations for all students. She says,

> You kinda have to . . . let them know that you expect a lot from them [African American males] because you know they can do . . . make them feel good, because a lot of them don't necessarily have that internally . . . it's an external . . . not motivation but confidence level. (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Mae believes that experiences are key for children, so learning about what they have seen and been through in their lives is imperative for her to know as their teacher (Mae, Questionnaire, 7-27-09). So, when developing lessons, Mae says that she considers her students' ability levels, interests, background, social skills, and content knowledge (Mae, Questionnaire, 7-27-09). In determining students' ability levels she uses ongoing assessments, as she stated during our initial interview,

> Oh, I can't teach without assessment. I'm constantly assessing, reevaluating every couple of weeks . . . so I know exactly what they're doing with me because every couple of weeks I'm constantly assessing their literacy ability especially, because I know it depends on the child, but some pick up really quickly on certain things. (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09)

Mae says that constant assessment helped her meet the needs of one African American male. She said frankly assessment and watching him closely, ". . . it helped me teach him,

because it definitely helped me with planning and knowing . . . you know you can't start

a lesson unless you know where a person is at . . ." (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10).

Mae also stated that when her African American male students experience

academic difficulties she seeks the help of others including her students:

> Well, for the grade level, we [third grade teachers] do all of our lesson plans
> together and then if we want to, or if we feel like we need to change something,
> we can tweak it depending on our students' needs. But that's for whole class,
> teacher-directed, for whole group reading. And then for guided reading, it just
> depends, I do that individually and that depends on where my students are, their
> own individual level . . . our curriculum facilitator comes in once a week and
> plans with us and helps us . . . she looks over our plans . . . There's a woman on
> our grade level, she just left, [the classroom and is now the reading specialist] but
> she's been teaching for probably 35 years, so the curriculum facilitator kind of
> lets her facilitate as well. (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09)

Allowing students to participate/assist in the teaching is a resource useful for Mae

in the learning process (Mae, Questionnaire, 7-27-09). I observed as Mae placed students

in groups to work on a particular assignment. She says that she places her high African

American males in groups where they are charged with facilitating. When it was time to

report what was learned she called on African American males to tell the class what they

learned in their individual groups. Additionally, providing opportunities for students to

interact with one another is a belief that Mae accomplishes by using various kinds of

student groupings. This was also observed as students worked at literacy stations. Mae

stated that she was going to allow students to select a partner to work with during the

time they were at each station. The African American males in her class paired with each

other. Mae also allowed a group of three males to work together.

Mae believes that education should be about the whole child and not just about how students are performing as learners, but also about what has made them the kind of learner they are. For Mae, that means moving beyond academics to include getting to know a child. She states that, "If the child feels as though he/she is cared for in a learning environment then they are more likely to succeed" (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09). Additionally, she states that students "have to feel some kind of connection . . . some kind of bond or trust with me" (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09). Mae accomplishes this by creating a safe environment using structures such as rules, consequences, and rewards for students. For her African American males she told me:

> I have conversations with them, a bunch at recess about their home life, things they are interested in . . . they love horror movies and then it clicked they'll like R. L. Stine books like it just kind of clicked . . . and that's good to know because I can tie that in with lessons . . . but even if I don't think it's age-appropriate, it's what they do . . . they like thrillers . . . (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Mae also includes what each child is interested in, and then focuses on their interests to help them accomplish their goals (Mae, Questionnaire, 7-27-09).

In exploring her own diversity and teaching Mae recognizes that it is easier for her to understand her students and for her students to understand her when she remembers where she comes from and her life experiences (Mae, Questionnaire, 7-27-09). She is aware of where she has been and how each experience can be used to impact her students. Mae says that because of the role that an adult served in her life that she tries to do the same for her students that have similar needs. In sharing the experience Mae says,

> There is a group [of students] in High Point that I take care of since I had them in second grade [two African American males and one female] and they are now in ninth grade. I take them out once a month and we go do things and they are . . . they are not very privileged but they are very bright students . . . and I take them out and do stuff with them and a lot of it is things that they can . . . you know it's not just to the mall or to McDonald's . . . one day we did Mini-Golf and then we did bowling so we try to do things that will help them . . . They call me Mommy number 2 . . . [the female] calls me Mommy B, and [the other male] calls me Big Mamma. They call me [at home] all the time, they are really in love with me and I love them too . . . (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Mae believes the above act of giving back becomes full circle when she thinks of how someone intervened in her life as a child. She said,

> That's one thing that I like to do with them because I had this woman, Lydia Beaudelaire (Pseudonym), who did the same thing for me, so, and I still remember her and she would talk to me about college all the time and doing well and I wasn't really motivated. My Mom's a professor in sociolinguistics and she's really up there and one of the most famous sociolinguists in the country but she never talked to me about going to college . . . she was in her own world and I had a nanny who took care of me and my Dad passed away and I didn't really have a lot of people who talked to me about you know personal things but my Mom and she wasn't there a lot. So, Lydia would take me out to talk about how I felt about school and just you know more personal stuff and then college and what to I wanted to do when I get older . . . and that really, honestly helped me a lot . . . So I was raised by this nanny who was Jamaican, she was really, really good for me . . . and I would visit her house . . . I knew her family . . . and I guess that's why I feel connected to African Americans in general. (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Mae believes learning is reciprocal when telling me that she is constantly learning for them [African American males] as well as them learning from her. Mae gives an example about two of her African American males who were mad at each other and made-up quickly. Mae ask them,

How did you get over it so quickly [speaking to the two boys], you know, I always held grudges [at that age]. And you know he said "well that's just life" and he said "people be who they be" and I said wow, like it's so simple but it really made me think . . . (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Mae compares herself to a "ladder" when thinking of her position as the classroom instructional leader. She sees her students, in particular her African American males, as climbers trying to move from a lower rung to a higher one. This task is complicated by the fact that students have weights on their feet keeping them from naturally moving from rung to rung. Mae sees herself as the ladder that scaffolds the students and supports them in moving to the top rung of the ladder. Therefore the ladder is placed at an angle to aid students in their upward climb. Mae recognizes the potential of her (all or her African American males) students and knows that by the end of the year her students "will all make growth academically and emotionally/mentally" (Mae, Interview, 10-5-09).

Theme 2—Teacher Practices: *What I Do & Why*

Teacher Directed Reading (TDR)—Teachers explored the team teaching concept for reading instruction at Russell Elementary School in third grade. During the time in which I conducted observational research in Mae's class she had rotated to social studies. In order to expose students to narrative and expository test, the teacher created a rotating schedule alternating between reading these two dichotomous categories. All teacher-directed lessons stemmed from the social studies curriculum. In teaching expository text, Mae's students interact with non-fiction information. For example, the social studies (expository) text provided a structure for understanding the information in that it was

equipped with a number of features. Even with that Mae felt information remained

difficult for her students to understand. Also due to time constraints mandated by pacing

guides she felt little time was left for differentiating, which created a conflict between her

teaching beliefs and task implementation. In thinking about teacher-directed reading and

its appropriateness for African American males, Mae states:

> I don't really know that it helps them. I don't think it helps them more than group work . . . it is a time when they can feel like they're a part of the group and they are all on the same page. I think TDI is kind of, it's something that we have to do, I don't know if it's for them [African American males] . . . because it's not differentiated enough for them. It's not as effective as guided reading or literacy stations where I can work with them on their levels. (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Guided Reading—Students were also divided on the grade level for guided

reading groups. Informal reading assessments for students assigned to Mae demonstrated

that they were functioning below grade level, and that one was a non-reader. To assist

students Mae provided a structure that consisted of comprehension strategies to use when

reading literature, such as making predictions and setting a purpose for reading. She

provided a leveled text for this type of reading engagement. At the end of the reading she

presented questions to assess comprehension. During reading she used popcorn reading, a

type of reading similar to round robin, as well as silent reading. As students read silently

she called on students to read aloud to her for several minutes before moving to the next

student. Working with words was another part of the guided reading instruction. Students

completed a vowel word sort about short and long I. At times she is able to integrate

word study with guided reading texts to give students authentic reasons for learning word

patterns. Guided reading was conducted four days a week in during the time I observed in Mae's classroom. Students were introduced to books on their instructional levels. Mae states that guided reading is beneficial for African American males because they are reading with her. She says ". . . this is great [guided reading] because they get to read and they get individualized attention from me . . . they get help with words . . . depending on what they need in terms of phonics . . . it's all on their instructional level" (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10).

Literacy Stations—Literacy learning and engagement was reinforced through centers/stations. One such station/center was technology. Students in Mae's classroom, as well as throughout the school, are required to complete a number of reading assignments each week on the computer. Such reading lessons were designed to impact the literacy achievement of students. Other literacy centers engaged students in literacy-related games.

Mae collaborates with the school's reading teacher who prepares a traveling tub of various games and activities that are use for literacy stations. During one of my observation visits the reading teacher was in Mae's class delivering one such tub. This tub had a number of activities related to word building with blocks, compound word construction, matching short and long vowels, suffixes matching (less and ness), story sequencing cards, writing graphic organizers, handwriting placemats, silly sentences, vocabulary cards, and context clues. These games were all differentiated by student interest and skill needs. Materials stay with Mae's class for two week intervals, and then another tub of games is delivered. Mae states that employing literacy stations is a time

when she can work with African American males individually because other students are

working in stations. Providing various stations gives students choice in that they pick

what they would like to learn about.

Spelling Lesson—Students words are given weekly followed by a test

administration at the end of the week. These words evolve from content area vocabulary,

test prep, and high frequency words.

Theme 3—Classroom Environment: *Safe, Friendly & Fit for Learning*

Mae is aware that efforts to solicit and/or increase parental involvement are not a

challenge for some schools in her district; however, it is a challenge that continues to be

an on-going priority for Russell Elementary. She also understands that increasing parent

involvement begins with developing relationships. Experience has taught her that parent

involvement is highly contingent on her ability to welcome parents to her classroom and

make them feel they are valued. Mae states,

> I'm really involved with their parents . . . parents have my cell phone and I call
> them on a weekly basis, and I keep in touch with them through their weekly
> agenda . . . every day at the end of the day, I write how they [students] did,
> everyone. I go around and write how they did, what color they're on, and why, if
> they did their homework, if they didn't, what did they miss, any other
> assignments, so I write in there individually, and I have about 4-5 students whose
> parents I call every single Friday, and they have my cell phone, so if for some
> reason I have to leave early, they know they can call me, or if I call them from my
> cell phone, they'll recognize and pick up. (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09)

Mae believes that communication is the key to this endeavor. She states that

although parental involvement is a problem, open house at Russell is one event that is

well attended by parents. Understanding that "first impressions are important" she uses

open house as an opportunity to establish relationships and become partners with parents

to benefit/impact the success of children. Mae says that for her African American males,

working with parents helps to motivate them because they [males] see people working

together as a team for them. For example, Mae says that

> Akeem's (pseudonym) more inclined to talk less and do better because he knows
> that I will call his mom immediately and that we understand each other and trust
> each other and that we have a good relationship so we are going to be honest with
> each other and not resent each other . . . (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Below is an overview of Mae's open house this school year, which she described

to me during our initial interview, some of which I also observed:

During open house parents Mae had her classroom environment set up to

welcome her parents. She was excited about the start of the new school year and used

every minute leading up to the visitation hour to make sure she was ready to welcome

parents. Trying to anticipate the needs parents might have during their visit she left the

room about twelve minutes before open house was about to start to make copies of a

handout. As the first family comes through the door Mae places the contents she was

holding in her hand onto a nearby table then approaches the family and extends her hand

out to shake the mother's hand as she introduced herself. The mother reciprocated and

then introduced her son (African American male). As they engage in dialogue, another

family of four enters the classroom stopping at the entrance and begins looking at the

door decorated with students' names. One family members points to her sister's name

[for Mom to see] and says to her sister, "yeah, this is your class." The family walks into

the room and because Mae was talking to another family they began moving around the

room looking for their desk assignment. Nametags had been placed on each desk; however, they were not affixed. Mae said that she welcomes the input of parents in making appropriate seating assignments; therefore making desk assignments without collaborating with parents would have been premature. After some dialogue with one parent who requested that her son (African American) not be allowed to sit beside another student who got him in trouble last year for talking, Mae asked them to choose a seat for him. The parent moved her son's material's to a desk close by Mae's.

Adding to her relationship building with parents, Mae sends her students' work, which is completed and corrected, home for parents to view weekly. The students have their own personal folder that is used for containing and transporting these assignments home to parents. Parents are also aware that Mae uses this weekly folder to send written notes, and other school-related correspondences. On one of the days during the time I observed in Mae's class she was checking these returned folders for contents. In particular Mae was searching for a note she had sent to a parent in the folder. After retrieving and reading the note containing the parent's response Mae told the child of the parent who had written the response to tell her mother that she would call her that night.

Connecting with students is also important to Mae. When asked about her relationship with her African American males Mae stated,

> I don't know why, but I just connect better with them. I spent about six months in West Africa and I worked in an African boy's school there, so that's kind of what started my career, that was before I got into teaching, so that might be why I still felt connected to that part of my life or to the beginning of my career. (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09)

Mae's Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) Analysis

Based on the six characteristics of Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) and what

they consider to be Culturally Relevant Teaching, I noted few commonalities in Mae's

classroom. Students were engaged in a culture project during one of my observation. In

conducting interviews it was apparent that Mae is aware of culturally relevant teaching as

she expressed her desire for students to be engaged in more student friendly learning.

Socioculturally conscious. Mae learned about the life experiences/cultures of

other individuals early in her life. One such experience she shared about was the times

she spent in the home of her Jamaican nanny. By age five, Mae was fluent in two

languages, English and Patwa, the native language of her nanny. She also spent time

learning about still other cultures as she worked for six months in a boys' school in West

Africa. Mae's beliefs about student learning demonstrate her sociocultural consciousness

which was quite possibly developed from these two cultural experiences. She believes,

> I definitely think every child is a different learner and they bring to the table, not
> necessarily baggage, but different experiences which can affect their learning,
> their background knowledge, and their socioeconomic variables. This definitely
> makes a person into the kind of learner they are. So every single person in my
> class is a different learner. Some people are visual, while others may be auditory
> learners, and some are both visual and auditory or even more. It just kinda
> depends on the kid. And knowing their experiences at home or out of school helps
> me to help them. (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09)

Holding affirming views about diversity. For Mae, holding affirming views for

students means providing instruction reflective of varied learning modes of students in

her class. While I observed Mae during her literacy block, she was using that structure to

integrate social studies content into her teacher-directed instruction as a way to expose

her students to expository text. This instructional strategy was a mandate of the school's

administrative staff to ensure all students were exposed to similar text styles that they

may encounter on their EOG assessment. This scripted style of engagement resulted in

students reading passages from their Social Studies book and then responding to a

number of questions related to the passage read. Textbooks were structured so that

students were able to directly record their written response in designated sections

throughout the book. Mae expressed to me during a post-observation interview that this

was not her chosen manner of instructional delivery. This delivery style results in drill,

practice, and rote-learning. Mae told me,

> Reading is doing that Social Studies book this year. We're [reading teachers]
> doing main idea [for example], we're all doing the same pages [in the book].
> What I'm doing is—I'm trying to do the first couple pages with them [students],
> and then I wanted to do everything together the first time, but I guess what ended
> up happening is I just did the first couple pages about main idea together, then I
> had them work in groups to answer the questions. So it didn't work exactly how I
> wanted it to, they're not as focused as I thought they'd be. (Mae, Post-
> Observation Interview, 10-15-09)

Skill to act as agents of change. Mae feels that her views about student learning

are always in opposition to those of school administration. Because of that she feels she

cannot adequately advocate for her students or act as an agent of change. She understands

that the mode of instructional endorsed by administration is not compatible with how her

students learn best, but she feels she is not in a position to effect change. She notes that

students become less focused each lesson. She told me the following after two different

lessons I observed:

I'm supposed to be teaching Reading—and we don't have a lot of time, and they [administration] want us to actually read, and not create a lot of projects and things like that . . . they're [students] getting sick of sitting at desks and they were just having a hard time with the concept. So I think next time I need to have a big graphic organizer and have them do it with partners or each have their own instead of using what's in their books, 'cause they need a bigger one (Mae, Post-Observation Interview, 10-13-09)

My only real concern right now is that there's not enough time to do what they need to do. I would like to include hands-on projects, recycling units, units on things to just get them involved, but there's very little time, we only have 2 weeks of Social Studies every 9 weeks and they have to be doing actual reading in a text or a testlet, or something like that, which also means I have to figure a way to do both (Mae, Post-Observation Interview, 10-12-09)

Mae's frustration was quite apparent, yet she has not felt empowered to take any real action to correct this. Mae did talk about the fact that she has acted on the behalf of former students. She has followed three of her students who are now in ninth grade since they were in her third grade class. Although they refer to her as Second Mamma, she said she is more like a Big Sister. She has taken on the responsibility to mentor these individuals and act as their advocate. She visits with these students on a regular basis taking them out on shopping, and on recreational excursions ending by dining with them at a local restaurant. Her ability to advocate for these students in this capacity demonstrates her ability to act as an agent of change. Overall she sees the need to act in the behalf of her African American males; however, due to her lack of empowerment related to curriculum issues she feels defeated in many of her ideas and efforts to advocate for students.

Constructivist views of learning. Again, observing Mae I noted minimal engagement in learning associated with constructivist views. She expressed her

frustration with implementing a direct teaching model she expressed was imposed on her

by the administrative team that was in opposition to her beliefs about how children learn

best.

> I just want to explain that I don't . . . I don't like doing it with the book. I like incorporating the book, but we have to go through the book, we have to go through every chapter and it takes so long, and they have to get tested on everything, and it's just grueling on them. Like Social Studies should be more fun, I think. I would like to do projects, research, I want to get out in the garden, I want to go to other communities, take pictures of other communities go out and do that as a class, interview people, make posters and then research projects and share, after you interview people in your family . . . there's just so much I want to do but there's no time. (Mae, Post-Observation Interview, 10-15-09)

Learning about students. Mae understands the importance of culture and

learning about students as a way to increase academic achievement. She says,

> I focused more on MLK, then I also talked about culture, how people who come from—like if their ancestors are slaves, they might have a different culture, they might do things like . . . my ancestry is Jewish, so all my grandparents were in the Holocaust and they're all concentration camp survivors, so that impacts my culture, so how history impacts culture, and I talked about some of the Mexican students—because I have five from Mexico, different parts of Mexico—so I talked about Mexican culture and there's the Day of the Dead and different holidays from that, so it's not just the holidays, it's things you do that are different. So it was more in-depth with my homeroom—I don't think it was . . . I also think I had more time, it wasn't like I was like, "oh I have more Mexicans and African Americans so I'm going to do this, this, and this," it was also that there was just more time. (Mae, Post-Observation Interview, 10-12-09)

Culturally responsive teaching practices. Overall, due to Mae's unique teaching

situation, which used mainly direct teaching, is heavily monitored by the school's

administrative staff because, as she says, that is what they want to see taking place in

third grade. Because of this I would say that Mae's culturally relevant teaching practices

are a work in progress. One positive accomplishment is how Mae works closely with the

parents to develop relationships and ensure maximum growth of students.

> I'm really involved with their parents—their parents have my cell phone and I call them on a weekly basis, and I keep in touch with them through their weekly agenda—every day at the end of the day, I write how they did, everyone. I go around and write how they did, what color they're on, and why, if they did their homework, if they didn't, what did they miss, any other assignments, so I write in there individually, and I have about 4-5 students whose parents I call every single Friday, and they have my cell phone, so if for some reason I have to leave early, they know they can call me, or if I call them from my cell phone, they'll recognize and pick up. (Mae, Post-Observation Interview, 10-15-09)

Summary. Like the other five participants Mae believes that all students can

learn. She is in a different teaching situation in that her beliefs about student learning are

different from administration. She is a certified Montessori teacher and believes in

designing instruction to meet students' individual needs. From my perspective, perhaps

because Mae was raised by her Jamaican nanny, she seems to have a developed a sense

of sociocultural consciousness .

Augusta: Fourth-Grade Teacher

Augusta is an African American female. She is married and has two children. Her

son graduated from high school in 2008 and her daughter is in any early college program.

Augusta keeps herself busy outside of school, as she is very involved in the school and

community activities, events, and interests of her children. Augusta is also a

foster/adoptive parent and recently adopted a nine-year old African American male who

has been in her care since he was age four.

Augusta attended a school in Ohio as an undergraduate and majored in elementary education. She has been a teacher for nine years, and holds a K-6 teaching license, and 6-9 license in language arts and social studies. She also has a master's degree in Elementary Education from a school located in North Carolina. She was recognized by *Who's Who among America's Teachers* during the 2003-2004 school year. Prior to coming to the elementary setting, Augusta taught language arts and social studies for six years in a middle school in another school district in North Carolina. Augusta is currently a fourth-grade teacher and is considering pursuing another degree in the fall. She is also a member of the school's Hospitality Committee. She is a PTA member and wrestling assistant. One African American male student from her class is on the wrestling team. As a teacher, Augusta keeps herself abreast of best practices in literacy by engaging in a number of professional development workshops offered during the school year and summer that are provided by the school district.

Augusta's Classroom Design

Augusta's room is located in the same building as April's. In fact only three classrooms separate these two teachers. Like April's classroom a number of pipe fixtures dominate the walls and ceiling in Augusta's classroom. Unlike in April's classroom, Augusta has only one entrance door leading from the hallway to her classroom. This door is decorated with an owl perched on top of a wooden sign that reads *Welcome to All*. The owl is mounted on sky blue paper creating a natural background, and the owl is holding a piece of paper with all the students names listed. Augusta keeps her door open more than closed. When closed her decorated door is an inviting view to passers-by. Augusta's

classroom is slightly smaller than April's classroom. She makes use of this smaller room

by clustering her students' desks into two groups extending from the front of the room to

the back. Augusta says, "Groupings of this nature make it convenient to do cooperative

learning" (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10). Placed between the students' desks

and at the front of the room is an overhead projector/desk combination. A large

whiteboard extends across the front of the classroom in a typical fashion seen in many

classrooms. This whiteboard is divided into several sections to make room for procedural

and classroom management charts and other visuals like a calendar, class schedule,

literacy objectives and essential questions (EQs), various graphic organizers, behavior

chart, guidelines for success chart, etc. Propped up on the whiteboard's marker holder is a

display of literacy books of varying genres extending across two-thirds of the whiteboard.

Below the whiteboard's marker holder is a portable literacy bulletin board that sits on the

floor displaying student work from the novel study about the book *Because of Winn-*

Dixie by Kate DiCamillo. A number of character education posters are strategically

positioned on the wall under the whiteboard for students to view. Augusta has five main

sections in the classroom designated for literacy stations.

The computer station, which consists of three computers, is located at the back of

the classroom. During center time students use *SuccessMaker* and/or *Accelerated Reader*

on these computers. Both of these programs are used to assess students reading, but in

different ways. Students from other classes travel in and out of this class to use the

computers. Directly beside the computer station is the teacher's desk, which doubles as a

literacy station. Between the front and back wall in front of the window is a kidney table

where the teacher meets with students for small group activities. This area also serves as

a literacy station area. Directly behind this kidney table is a making words literacy station

area. Magnetized letters of the alphabet are stuck to the heating unit and remain there

after cleanup.

There are five fourth-grade classes on this grade level. The five teachers work

together to form three teaching teams. Augusta is paired with one other teacher. Her team

teaching assignment requires that she teach two 90-minute blocks of guided reading daily

to her students and her team member's students. She also integrates 30 minutes of Social

Studies into her literacy teaching twice a week. Writing instruction occurs three days a

week for 30 minutes. In fourth grade Reading and Math are tested on the End of Grade

exams.

Theme 1—Teacher Beliefs: *All I Am and Hope to Be*

Augusta believes all children can learn. She believes it is important for her to

meet all students on their individual levels. Based on her survey responses she also

believes in being student-centered (Augusta, Questionnaire, 9-21-09). Augusta told me

the following about being student centered with her males,

> . . . with African American males . . . they can't be lectured to all day long, they
> need choices, variety, different opportunities . . . in the classroom just because of
> their learning styles. So just to keep them interested I always give them
> opportunities to work together with another person, partner or small group so they
> develop those social skills, develop how to help one another with learning the
> skill or the concept that they need to demonstrate to me that they understand. And
> with that, they are teaching one another using the guidance that I gave them in
> modeling . . . .individually they learn what is being taught and the products are
> my way of assessing them too, so that I know if they need to have continued extra
> help on that [skill] or if they are successful and can move on to something else.
> (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10)

This way of teaching was observed during all of my observations as Augusta involved

students in various types of active-learning and many times with peers. She plans

instruction with the goal of preparing her students for the next grade and the real world

by providing them with needed academic and social skills. Augusta says,

> Definitely I feel that whatever grade level you're on you are always building on the prior skills you learned . . . and I always try to emphasize the importance of my students learning what I am teaching them so they can take it to their next grade level; and they can take as the foundation of what they are learning because they will be building on the foundation until they graduate from college as well as in life . . . we live to learn everyday and if they can take the concepts that we are teaching them as their foundation, it will only enhance what they are learning at such a young age . . . cause we are not only preparing children with education, we are preparing them for life with skills that they can use in life to be productive citizens. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10)

Augusta also uses the required state curriculum objectives, called the North

Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS), and "knowledge students bring" to help

her teach them (Augusta, Questionnaire, 9-21-09). Augusta believes in changing or

differentiating her instruction, both curriculum and pedagogy, based on seeing students'

strengths and weaknesses, and when she sees that students are having difficulties. She

believes in "meeting students at their own level so she can reach them and help them

grow" and she does this by "making connections with students personally, [which] is a

great way to earn their trust and get them engaged" (Augusta, Questionnaire, 9-21-09).

Augusta also told me:

> I believe that all students can learn when provided with differentiated instruction. All students learn through differing styles and on various levels. All students can make growth when they are effectively taught the prerequisite skills they need. In order to meet each student's unique needs, I believe in providing individualized

instruction. I work to differentiate my instruction through the use of small, flexible guided reading groups, flexible math skill groups, differentiated literacy centers, leveled book bins, and various degrees of scaffolding. (Augusta, Post-Conference Interview, 10-1-09)

Augusta admits that not all African American males in her class have reading challenges; she says that some are more advanced than others. In reference to the more needy males she commented,

I try to take a keen interest in the ones [African American males] that are very low-performing so I can try to teach them strategies and different techniques that they can pull in to learn . . . so I can teach them so they can try to use them [strategies] on their own time so they can actually experience more success in reading (August, Interview, 7-27-09)

Augusta also tries to keep learning herself so she can bring new ideas to the learning setting to help motivate students. A recent workshop that she attended focused on boys and how they learn. Augusta likes making learning fun for her students. She asserts, "Doing the same thing gets tedious, so I keep learning to bring new exciting things into the classroom" (Augusta, Questionnaire, 9-21-09). Allowing students to work together and teach each other is an example of a strategy which Augusta has found successful for engaging her African American males. Augusta is aware that educating today's student is a difficult task. She states that today's teacher is competing with the glamorous and animated technology, which makes teaching reading difficult when teachers employ mundane strategies/methods. Augusta said in the interview that,

. . . most of our children are raised watching TV all the time, or being in front of the computer, or playing the hand-held games, and that's our competition. So we're competing against all this glamorous technology to handing the children a

book to sit there and read quietly to themselves and there're no visuals in these books and that's boring to them. So when you say reading, no, they just, the attitude is just like, "I don't like reading, I don't wanna read" or when you give them a computer, or a video, or going outside to play basketball, it's just not animated enough for them, it's boring and it's very challenging to change students' attitude about it and motivate them to read. You gotta bring creative ways into the classroom to just get them to read. (Augusta, Interview, 7-27-09)

Augusta mentioned during another interview that one major obstacle she faces in

teaching her African American males in reading is motivation. She states,

Motivation is one of the biggest obstacles, they [African American males] love the pictures, because the pictures are eye-catching, but to actually have them sit there and read is kind of hard, especially if it's something they're not interested in. So that's why it's important to pull other sources into the classroom so they can have something they're interested in. And that's very, very important. But motivation and giving them a change in attitude about reading [is the biggest obstacle]. (Augusta, Interview, 7-27-09)

Augusta understands that the school is competing to find ways to motivate

African American males. However, she feels that lack of parent/family involvement or

interest may contribute to poor achievement (Augusta, Questionnaire, 9-21-09). August

told me,

I just feel that the more parents are involved in their children's education they will perform better and achieve knowing that someone at home or in their background will help them, will encourage them as a support system to be successful . . . and I just feel that children that are lacking that parental of family support they struggle a little more. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10)

Metaphorically, Augusta compares her job as teacher to a chauffeur. She states,

"Like a chauffeur or professional driver who transports people, it is my job to pick up my

students where they are/point A then take them to a specific destination/point B."

Augusta sees herself as taking students on a limousine ride,

> . . . where she meets the students where they are and then takes them to a more in depth level of thinking by enhancing their learning skills and abilities in education. While they are on the journey the students will feel that they are loved, truly cared about, and know they are getting a great education while they are spending a year with me in the classroom. (Augusta, Interview, 7-27-09)

Augusta believes the journey will not only prepare them for the next school year but give students skills and strategies that will help them for life. The word Chauffeur (French origin), which means "to heat," is also symbolic of what happens in Augusta's classroom. She see herself as responsible for lighting the fire or providing opportunities for learning to happen for all of her students. Viewing herself as the chauffeur allows her to take more of a proactive approach to teaching and less of a reactive approach to blaming the previous teacher for a student's lack of learning, which is not part of her style. In reflecting on the academic potential of her students Augusta knows that at the end of the year that all of her students will be prepared for the challenges of not only the next grade but the challenges they will have in life.

Theme 2—Teacher Practices: *What I Do & Why*

Read Alouds—Augusta uses read aloud opportunities as a regular part of the instructional day to model for students reading for pleasure, to expose them to various genres, and as a means to integrate literature into other components of her balanced literacy instruction. She completes at least one read aloud for pleasure for her students

daily. This read-aloud time is an event designed for her students' to enjoy literature as well as a time for her to model fluent reading.

Another opportunity for read alouds occurs in conjunction with genre studies. Augusta incorporates read alouds using "stale" texts, which she defines as a text which students have previously heard or read, in teaching genre types. Following a mini-lesson, students worked in heterogeneous groups to engage in genre related inquiry and conversations.

Still other read-aloud opportunities I observed were done in conjunction with reading comprehension mini-lesson instruction. Such lessons I observed began with Augusta verbally stating an essential question (EQ). Essential questions are declarative goals that are usually state mandated and then rephrased by the teacher as an interrogative to engage students in the lesson from the very beginning. Augusta states the EQ at the beginning of each lesson to help students focus on what learning they should have attained by the end of the lesson. Augusta uses authentic texts during read alouds as a way to strategically impact students reading comprehension. One read-aloud opportunity that happens at the beginning of the year is her reading *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch. Augusta says that she begins with this read aloud after learning that some students never told that they are loved by anyone. She says,

> . . . one of the things that touched my heart with that group that I had [from a previous year] was they [the students in my class] thought no one cared about them and no one loved them. The word love came out one day and I asked them, 'Did anybody tell you that they loved you today?'I went around the class, one by one, and nobody said that anybody told them they were loved . . . [Augusta said to her students] You all are missing something that is so critical in life, you need to know someone loves you . . . just know that you have a teacher here [referring to

herself] that cares about you and I love each and every one of you and I want you to be successful . . . I came across this book, *Love You Forever*, and read it now at the beginning of every school year so that they [each new class] knows they are in a teacher's classroom that loves them . . . and that book will forever be in my classroom and that's the intro to my students when I introduce myself. I read that story to them the first day of school . . . African American males need to hear those words because you never know what baggage our children are coming to school with. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10)

I observed this book with its faded cover propped up on an easel sitting on the windowsill behind Augusta's desk.

Teacher Directed Instruction (TDI) —Teacher directed instruction for Augusta is a whole class opportunity for her to provide instruction to students. Test-taking strategies via reading instruction is one such example. Augusta plans two 30-minute test preparation lessons each week. A series of test-taking lessons are developed and integrated into the reading block to give students exposure to the genre used in standardized testing in an attempt to prepare them for annual state mandated assessments in reading. Because these annual tests are only differentiated by grade level Augusta deems that teaching such strategies during TDI is helpful, especially for struggling readers or students who are below grade level [in reading]. During test preparation time students interact with different genres of text (e.g., fiction, expository, recipes, poems, etc.) to learn and practice strategies related to locating and highlighting relevant information within the text, eliminating inappropriate answer choices, and selecting correct answers. All these strategies are considered to be useful for multiple-choice style assessments.

Another TDI event relates to how Augusta utilizes the basal text for reading instruction. She makes use of the collection of stories within the basal anthology as a resource for quality texts in planning whole class mini-lesson for students. Augusta also uses other content-area texts from social studies and science for mini-lessons. Product differentiation is used to assess students' understanding of lesson content. For example, after completing the reading of book *Because of Winn Dixie*, by Kate Dicamillo, students were asked to select a favorite part of the book and present what they learned. They could write a summary or a poem, or make a poster or a drawing, among other possibilities. This is an opportunity for African American males to produce a product reflective of their particular leaning style. Augusta said "my African American males give me everything, some do drawing and poems and some do cartoons, comic strip and some do graphic organizers . . . I don't care just as long as it tells me they understand" (Augusta, Post-Conference Interview, 10-1-09). I observed a bulletin board during my first observation that displayed students' *Because of Winn Dixie* work displayed. Augusta also told me that teacher-directed instruction is also a time to use technology and other visuals which are appealing to her African American males. She said,

> I use PowerPoint . . . when they [African American males] see that projector out on that cart they know . . . they get ready because they know we are doing something different. I usually show videos or power point presentation or we do a game where they use the remotes to choose their answers . . . When the visuals come up . . . the African American males like it . . . and they need that [visual stimulation] cause it a different style of teaching for them . . . One of the strategies for African American males is you have to bring variety. It's hard for them to just sit and listen all day. Boys need movement, they need visuals, they need color, and they need a lot of different things, they need manipulatives, they need different ways of teaching, especially our African American males, just to

keep them interested in what they are learning. That's one thing that I learned to do so they can be successful. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10)

Word Study—Word study is another component of Augusta's literacy instruction. During this time, students work with letter combinations words or phonics instruction of varying spelling patterns, vocabulary and words meanings, and/or grammar instruction, which are determined by students' needs. This time is structured for communication skills entitled, 'working with words' in a manner that differs from the traditional memorization of spelling words. Word study lessons are introduced weekly as a whole class event for students during Augusta's TDI time. She presents an EQ, and connects the prior weeks' word study focus as a springboard to her new word study lesson. Following the initial lesson launching word study for the week, students get needed practice and engagement throughout the week as they complete assignments during literacy stations engagement, independent assignments, self-selected reading, making words, word games, or small group. As students work independently, Augusta is able to monitor and/or assess students' progress and understand and plan additional lessons based on individual and or group needs.

Augusta also maintains an active word wall which students frequently use during instructional, and independent writing, and also for reading tasks, reviews, quizzes, scavenger hunts, and centers. Content-area vocabulary charts are also utilized for such tasks. Augusta's word wall is at eye level for students when they are seated at their desks and easily doubles as a literacy station area for students during group and word study times. This additional practice with the word wall makes its usefulness even more evident

for students as they gain familiarity with its structure and with the words through continued engagement.

Augusta gives a weekly list of 25 spelling words, including 20 regular words and five challenge words, which students are tested on at the end of the week. Providing weekly word study opportunities involves hands-on interactions for students with word patterns, which impacts students' understanding of these words. Augusta is committed to word study implementation which occurs three days a week.

Guided Reading—Guided reading occurs for students on Augusta's grade level four days a week. This is a collaborative time of the day when students are divided into groups by their instructional reading levels and each group is facilitated by a teacher. Instructional levels are determined through the use of an informal reading assessment and EOGs. Students in Augusta's guided reading group are students with the most severe reading needs compared to other students on the grade level. She had five students in her group during the time of this research study. Instruction and retention of information was complicated by the fact that four of these students were frequently absent from school, therefore re-teaching of lessons became a natural occurrence during this 30-minute timeframe. Augusta's structure for guided reading involves students in the reading of text, a word study activity, and an individual writing assignment related to the reading. All guided reading related lessons/activities occur at students' instructional levels.

Students in Augusta's guided reading group were active and eager to participate during each session I observed. During the transition time between ending previous lesson and beginning guided reading, the students' of all five classes had high energy

levels as they navigated around the maze of almost 24 students and desks, working their way to the guided reading area in the back of the room. They plopped down in their seats while grabbing for the day's reading text. Even before the lesson begins students are asking if they can participate. Each guided reading instructional session is 30 minutes and occurs four days a week. There were two African American male students in Augusta's guided reading group.

Shared Reading—Shared reading is an event that Augusta's students accomplish as they participate in the reading of a literature selection, a literature reading that is read together between teacher and students. This interactive reading process is an instructional strategy that allows students to participate in reading as Augusta scaffolds and models reading fluency. Augusta used echo and choral readings, which are types of shared readings, as whole group activities at the beginning of the day as a way to start the school day and a prelude to other reading engagement. She also used shared readings during guided reading and other content area reading as well as during small group instructional times.

Writing Instruction—Writing is also integrated into Augusta's guided reading instruction, teacher directed instruction, and during literacy station time. Writing instruction is a focus for her centers only one day of the week. During other times writing is incorporated in the reading activities through guided reading activities, as mentioned earlier. Another writing opportunity happens along with books that Augusta uses as read alouds, and literature that students read from the classroom library. She said that she uses, as read aloud selections, books that she knows are of interest to her African American

males as she has seen them reading such books or she has knowledge that they are of interests to these males. Augusta then is able to plan differentiated writing assignments which are extensions of the books she reads. Augusta says that her African American males prefer free writing as compared to prompt writing. She told me,

> . . . my African American males, they are so creative in their writing . . . but it's challenging when you give them a prompt to write about, and they have to do what the assessment wants them to do; you can't get them to do . . . it's just challenging to get them to write something from a prompt . . . (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10)

Augusta acknowledged that group writings actually appeal to her African American males. She said,

> Another thing that's funny is . . . I do group writing, I give them a topic about anything . . . tell me about your day at the beach and they pass the paper around the group with each person writing a sentence. Oh you should see those papers they write pages after page . . . and then I tell them to read their stories and my African American males always want to read their group's story. They love to read stories where someone got off the topic and then someone gets them back . . . and they just get a kick out of that. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 4-8-10)

Theme 3—Classroom Environment: *Safe, Friendly & Fit for Learning*

During one of my observation sessions in Augusta's room she had four parents in her classroom who had been invited to volunteer. The class was involved in the review of spelling words in preparation for their weekly test. This review session was in the form of a baseball game, students were divided into two teams. Classmates on each team were given words to spell and when it was a student's turn to spell a word that student was considered to be up at bat. If they spelled their word correctly they proceeded to first

base; if spelled incorrectly the team received an out. Four designated chairs represented the bases. Team points were earned as students progressed to home base. This was a high-energy activity and parents were the extra hands that Augusta needed to provide this review/learning opportunity for her students. Every African American male in the classroom was eager to participate when it was their turn *at bat*. While they waited their next turn they encouraged other teammates. Augusta gives a participation grade for this activity. The winning team receives 100 points and the other team 93, which means both teams earn As. The spelling test followed the baseball spelling review.

A read-aloud opportunity occurred after the spelling test because of the adults in Augusta's classroom. Augusta divided students into six groups, which was the number of adults in the room, and each adult was assigned to a group to read a story to the students. I also had a group given my preferred role as a participant observer, and as I panned the room parents seemed to be very comfortable in their role too. The parent reading in the group closest to my group would pause after reading a page to tell the meaning of particular words and ask students if they had ever heard the words. When it was time for parents to leave Augusta thanked them for their participation and then asked students to do the same. Parents also thanked Augusta for including them in the learning process. Augusta said opportunities of this nature benefit her African American males in that they are happy to share their learning with these adults.

Augusta had the following to say about the benefits of grouping her African American males,

> . . . one of the things they [African American males] love is to read, to each other, instead of just me reading to them, or they're sitting there [silently], reading so they love to interact with one another. So, that's one of the positive strategies to use, is having them partner read, or read in small groups . . . (Augusta, Interview, 7-27-09)

However, she goes on to say that it is necessary make an assignment to keep them on task. Augusta says,

> . . . but the challenging part of that is keeping them on task, because when you start putting them in groups, they get off task and want to play, but you gotta keep redirecting them, facilitate around the classroom, and make sure they're staying on task and giving them an activity to do on the actual section of what they have to read. [You] gotta have a product to evaluate that they're being on task and being successful comprehending what they're reading as they work together. (Augusta, Interview, 7-27-09)

Augusta reports that in order for students to understand that she cares, and to establish positive relationships with students, she allows them to see her outside of the school day. She stated that many of her afternoons are spent attending events in which her students participate. Attending many of the events are a result of student invitations. Augusta says that she has been invited to sports, scouting, and church events, to name a few. One benefit of attending these events is that it allows Augusta to meet other adults that she can collaborate with on the students' behalf. She has developed relationships with these people and has asked them to work with other students in her classes, of course with the support and permission of her students' parents.

Augusta is very spiritually grounded and believes that it is her destiny to help others. She said during one of the interview session,

> I Love, I Care, and I Educate! My message to my students is to let them know that as their teacher I am there because I love them and what I do. God has blessed my life tremendously so I strive to express love in the classroom because God is love, patient, kind, and longsuffering. My Christian attributes are hopefully exemplified in my classroom. I care about each of my students and desire for them to be successful. (Augusta, Interview, 7-27-09)

Augusta's Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) Analysis

Essential to Augusta's pedagogical style and her academic success with African American males is the fact that she exhibits all six of the traits associated with being a culturally relevant educator.

Sociocultural consciousness. Augusta, an African American teacher of nine years who approaches teaching from a personal perspective because she has raised two sons in a society where she feels they were the recipients of a number of societal injustices. Advocating for her sons made her aware of the negativity that continues to linger in society about African American males. Her personal experience, passion, and dedication are merged as part of her classroom practices that empower her students. Augusta's beliefs and actions of justice represent her sociocultural consciousness. She stresses,

> My philosophy is I love, I care, and I educate. I believe that students perform better academically and behaviorally when they recognized the teacher has a relationship with their parent(s) as well as with them. I believe that this is crucial for African American males because they need to know that they cannot get away with inappropriate behavior or lack of effort with their work. My students are encouraged to display their intelligence and appropriate behavior at all times. With open communication with parents, African American males will feel encouraged to make positive decisions that will benefit them, and the expectations that I have for them will be supported by their parents. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 5-1-10)

Holding affirming views about diversity. Augusta has allowed her life's experiences to inform her beliefs about students. She understands that although her students come from diverse backgrounds they come to the school setting with knowledge that teachers can use to build new learning, and she believes that the best way to tap into students' knowledge and shared experiences is by spending quality time with them.

Providing students with a quality education translates to maintaining high expectations for all students, which is a priority for Augusta. In order to build on their existing knowledge and maximize learning, Augusta feels it is important for her to engage in professional development. She says,

> I enjoy learning new information. I attend workshops, staff development, and take educational courses so that I can enhance my skills and abilities. I strive to do this because I desire to keep my students engaged in their learning in a variety of ways. I want my students to be exposed to new, innovating, and exciting things. It is important to keep all students engaged especially African American males so they all can take a keen interest in their learning. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 5-1-10)

Augusta also understands that one way the teacher can learn about her students' cultural knowledge and interests is by building relationships. In order to accomplish this Augusta spends a great deal of both instructional and non-instructional time learning from and about her students. In observing students on the playground they were always gathered around Augusta engaged in conversation or asking her to turn the jump rope, jump, play football, volleyball, etc. The same is true during lunch time. As students left the classroom and headed towards the lunchroom they would pull and tug on Augusta asking if she would sit with them during lunchtime. It was obvious that Augusta's lunch

calendar was already reserved as she announced who she already promised to sit with. As

soon as Augusta announces the name of the student that she is sitting beside the other

students then restate their requests to that of sitting near their teacher. Augusta says,

> So you just gotta talk to your students and see what's going on with them . . . you
> gotta communicate with your children and talk with them and see what you can
> do so that everyone can have a good day in the classroom.

Skill to act as agents of change. As mentioned earlier Augusta is aware of the

injustices and stereotypes that linger in society about African American males. She even

elaborated that, having an African American male child of her own, she has witnessed

many inequities up close and first hand. Augusta is also aware that schools, being smaller

organizations within the larger society, are places that perpetuate such injustices and

stereotypes. Augusta is aware of the role that schools serve, in tracking students into such

places such as special education classes based on the fixed beliefs that teachers' harbor, is

an example of an inequity. Therefore she acts as an agent of change positioned to

advocate for African American males. Her mission is to be vigilant about such matters as

she teaches her African American males. This act of vigilante advocacy demonstrates her

dedication, commitment and skill in acting as an agent of change. Failure to act insures

that the status quo prevails. Augusta talks about first-hand experiences that ultimately

impact the African American male, as well as the role that she serves in reordering the

future of these males. She told me,

> Being an African American woman, I have many [African American] men in my
> life that struggle. They get addicted to drugs and alcohol, sell drugs, go to jail, get
> felonies on their record, etc. It is difficult for them to get a job and make lives

better for themselves. They have to learn from the choices they make in their lives in which I call the real life education. I feel that while I am teaching all my students that I have a special touch that will enhance my students' lives in a special way. While I am educating them academically using the Standard Course of Study and the curriculum I strive to prepare them for the real world by exposing them to real life situation through different types of literature; biographies, current events in newspaper, magazines, etc. Most importantly of all I desire for all of my students to know that they have a teacher that genuinely loves and cares for them. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 5-1-10)

Augusta indeed challenged the status quo as she advocated for a new African American male student who was placed in her fourth grade class after transferring to Russell Elementary. At his previous school he was referred for special education testing because of his lack of academic achievement. This paperwork in his cumulative folder trailed him to his new school and ended up in the hands of Augusta for review. After noting discrepancies related to the student's academic ability contained in the paperwork of the previous teacher's assessments, compared to Augusta's assessments of this student, she began to question the accuracy of the referral. Augusta's advocacy halted the referral process. Challenging the referral and potential placement demonstrates how she acts in a manner consistent with that of an agent of change. Augusta understood the possible outcome would result in the placement of him in special education classes where African American males are already overrepresented and possibly prevented from becoming a productive adult.

Constructivist views of learning. August stated that her African American males learn best when they are actively engaged. This active engagement style of learning has its roots in constructivist views of learning. A concept important to the constructivist view is that new learning is optimal as it is built on the prior knowledge of the learner.

Augusta shares these beliefs. She understands that students' prior knowledge is the

knowledge which is used to make meaning of new learning; therefore, she uses their

knowledge as a scaffolding tool.

As a result of her beliefs and knowledge about her students Augusta plans literacy

instruction such as guided reading lessons and literacy stations that not only allow for

active student engagement and inquiry but are also differentiated based on the individual

needs of her students. She is cognizant of the fact that not all students learn at the same

pace nor the same way; therefore, she plans literacy stations that are appropriate in

meeting students' individual developmental needs and lessons that allow students to

demonstrate new learning using product differentiation. She had the following to say

about teaching using one instructional mode.

> You can't teach a room full of children the same way. You have to have different
> kinds of learning in the classroom because all children don't learn one way.
> That's why we have stations, manipulatives, different kinds of activities for them
> [students] to do, so at least that child feels they can do this, [or] I know I will be
> successful . . . And when they pick that [literacy station] as a choice, you [the
> teacher] know they will be successful because it is their style. (Augusta, Follow-
> up Interview, 4-8-10)

Augusta said the following in reference to meeting the needs of her African

American male learners. She said,

> For African American males you have to meet them on their level and take the
> time to try to work with them individually or in small groups . . . give them that
> one-on-one support so they can see that you have an interest in them. Just putting
> a book in front of them and telling them to read . . . they're not going to do
> anything; . . . but you gotta make sure that they all are having some kind of
> success with their learning, with their reading, and that's one of the things I want
> for all of my students especially my African American males to have success at

their own individual levels. So I have to meet them where they are and they will rise to the occasion and so they all will experience success. (Augusta, Interview, 7-27-09)

Structuring her classroom environment to promote student collaboration and cooperative learning are also practices consistent with the constructivist views of learning. Augusta promotes collaboration as she plans instruction that allows students to work together. She has her students seated in cluster groups and they are at liberty to move around the room, and in and out of groups as needed. One collaborative effort that I observed during the time I was in Augusta's room was a group of students working together to complete a jigsaw puzzle. Students engaged in discussion about various pieces and how they would or would not fit into various parts of the puzzle. The students collaborated using vocabulary to describe the puzzle pieces and used problem solving to assemble it as they worked together to complete the puzzle.

Still another practice which was observed and found to be consistent with the constructivist views of learning is the manner in which August speaks to her students. She maintains a calm tone of voice at all times understanding that students are more productive and learning occurs when students are in a positive educational environment, free of threat or intimidation. Augusta says,

When interacting with students tone is very important. When I have to put emphasis on important skills I repeat and repeat. Then I have students repeat what I said. This exercise is good for African American males because it gets their attention and helps them to refocus on what is being taught. For African American male students, it is not good to yell because it may trigger them to retaliate in a negative way. They will refuse to do their work, lack in motivation, not like the environment or the teacher, and develop a negative attitude about getting an

education. This will hinder them to be successful in classroom. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 5-1-10)

Learning about students. For Augusta, learning about her students' lives beyond the school day means she must interact within their communities. She makes great effort to learn about her students as a means to connecting to them and also providing instruction reflective of their interests and culture. One example of how Augusta uses this knowledge occurred as she engaged students in a review of their spelling words in preparation for their weekly test. Understanding her students need for active engagement and using the knowledge gained about her African American boys' recreational interest Augusta planned a weekly spelling review, which is described in more detail above, that had a baseball related theme. Augusta said that this cultural connection and implementation helped her African American males to connect to the learning, and enabled them to be successful on their weekly test.

Culturally relevant teaching practices. A major component of multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching is what Banks and Banks (1995) call 'social justice,' or preparing students to live and contribute in a democratic society. One way that Augusta prepares her students to live and contribute in a democratic society is by providing instruction that involves group collaboration. During each of my researcher observations in Augusta's class I saw students working together in some collaborative capacity. Augusta allows students to discover the benefits of working together as she plans lessons for them. One such activity was a word sort lesson. Augusta says,

. . . for African American males competition is always something that you can expect from them. They always want to be the first ones done especially with word study activities. One activity is manipulating letters on a magnetic board and they come up with as many words as they can. You hear them saying 'I have 8 words, I have 10 words, I have 15 words, I only have 2 words . . . I am going to make some more and beat you!' . . . Then when I say, 'Ok, what's the challenge word, use all the letters and come up with one word.' You should see them working trying to be the first to finish . . . then they realize after a while that 'Hey, we need to work together on this, let's work together on this.' Then they start working together with a partner or in small groups [still competing with the other groups] trying to find the challenge word . . . (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 3-11-10)

As indicated earlier, collaboration is an important instructional strategy for engaging students. Collaborating with parents is also important in helping students to progress as learners and is consistent with culturally-relevant teaching. Augusta said the following about the value of parents.

I believe that students perform better academically and behaviorally when they recognize their teacher has a relationship with their parents. I believe that this is essential for African American males because they need to know they cannot get away with inappropriate behavior and lack of effort with their work. They are encouraged to display their intelligence and appropriate behavior at all times. With the open communication with parents, African American males will know they are encouraged to make positive decisions which will help benefit them. The expectations that I have for them are supported by their parents. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 3-11-10)

Augusta incorporated students' culture into the learning in still another culturally-relevant way to help them in the learning process. Augusta told me how she used shared reading, culture, and the EOG test to design a strategy to help students, in particular her African American males in reading. Augusta said,

Shared reading is another way we read different materials in the classroom. Usually I have African American males banging on their desk and tapping . . . so I implement that [tapping] into instruction we would choral and echo read and the students would bring creative ways to bring the beat into the reading. This was another way to bring in what they like in an instructional way as it was something that they enjoyed doing as they read, especially the African American males. Our history is music; from Africa, we thrive on beats and sounds and music . . . When I have them [African American males] reading in a groups they read by keeping the beat, tapping and patting and it keeps them awake, it keeps their interest, and helps them become successful in getting assignments complete. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 3-11-10)

Augusta is hopeful that these same rhythmic patterns associated with reading will help

them as they read passages on their EOG assessment. She says,

I'm hoping that is a technique they use mentally [not physically] as they take their assessment; I'm hoping it will keep them reading. As you do assessments with the students it is black and white, paper -pencil [EOG assessment] and it's long and they have a lot to read and they have to keep their stamina up. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 3-11-10)

Augusta also references a movie as an example of how rhythm is used in spelling. She

said,

'Akeelah and the Bee' is a perfect example of that rhythm, when Akeelah, the African American star in this movie is played by Laurence Fishburne, is spelling her words she puts them to a beat by tapping and mimicking jumping rope. That's how she was successful with rhythm and memorizing her spelling words. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 3-11-10)

Augusta's position as teacher is to provide instruction according to the ways in

which her African American males learn best. This is important to them in getting to the

next grade and also an important factor which will value them in life as adults. Augusta

spoke, almost tearfully, about the importance of this as she discussed matters related to

her own children. She told me that,

> . . . Having my own children, African American males, I just feel the way that society is, the way that the world is, they have so many things against them as it is; and as an educator and African American myself I know that the odds are against them. I didn't totally understand that concept years ago but now, with my son being older, I know that it is a concern. I heard a while back that statistically third graders [African American males] by the time they grow up they will be in jail, selling drugs or just unsuccessful or criminally minded and I didn't understand that until my son became older and that is exactly what happened. They end up making wrong choices and accruing felonies on their records and it's hard for them to make it in life 'cause you can't just go back and erase those felonies just because it was a poor decision or choice. It hurts me to my heart now because I don't know [as a mother] what I could have done differently. It breaks my heart that my son is part of the system and statistics that I heard about years ago; and if I can be an example for students that I teach in my classroom and make them aware of these kinds of things at such young ages and pull different strategies, techniques, and styles of teaching and tell them about choices and what kind of impact that has in their lives not only prepares them for the next grade but for life, that's what I want to do in my classroom. So giving them a chance to make choices in the classroom puts them in a position to make wise choices in life and letting them know that it [a negative future] doesn't always have to be that way. You [African American males] can be successful in doing something in a different way that is more compatible with you; you just have to find your niche . . . and try to make positive choices not bad choices. But if you do, you should learn from the bad choices and redirect yourself and others if you can reach them and make better choices. (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 3-11-10)

Augusta says that she believes in starting over. She said,

> You have to learn from your mistakes. There is a saying that goes, if you fall down you have to get back up and like Winston Churchill said "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never . . . you keep trying, you keep trying, you keep trying, you keep trying." (Augusta, Follow-up Interview, 3-11-10)

Summary. Augusta is passionate about teaching and her African American

males. She provides many opportunities for them to engage in learning according to their

particular style. She uses guided reading, read aloud, shared reading, and literacy stations to meet learning styles. She has a very developed sense of sociocultural consciousness.

Octavia: Third-Grade Teacher

Octavia is a Caucasian female. She has been married for two years. Although she claims all the students in her classes, past and present, Octavia has no biological children of her own. Octavia is a third-grade teacher. She is a graduate of a university located in North Carolina and is in her third year of teaching at the same school where she fulfilled her internship and student teacher requirements as an undergraduate. After completing her first year as a kindergarten teacher, Octavia took a teaching assignment in second grade, and then she looped with her students to third grade, which is her current teaching assignment.

Octavia's is proud of how she teaches reading as she has implemented of reader's workshop model in her classroom over the last two years. She admits that reader's workshop involves much planning; however, she told me that that reader's workshop provides a great deal of student individualization, which she considers beneficial to her students' academic growth. Octavia's classroom environment reflects her literacy focus, commitment, and effort towards its implementation. As a result, she spends a great deal of time at the beginning of the school year acclimating her students, and the assistant teacher, one EC inclusion teacher, a student intern, and one ESL teacher to her differentiated learning approach.

Octavia's Classroom Design

Organizationally, Octavia's classroom is set up for the success of all student learners and the implementation of the reader's workshop model. An important part of Octavia's organization includes designating four areas within the classroom for group meetings with students. The first is the reading area where Octavia meets for whole-group instruction. Octavia sits in a rocker. Students sit on the carpet in very defined rows facing Octavia and any materials that are a part of her teaching. Octavia meets with students in this reading area about three times a day. The first meeting each day involves a read aloud, which is followed by a mini-lesson. Evidence of previous learning surrounds this area on nearby bulletin boards and walls. Also, a number of recently shared read-aloud books are displayed in an upright fashion for students to view. Above the read-aloud display is a teaching bulletin board which outlines the daily literacy skill focus. A whiteboard, holding the read aloud for the day, is positioned next to the rocker.

Three tables set up around the perimeter of the room are areas utilized for small-group instruction. Small-group instruction includes guided reading groups, reader's theatre, book clubs, skills mini-lessons, etc. A fourth table sits in the classroom library area for students to use when they visit.

Still another important feature of Octavia's classroom organization is a bookshelf that houses 18 book tubs (one for each student). These tubs hold students' instructional materials used for reader's workshop. The book tubs are returned to the bookshelf at the end of reader's workshop. Following meetings in the reading area, students collect their book tubs and move to what Octavia refers to as *book nook* areas in the classroom. Book

nook areas are spaces/locales within the classroom which are assigned to students weekly and serve as private, motivating, cozy work areas for working during reader's workshop.

A look around the classroom reveals a print-rich environment. Procedures and expectations are visible throughout the room on teacher-made posters. Word walls (one each for reading, math, social studies, and science) are placed in each content area around the room. Charts containing thematic words are also placed around the room in respective areas for students to reference. Bulletin boards displaying student work can be found all around the room. At the front of the classroom a chart is posted on the white board on which daily curriculum objectives are written for each content area. A poster, written in kid friendly language, explaining each component of reader's workshop is mounted on the wall in the classroom library.

A chart with student names is posted on the inside of the entrance door which students use to sign themselves out as they leave the classroom to go to the bathroom. When students arrive each day they make lunch choices. This is an important task that lets the teacher know which students are present for the day.

Students' desks are organized in the center of the room into two symmetrical groups of nine. Four students have a classmate that sits across from them and one student sit at the end of each row, perpendicular to the other eight students.

The classroom library is equipped with literature books that are stored on bookshelves and book tubs. Books found in the library are divided into a number of genres. A table lamp and six-foot plant decorates the corner area of the classroom library and gives this part of the room a cozy ambiance.

Theme 1—Teacher Beliefs: *All I Am and Hope to Be*

Octavia's primary belief is that all students can learn. She acknowledges, based on her experiences in the classroom, that not all students come to the learning setting believing this to be true about their abilities. Consequently, as the instructional leader of the classroom and the person in charge of her students' success, Octavia believes it is her duty to plan lessons that are compatible with students' modes of learning and reflect how they view the world. Octavia shared with me the following beliefs:

> I believe that all students can learn but that all children come to you with a variety of knowledge, skills and needs. I believe that it is my job as a teacher to get to know each one of my students and understand their needs so that I can appropriately differentiate instruction and provide a variety of experiences to meet the needs of each child. I believe that as a teacher you have to constantly assess yourself to see what you do that is working and what you can change to be more successful. (Octavia, Interview, 1-12-10)

In the survey, Octavia shared that she believes the road to student success should be paved with differentiated instruction based on content, process, product, and language, and that culture helps students see their potential. She is mindful that this metaphorical road is being traveled by students who have traveled alternate roads and that their knowledge is valuable as she makes these decisions about lesson content. Therefore, as a starting point, Octavia believes in using the knowledge of her students to provide thoughtful lessons that build on her students' prior experiences, which she also wrote in response to a survey question.

Octavia believes that on-going assessment must be employed as a means of finding out what is working for moving students forward, and making changes that need

to take place to enable students to move forward in their acquisition of knowledge. Octavia told me the following about the on-going need for assessment, "I do assessments every nine weeks—formal assessments—of course, throughout the quarter you do informal assessment constantly and decide who needs to be moved up and down" (Octavia, Interview, 8-18-09). As a result of assessment Octavia gained knowledge about one of her African American males. She reflected during our interview about assessment results that she felt were a lack of confidence, not ability:

> My African American male, he . . . I always tried to really push him because I knew that he could and he didn't always have . . . sometimes it was confidence and sometimes it was the desire to want to read, but he was one that I especially tried to instill that. You know, "it's fun, and we can learn things and we can do things, find out about things that we like" and really tried to advance him and sometimes I would try to push him a little further, even when he kind of shut down, because I knew he could do it. And then once he saw that he could, it was like, "oh, I can do this" and when he saw that I was proud of him and the others were proud of him, it made him even that much more confident in himself. (Octavia, Interview, 8-18-09)

Octavia is accepting of her students' home languages and uses a wide variety of literature that includes students' home languages. To clarify, Octavia's student population is reflective of the school population. Her class make-up represents minority students. She has no Caucasian males or African American females. She has four African American males and a fairly even distribution of male and female Latino students. She uses multicultural literature reflective of students represented in her class. During one observation she was using the literature selection *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson (2001) about two little girls, Clover and Annie, one Caucasian and one African American, who become friends in a small, segregated town. Texts of this nature are what

Octavia mentioned in the survey where she explained that they are used not only for

reading skills but to help students understand issues related to fairness, equity, and

justice, beyond the classroom. I saw other multicultural books that Octavia had selected

for instruction propped on an easel, and the other multicultural books I observed in the

classroom library were available for checkout.

> I try to choose literature that uses a variety of home languages, some that have
> dialects from . . . different types of . . . different languages . . . I guess . . . so . . .
> some that would be typical for African Americans families or Hispanic families or
> things like that . . . and occasionally students in their writing use it [home
> languages] but not a lot so much because they don't really . . . they sort of use
> their dialect but not much . . . (Octavia, Follow-up Interview, 3-18-10)

Octavia was experiencing some ambivalence about students speaking their native

language as they are learning English. This ambivalence is due to a conversation which

she had with a Hispanic in-law. She informed me that,

> I used to have a little bit of a different opinion of that [allowing students to speak
> in their native languages] I used to think that they needed to . . . well I think the
> value can be placed on both speaking in English and speaking in Spanish, I
> actually had an uncle who married into my family, he came from a Hispanic and
> Filipino family and he told me one time. . . . I was talking to him one time about
> the population at my school one time and how I didn't think it was right that
> people didn't let their students talk in Spanish at lunch and that they would fuss at
> them and I thought it was fine for them to talk in Spanish. And he said that when
> he was in school that he wished that someone had made him speak in English so
> that he could have learned English better and quicker . . . because he came from a
> family that spoke Spanish and Filipino [aka Tagalog] so . . . and he was probably
> a minority in his school also . . . so that kind of changed my opinion of it a little
> coming from someone who grew up being the only people who spoke a different
> language . . . so I try to value on both their native language and also tell them the
> importance of learning English because that's the society that they're in. (Octavia,
> Post-Observation Interview, 3-18-10)

Octavia is able to personalize students' learning by understanding and accepting

her own diversity, as she said, "I try to find a way to relate to other students' diversity

through thinking of things that I have experienced in my life" (Octavia, Post-Observation

Interview, 3-18-10). For example she asserted,

> I was fortunate as a child . . . I had lots of opportunities. I was never, I had
> everything I needed and wanted all those things but I think that a lot of times I
> saw others that didn't, and so part of what I try to do for my students, whether
> they have opportunities or not, is to make sure they have opportunities available
> to them and make sure that they know that I care for them and that I am proud of
> them for what they do, because I always had that from my parents . . . I try to
> build their pride and empower them and let them know that they can do what they
> want to do. (Octavia, Post-Observation Interview, 3-18-10)

This empowerment was witnessed during my classroom observations of Octavia as she

provided a number of opportunities for students to make choices. Octavia empowers

students in a number of ways during the school day. These opportunities are both

academic, curriculum related, and non-academic through free choice, independent

problem solving, student-centered organization, logical consequences for actions,

student-developed contracts, and other decision-making opportunities.

When asked to describe her position in the classroom, Octavia selected the

maestro as her metaphor because she conducts herself in a musical manner. Octavia

explained,

> I feel like a maestro leading an orchestra because when you think about an
> orchestra you think about all the different instruments and how the different
> groups work separately but they work together to achieve the same thing. You
> might have a solo over here [Octavia pointing to an area of the classroom where
> students work independently, a book nook area] at one point and a duet and small
> groups of people doing things at a time or everything doing one thing. So I feel

like I lead the different groups at different times. (Octavia, Post-Observation Interview, 3-18-10)

Octavia also expressed in the survey that by the end of the school year all of her students will have demonstrated growth in all areas even if they are not on grade level.

Theme 2—Teacher Practices: *What I Do & Why*

Octavia's approach to a balanced literacy framework is accomplished in her class as she implements reader's workshop (RW). This is a time when she provides instruction starting with the whole class followed by independent and small group instruction that ends with whole class. Reader's Workshop components observed during the research period included read alouds, mini-lessons, conferencing and independent reading, small group instruction, and student sharing. Reader's Workshop is a daily event for Octavia's students. A great deal of planning and organizing is dedicated and required prior to the RW implementation in order for students to benefit and grow as learners. Her ability as a maestro is manifested as she implements RW.

Strategic Read Aloud—Octavia launches each day's RW with a strategic read aloud or literature selection complimentary to the mini-lesson. Students meet together in an organized manner on the carpet. This area of the room is equipped with a white board, displays of reading selections for the week, markers, and other teaching materials. Octavia uses read aloud opportunities to explicitly model by engaging in, as she reads, pre-reading behaviors (e.g., making predictions, looking at the picture, etc.), during reading behaviors, such as think alouds, and after reading behaviors (e.g., responding to what was read, sharing, etc.). She also incorporated a number of multicultural selections

as example of quality literature for strategic read-aloud instruction during the researcher's observation cycle. Octavia also selected read alouds that her students appeared to enjoy. Lots of impromptu smiles and laughter erupted from students during read aloud times. Octavia said the following about her selection of read alouds. She told me, "This would be the time when I would try to choose multicultural books that would apply to different students at different times based on interest." (Octavia, Follow-up Interview, 5-4-10)

Mini-lesson Instruction—The next component in RW following the read aloud is a mini-lesson. These mini-lessons involve the explicit teaching of a particular reading comprehension skill. Mini-lessons last about twenty minutes. The content of such lessons vary depending on the needs of the students but normally relate to a comprehension skill or literature theme. I observed three mini-lessons involving identification of the theme of a text.

Following the mini-lesson was self-selected reading. Octavia assigned students to read at least one book during that time and identify the book's theme, which was the skill focus of the lesson. She gave students a post-it note and modeled/instructed them explicitly on how to record information after they identified the theme of the book. One African American male divided his post-it note into sections similar to a graphic organizer to aid in recording required information. The next day when Octavia assigned students to repeat the assignment during self-selected reading with another text, she also shared the post-it note completed by one of her African American male's that resembled a graphic organizer. She told the student she liked the way he had chosen to label and organize his post-it note and that it was easy to read. She then asked the students to

organize their post-it note in the same manner. She outlined the graphic organizer on her whiteboard for students to reference as needed. Lastly, she thanked the African American male for allowing her to share his method of organization with the class because it was very easy to read. This is an example of how Octavia empowers students, including her African American males, as mentioned earlier.

Self-Selected Reading—Self-selected reading follows each mini-lesson. Self-selected reading is an independent reading time where students leave the whole group setting and move to their book nook designation. These designated areas serve as evidence of the planning and organizing stage of RW mentioned above. Octavia has divided her room into 18 individual cozy yet productive reading areas, which she refers to as book nook areas. Students are assigned new book nook areas weekly. Book nook areas are as individual as her students. Octavia uses various kinds of chairs to design and make each nook unique (e.g., rocking chair, beanbag on the floor, director's chair, pillows). During self-selected reading students are reading on their independent reading levels.

Writing Instruction—Following self-selected reading, students complete a writing entry in their reader's notebook. Reader's notebooks contain book logs and student writings related to their reading, such as letters written to authors or about what they are reading and/or other stories. Notebooks are used to store student forms, including their reading goals, genre tallies, and book reviews. Octavia has issued each student a box in which notebooks are stored along with pencils, paper, and books for self-selected reading. These materials travel with students to their book nook areas daily.

As students engage in self-selected reading and writing Octavia makes herself available for student conferences and small group instruction. Conferencing with students involves meeting with students to listen to their stories, and to monitor and assess progress. She meets with an average of four students daily to conduct such conferences. Conferences are student centered and view by Octavia as a time to provide additional instruction for learners whom demonstrate the need or are having difficulties stemming from the mini-lesson.

Guided Reading—Guided reading is an instructional approach in which the Octavia works with small groups of students on their instructional level or with students who have similar reading skills. This is a collaborative effort between three teachers: Octavia, the ESL teacher, and the EC teacher. Octavia's students are divided into four groups. The three teachers meet with the three lowest groups. Octavia plans the instruction for the fourth group which is facilitated by a student peer. For Octavia, guided reading is a time is a time that she can focus on the individual needs of students. She says,

> . . . The way I choose books for guided reading. One of my groups is made up of all males so I can choose books according to individual interests and that's the time when I try to think about individual students. I have an African American male in the group, sometimes I choose a book that I know will interest him and the next week I try to think of a book that interests someone else. The good thing is that they [the males] share some of the same interests…they like non-fiction texts a lot, informational text so I try to select books that will grab their interest. (Octavia, Follow-up Interview, 5-4-10)

Sharing—Student sharing is the culminating part of reader's workshop. Students reconvene on the carpet where they started out for their strategic read aloud for a closing

time for the day's RW. This is a celebratory time in which students share what they have learned or accomplished for the day. These meetings are also times for Octavia to asses, praise, and encourage students for their accomplishments and appropriate behaviors during RW. She ends each meeting with positive comments related to how students are progressing as good and developing readers. It was during this sharing that she acknowledged the work of an African American male and used a graphic organizer that he created for the rest of the class.

Theme 3—Classroom Environment: *Safe, Friendly & Fit for Learning*

Octavia believes that as the teacher and individual ultimately responsible for the progress of students assigned to her year after year, she must develop relationships with each one of her students and understand who they are as individuals. She believes that building such relationships is vital to her ability to appropriately support instruction but also is important for insuring that students are in a safe and orderly environment that supports learning. She reports that developing student-teacher relationship is important both in and out of school. Octavia smiles as she spoke about the time that she took an African American male student to an art show after school. She told me,

> I had two students [one African American male] out of my class that had art that was going to be in an art show . . . and I knew that their families were not going to be able to take them [to the art show] so I got permission and . . . I let them stay after school with me, took them out for ice cream and brought them to the art show and made a big deal, took pictures of them with their art to sent home with them to their families because I wanted them to have that opportunity to be proud of themselves and to know what they had done was an achievement and that they've done something really good and let them know it was a special thing that it was not just another, you know, thing at school . . . I think that it helped them and they had a good time. (Octavia, Follow-up Interview, 3-18-10)

Octavia gains information about her students by having discussions with them and their families. Octavia feels that a barrier preventing parent involvement is the fact that most of her parents speak Spanish and the fact that she speaks only English. Octavia expressed feeling that many times this confounds her efforts to reach a certain level of parent involvement. Therefore, communication and parental involvement is not as progressive as it can and should be according to Octavia. For example, her inability to speak Spanish prevents her from making impromptu phone calls to parents to share something good or even a concern about their child. Such communication requires her to request the assistance of a translator, which takes away the impromptu-type communications that might encourage parents to become involved more. Octavia states that

> Parent involvement in a school, such as [Marsh], where most students come from low income families, and the ways that parents want to be involved in school is very different when compared to the level and types of parent involvement at other schools with different demographic and socioeconomic statuses. Even with the written communications these parents are receiving have limited information about both their child and the school, and it is also sometimes a hassle because they have to be translated as well. (Octavia, Post-Observation Interview, 12-15-09)

One counterpoint to that lack of communication is that Octavia looped from second grade to third grade with her class and thus has had the same students for two consecutive school years. Although she is limited in her verbal communication with Spanish-speaking parents, she has developed relationships with them through their various levels of involvement over the last two years. Octavia points out that "Parents enjoy going on class field trips and attending special events in which their child is

involved" (Octavia, Post-Observation Interview, 12-15-09). Octavia also realizes that parents' work schedules conflict with regular school hours, therefore preventing willing parents from volunteering in the classroom.

Collaborative efforts with staff are ways that Octavia creates a classroom environment which is safe, friendly, and fit for learning. She works with other staff members to offer an inclusion model for her EC students. This collaboration allows EC students to stay in the classroom, an environment which Octavia has worked to make safe and friendly, as other staff push-in to provide needed special education services. This collaborative effort maximizes learning for all students as the teachers plan, implement, and then reflect on curriculum matters together. These collaborative efforts involve the EC teacher, ESL teacher, teacher assistant, and Octavia. Octavia values the inclusion model. She says the following about inclusion:

> My classroom village consists of several people that are involved with my students on a daily basis. I think that each person offers great experience, knowledge and support to the students in my classroom. I have an EC teacher that works in our classroom for over 2 hours daily, a teacher assistant who works with students daily, and an ESL teacher who is here for 1 hour each day. We plan together weekly and discuss ways in which we can work to meet the needs of all students in our classroom. (Octavia, Follow-up Interview, 12-30-09)

This collaborative effort was especially beneficial for one African American male labeled as EC in Octavia's classroom. As relationships were important to this male, remaining in the classroom with his teacher (Octavia) helped him to feel safe.

Octavia's Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) Analysis

Socioculturally conscious. No data collected from interviews, classroom observations, or the questionnaire was coded as socioculturally conscious. In fact, the following statement reveals what sounds like a deficit-based view of her students' home life:

> I never punished any child for not doing their homework, especially in a school where a lot of the families are low-income and there's no telling what their home situations are like, if there's even anybody at home at night when they do their homework, due to work or single parents, you know, there's all kinds of things that can keep a child from doing their homework. So I do not believe in punishing a child for not doing their homework, they always have the opportunity to do it. (Octavia, 8-18-09)

Holding affirming views about diversity. Affirming views about diversity deals with how teachers establish positive relationships with students. Octavia tries to develop positive relationships with students because she becomes empathic about home situations. She says,

> . . . he [student, African American male] would come in [to school], in the morning, and he'd give me a smile and a hug and that's pretty much every day, that's how we started the day. And he liked getting a hug, and he wanted it. So we started every morning, I'd give him a hug, ask him how he did, and he'd either say, "I didn't do my homework, I forgot my homework folder" and I got to the point where I expected it. I never punished any child for not doing their homework, especially in a school where a lot of the families are low-income and there's no telling what their home situations are like, if there's even anybody at home at night when they do their homework, due to work or single parents, you know, there's all kinds of things that can keep a child from doing their homework. So I do not believe in punishing a child for not doing their homework, they always have the opportunity to do it. But encouraging him and saying, "it's ok, after you go to the cafeteria and eat breakfast, you can come in here and get started, it's no big deal." And like I said with him, seeing that he liked my little stuffed animal, I went and got him one and I think that was probably about

> February or March that I did that and from then on he made so much progress. And I don't want to say that . . . that was kind of the point where he was starting to make progress, and it probably wasn't that one thing, but I think it was the constant support that I would try to give him and build his self-confidence and let him know that he really could do it and he was good, whether he enjoyed reading or not, it was something that he could do and he could be successful at it. (Octavia, Interview, 8-18-09)

Octavia presents a transactive curriculum (Fox & Gay, 1995) in that she provides engagement between content and students. She provides opportunities for her students to engage in cooperative learning and inquiry. However, such learning is not at the transformative stage because learning at the transformative stage requires that students are enabled to view content, issues, and events from the point of view of diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Banks, 1999). With the exception of single interactions with individual students, affirming views about diversity were not observed or otherwise evidenced in Octavia's teaching during the data collection period with Octavia.

Skill to act as agents of change. Octavia acted as an agent of change as she expressed the need for one African American girl to be placed in another class where she would have peers that were of her race. Octavia says that advocating for this student was based solely on race and that changing her placement had nothing to do with her academic ability or any factors which may have been viewed by an educator as negative.

As a way of meeting the varied needs of students and exposing them to a rigorous curriculum Octavia uses collaborative teaching model. Also, she is the only one in her school who has implemented the Readers Workshop model.

Octavia's work on the school's improvement team also demonstrates her ability to act as an agent of change. She says,

I'm on the school improvement team, so this is my second year on the school improvement team. Well we . . . there's a grade level representative for each grade level and then the other areas of the school and we meet once a month and we have a retreat in the summer for two and a half days, where we just make decisions about policies and things going on around the school . . . occasionally there are things we talk about that have to do with literacy, especially when we're talking about staff development, that was one of the big things we talked about this summer, was staff development for next year, and that was one of the big things, was literacy, and strategic literacy instruction. (Octavia, 8-18-09)

Constructivist views of learning. Octavia's implementation of reader's workshop is an example of her constructivist views on how students learn. Her mini-lesson provides the needed scaffolding and explicit instruction needed, and the independent reading provides a type of inquiry necessary in constructivist learning. Reader's workshop gives students to move beyond memorization to constructing their own meaning of content introduced during mini-lessons.

Learning about students. Octavia uses a combination of both informal and formal means of learning about her students. She said,

Last year I did one [interest inventory] with everybody at the beginning of the year, and I just . . . I really try to get to know all of my kids and what they like and things like that, so I would very often, when they were picking out books in our classroom library, try to encourage them [students], "well you said you like snakes, so here's a book about snakes that you'll be able to read, it's a 'just-right' book for you . . . maybe after you finish, you can write me a letter about it and tell me what you learned . . . So I think just constantly knowing your kids and knowing what they like and what they don't like is what I use more than my initial inventory . . . but I did do that at the beginning of the year, and since I had the same kids last year that I'm gonna have this year, I probably won't do a formal interest inventory other than the few new ones that I'll get, but we'll try to get to know and see if they've changed over the summer; there's no telling what they'll be into now. So we'll see what the changes are in their interests. (Octavia, 8-18-09)

Octavia went on to talk about how she will find out about students after they

returned to school from their summer break. She said,

> I think that just talking to them—I sit with them at lunch and I did notice last year that they did better with just informal conversation than they did when I was sitting there with a piece of paper writing what they said, because they were more interested in what I was writing and stuff like that. So I think it's just . . . talking to them in the playground or in the hallway, or in the mornings when they come in, 'cause they'll come in and tell you something they did and, "oh well we could read a book about that" or a TV show that they like or things like that. (Octavia, 8-18-09)

With the knowledge that Octavia gained from talking to her students she was able to

select and purchase a different book for each student to add to her classroom library. She

said,

> I try to get books that I know are specific things that they [students] are interested in. I know last year we had the opportunity to get some new books and when I went to pick those out, every book [that I picked out] I had at least one specific child in mind that I knew would like that book. (Octavia, 8-18-09)

Culturally responsive teaching practices. Octavia uses a number of

multicultural books in her classroom library available for students to read. She also

exposes students to a number of multicultural texts during lesson delivery. She is able to

design lessons that build on the personal strengths of her students, knowledge which she

obtains as she has conferences with individual students during reader's workshop. These

practices are one aspect of teaching in a cultural-responsive way, but the goals of

Octavia's teaching does not seem to include other aspects of culturally-relevant teaching

such as bridging home and school or developing a critical consciousness about the world.

Summary. Octavia employs a balanced reading model called reader's workshop which is beneficial to her African American males. Reader's workshop allows her to differentiate instruction based on students' needs. It also allows her to work one-on-one with students and assess growth, which are also beneficial to African American growth. She also keeps multicultural literature and other African American literature in her classroom library.

April: Fifth-Grade Teacher

April is an African American mother of two adult children, a male and female, and is soon to become a grandmother of twins. Both of April's children were educated in the school system in which April currently teaches. April decided to pursue a second career in education after working for a number of years in banking in another state. After moving to North Carolina she matriculated and completed program requirements at a local university earning her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. She is currently in a graduate program at the same university in pursuit of a Master's degree in elementary mathematics. April has been teaching at her current elementary school for eighteen years. At the moment she is teaching fifth grade. Prior to fifth grade, she taught second and fourth grade. In addition to teaching during the regular school year, April works in different areas/capacities with students and staff. For the past fourteen years, she worked with the school's summer program serving as Program Coordinator and teacher. She also provides instruction to students who are unsuccessful on the state End-Of-Grade (EOG) tests in reading and/or math. April has also worked with the school's Saturday tutorial program serving as the tutoring coordinator and providing instruction to the

school's growing Latino population identified as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. April also works as a home-bound tutor for eligible students within the school system. She currently represents her grade level as chair, which is a position she has held many times before. April has been a teacher representative on the school's Student Intervention Team (SIT), which is designed to meet the needs of the whole child (physically, mentally, academically, behaviorally, etc). April was nominated by her peers to be teacher of the year during the 2005-2006 school year. To keep up to date with the best practices in literacy, she has participated in Literacy First staff development, and voluntarily attends Teacher Academy workshops. Her last three summers were spent learning about ESL students, differentiating instruction, and classroom management.

April is also seen by colleagues as a strong disciplinarian. According to April, other teachers send their students for timeout to her classroom many times during the year. She stated that the African American males in her class seem to view her as a *mother figure,* possibly because she takes the necessary steps, academically and socially, to perform in a manner that reminds them of their *mothers*. April says, ". . . a lot of these African American males look at me like, that could be my mother . . ." (April, Interview, 7/28/09). When it comes to providing reading instruction to students, April feels the major requirement is that she provides instruction that allows students to have fun. This fun may be a class discussion, games, dramatic interpretations, making real life connections, or paired readings all centered on the text.

April's Classroom Design

When in the presence of April her core beliefs about respect that she expressed in her interview become apparent. A walk around her classroom reveals a number of posters about respect, and classroom norms have respect as their focus. Also, her homeroom class recently created a poem using the letters from 'respect' which they recorded onto a poster. The student-generated poem read, *"**R**espect yourself and others. **E**ncourage others to do well. **S**peak using kind words. **P**lay nice on the playground. **E**nter the classroom quietly. **C**are about yourself and others. **T**hink before you act"* (April, Observation, 9-8-09). Each school day in April's classroom begins with students reciting the school pledge followed by the class pledge poem. April's belief about respect help me to understand her beliefs about pedagogy as she expressed in her interview that she feels that respect is essential to learning and collaboration. April told me, "I believe in the golden rule, treat others the way you want to be treated, I am constantly reminding them of that" (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-13-10).

Although a number of teachers on April's hall have their students seated in groups, April chooses to seat her 20 students' desks side-by-side in rows facing the blackboard at the front of the classroom. This seating arrangement is a strategic move for April because she spends a lot of her time at the front of the class during teacher-directed reading and other whole group instruction/activities.

April's classroom setting is similar to those found in older schools; it is large. Evidence of renovations to bring the school up to code is obvious as a number of plumbing, heating, and electrical pipes cover the ceiling and walls. A large air

conditioning unit hangs from the ceiling and has control settings that require the teacher to climb onto a chair to reach. There are no permanent storage cabinets attached to the wall. Supplies, equipment, and materials are stored in portable cabinets along the back wall. Another feature of older school buildings, which is also true for this school, is the number of windows and the large amount of bulletin board space in the classrooms. The classroom wall opposite the hallway has one large window that runs the entire length of the room exposing students to the outdoors. Below the window is a radiator that also stretches the length of the wall. Peering out of the windows into the hallway, from the inside of the classroom, is a view of the ceiling decorated with pipes. April has bright red curtains hanging over the windows to block the view of the pipes. When the curtains are open it allows in the light from the hallway. These windows extend the length of the room and cover one-third of the wall top to bottom. Below the windows are the remaining two-thirds of the wall; this is divided into several bulletin boards. Although there are two entrance doors to the classroom, there is not a door leading to the outside that can serve as an additional fire escape.

There are five fifth-grade teachers in April's school, four of whom have chosen to team teach. This means that these fifth grade teachers are paired with one another and responsible for teaching all of the content areas: literacy (including teacher directed reading, guided reading, writing, word study), math, social studies, and science. April teaches reading and science to two classes of fifth graders each day. Science, reading, and math are content areas tested on the EOG in fifth grade. Two hours have been allotted for literacy instruction and 30 minutes for Science.

When asked about how she incorporates writing into her literacy instruction, April responded, ". . . we don't do writing as much. Fourth grade was a writing year, and by the time they get to fifth grade, we have the gateway and we really don't do a lot of writing" (April, Interview, 7-28-09). However, during my second observation, which was a teacher-directed lesson, April had a reading assignment that integrated writing. This writing assignment was related to a genre study on tall tales. During another observation April was planning a follow-up lesson in which students wrote letters to the author of a chapter book that she was reading to the class. Students also had writing notebooks that they use for writing varied stories. April told me that the sharing of writing compositions is an event that her African American males welcome. She says,

> . . . the funny thing is they [African American males] like to share [their writing] . . . they like to tell stories . . . I don't even know sometimes if they are actually reading what they wrote, or they are just telling it. Sometimes I feel they are just telling it, but I don't care because they just want to get their story out. But I have noticed that they are the ones that like to tell something or raise their hands to tell a story, we do a lot of predicting and they always want to tell a story (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-13-10).

April says that she provides group structures where students can share published writings with their peers. This gives students, especially her African American males, still another means of sharing their compositions before they are posted on the class writing bulletin board.

During one lesson I observed, April taught the lesson by beginning with a review of the characteristics of a tall tale. She reread the essential question (EQ), which is a student-friendly question based on the lesson's objective. The EQ was written on a

sentence strip (i.e. EQ—What is a tall tale?) earlier in the week and placed in one pocket of a six-section pocket chart. It provided focus and direction for students, and was intended to be a visual reminder for students.

April then proceeded with the lesson in her typical manner of calling on students to answer the essential question. At the end of the lesson, April asked students to take out their journals, which contained previously written stories, and write their own tall tale. Later during a post-observation interview, April stated that when students are finished, they form buddy groups and share their stories with peers.

Theme 1—Teacher Beliefs: *All I Am and Hope to Be*

In my interviews with her, April said she believes that all children can learn. She believes that some students are not given an equal chance at learning because they lack adequate materials and educational support from some teachers within the educational setting. She feels that African American males are often placed with teachers who are afraid to deal with parents. Consequently, she feels that African American males come to her classroom in fifth grade from teachers who have not maintained high expectations for these males or have held them accountable for their actions. April states,

> . . . it is consistency that we need . . . teachers are afraid to talk to Black males because they are afraid of the parents . . . I tell them that they make it hard for me [as the fifth grade teacher] because I am not having it . . . that makes it hard for me to try to fix what's happened for so many years in other grades. (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

April also believes that learning should be fun. She believes that learning occurs not at the same moment for all students, or during the same lesson for students; therefore

teachers must be patient with students as they progress as learners. For that reason, as she

develops lessons she is cognizant of students' knowledge, their ability, interests, and

learning styles (April, Questionnaire, 9-8-09). April reported on the questionnaire she

completed at the start of this study that she believes in empowering students to be

independent learners and seekers of knowledge. This belief causes her to design lessons

that enable students to understand major concepts and how such concepts relate to issues

of fairness, equity, and justice. However, April employees a teacher-directed approach in

teaching such concepts related to fairness, equity, and justice (April, Questionnaire, 9-8-

09). April said that one literature selection from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham: 1963*

by Christopher Paul Curtis was as an impetus for one such discussion. She wanted her

males to understand the opportunities that exist today. She talks about the read aloud,

stating:

> I want them [students] to know what opportunities they have today that they did
> not have during slavery times . . . people went through a whole lot for you to be
> free today . . . our ancestors didn't have the opportunities that you have . . . they
> couldn't learn to read and write, it was against the law . . . now you have the
> opportunity to learn to read and write . . . you need to learn all you can . . . (April,
> Follow-up Interview, 4-13-10)

April went on to tell me,

> For my African American males, I tell them your ancestors were the ones who
> were slaves, not the White kids . . . Your ancestors died, ran away . . . to give you
> an opportunity today to get a free education which they couldn't get back then.
> (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-13-10)

April believes it is important for students to feel a teacher's affective side as well. April

tells her students regularly that she cares about them and their education, and as a result

she will only accept their best effort. April has the following to say about her African

American males:

> I right out tell them that I care about them and their education so I expect them to do their best. I also tell them I know when they are doing their best so make sure that's what they give me. I give them praise when they do their best. Sometimes they ask me if they are going to get a treat when they do well. I tell them that they are getting an education and that's better than a treat. (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

Students were possibly expecting treats when they noticed the old-fashioned candy jar

sitting on April's work station at the front of the classroom. However, April shared with

me the following candid statement about her experience with African American male

learners:

> African American males seem to think they need to be tough. They carry a chip on their shoulder and seem to feel they have to prove that they are tougher than the next person. This interferes with their learning because they sometimes have a hard time following the teacher's directions. That's why I let them know right away that they [African American males] don't have a choice about whether they follow directions in my room. I tell them that I am the chief and they are the Indians and what I say goes. On the other hand, I feel I am very fair and let them know that they can talk to me about anything. I will always listen to them and then make my decision. I want them to know that I respect them and what they have to say, but as the teacher I have the last word. (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

This tough-love approach was observed in all aspects of learning in April's classroom.

In enabling students' efforts and scaffolding their learning, April understands the

importance of shifting pedagogical styles, seeking the help of other teachers on and

across grade levels, and even having conversations with students when she is aware that

her students are experiencing difficulties in learning. April says, "You get to learn your

kids so well that you know, ok, this is his breaking point . . . so let me give him a little

hint to something without everybody knowing . . . so sometimes I have to call them to the

side" (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10). She also incorporates competition via spelling

bees, "Race to the Finish," literacy games, Scrabble, class discussions centered on a

social issue, etc. (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10) into her instruction to do the

following: enhance social development, encourage discussions that allow for diverse

opinions, build strong academic skills, and prepare her students for the real world (April,

Questionnaire, 7-28-09). April told me that one such discussion occurred during a reading

lesson. Some discussions become teachable moments, she says:

> Well, number one, I think, I like to have fun with reading. I don't like to just read, read, read, I like to have a lot of discussions, sometimes I even have to stop myself and tell the children, "Ok we're getting way off track," because they will get so interested in one question . . . I will discuss anything with them. We've talked about jail and, we really get down talking about things, because these are things they really want to know that they think they can't talk to anyone else with. And at the time, I still feel like I'm feeding them some kind of knowledge and it'll usually come from whatever we're reading. They get so interested in that, so they'll get more interested in the reading. So we like to do a lot of spontaneous stuff. I'll think of a question that's maybe not in the teacher's edition or something like that, or you know, the kids will come up with [other] questions . . . (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

April said that the above discussion was prompted by a story from the reading text about

rules or consequences, and explained that

> . . . it [the reading text] was something about following rules or consequences; I don't know if somebody had a consequence for something and the kids will ask a questions about well, "what would happen if he would've done this and this and this" or you know something like that. And sometimes, I don't even know how

we got way down the road about this, and I'll have to go, "ok guys, let's come back, let's come back. We can talk about this when we go outside, or during our free time;" sometimes my kids will give up outside time to have a discussion group, you know? And it's just things they want to talk about. (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

As a result of her students' curiosity and willingness to engage in discussion about such issues April created a structure called Pow-wow. April told me,

A couple of years, we started where I would take the girls one week and take the boys the next week and we'd take our extra time, we'd go in the auditorium, and we'd just talk. They'd write things and put them in a box, and nobody knew who wrote it, and it'll ask a question and we'll just sit there and discuss that question. One day the girls were like, "what can we do for the boys to be nicer to us?" (laughs), "can you tell the boys to be nicer to us?" and I said, "we'll discuss that in the boys section. So things like that, we'd call them pow-wows, you know. (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

April is resourceful and believes in using every possible resource to educate her students. She sees parents as valuable resources in this education process. Parents are additional teachers in the classroom community. April commented on the questionnaire that she develops lessons that require students to seek the aid of parents and community members as well as collaboration that involves a number of partners in the learning process (April, Questionnaire, 7-28-09). This was the case during one of my researcher visits. April's students were submitting their weekly spelling project, which is completed at home with the aid of parents. These projects are weekly extra credit assignments that students construct and/or create. The projects range from composing a poem to creating a game using their weekly spelling words. These weekly projects are one way that April

involves parents in the education of their children. April provides all materials;

construction paper, markers, etc. to help students to be successful.

April feels that her job is a difficult one without parental support; therefore

partnering with parents is a priority for her in the education process. April commented

during one interview,

> I use every resource to educate my students. The biggest resource is the parents. It's really hard to teach a child when you don't have the support of the parent. So I get the parents on board right away. I tell them how I run my class and what I expect from my students. I also like to have the student there when meeting with parents so they will know that we are on the same page. (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

As mentioned earlier, April told me that she views herself as a *mother figure*. She

also stated that she sees herself as an "Indian chief" (one who is an elder in the tribe) in

the classroom and her students as the Indian children. She believes ultimately that as the

chief and appointed leader of the class, she is responsible for establishing an environment

conducive to learning. Like a chief she carries out her duties while allowing her students

to embrace their cultural experiences (customs and traditions). In keeping with the Native

American tradition, the chief, like other elders in the tribe, is responsible for teaching the

children. She believes in listening to her students and wants her students to know that she

respects them as well as what they have to say. She also believes that as the chief she

ultimately makes decisions related to what is best for the classroom. When thinking about

the academic potential of her students she knows that by the end of the year that her

students will demonstrate the ability to achieve goals on their own (April, Questionnaire,

9-8-09). April also told me in one follow-up interview the importance of her students

standing on their own. She said, "I want my students to be able to stand on their own. I want them to know how to find information and answers to questions they don't understand without depending on others" (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10).

Theme 2—Teacher Practices: *What I Do & Why*

April offers classroom structures that empower students to become responsible for their actions both in and outside the educational setting. Although she uses a balanced approach to literacy instruction, she offers structure by using a number of conventional teaching techniques. April's literacy components observed during the research period were teacher directed, including guided reading, working with words, and read aloud. Most of the talk came from the teacher and not the students during these parts of her literacy instruction. In reference to African American males April said,

> I believe instruction for my African American males should involve all types of activities that will encourage them to want to learn, like thing they would like to be involved in . . . and that's why I like to talk to them a lot, because then I can find out what they like . . . I want them to be actively involved in their learning, it should include thing they are interested in. (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Guided Reading—Guided reading is a collaborative effort in grade five where grade level teachers, tutors, and other staff members are assigned to work with fifth grade students to provide differentiated reading instruction. Guided reading groups were formed and implementation began after I completed half of my data observation time in April's classroom. Prior to this time, April planned and carried out guided reading instruction only with her homeroom students. Students were divided into four groups reflective of their instructional reading levels. Each group was given texts that

corresponded to their reading levels. Due to daily time constraints, it was impossible for

April to meet with each group during every guided reading session. Thus, she assigned

student *group captains*; each leader was given reading texts and other materials necessary

for facilitating the reading instruction. Having *group captains* provided extra hands for

April as she worked with one guided reading group at a time. She met with guided

reading groups based on their needs. She would meet more frequently during the week

with and concentrate on below grade-level groups. Appointing African American males

as *group captains* was strategic on April's part because it positioned these males in a

leadership role, which made them feel responsible for the learning of each group

member. April commented,

> I find that when I put my African American males in charge of a group they feel proud to be responsible for something, so they try harder, they take on the role as leader and they start even demanding respect for their peers . . . I also explain to them that sometimes they have to let others have a chance to lead but let them know that their opinions are always welcomed and valuable. (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Once guided reading instruction started across the grade level April followed a

similar format, except now she had one guided reading group as opposed to four. Her

new group consisted of six students deemed to be on grade level according to their

reading assessments. She used her guided reading time to conduct mini-lessons and word

study activities. April planned lessons with both narrative and expository texts as well as

other genres.

April formed a partnership with another teacher on her grade level creating a

team-teaching alliance. This partnership involved teachers taking the responsibility for

teaching certain content area subjects (literacy, social studies, science, and math). Team

teaching benefits both teachers in that they have fewer subjects to teach and more time to

plan such lessons. This means that teachers plan and teach only certain content subjects.

In this alliance, April teaches the literacy block to students in her class and students in the

partner class. Her partner teaches math to both classes as well. April told me the

following about her current guided reading group:

> My guided reading group consists of the lowest readers. I am able to work on
> skills that just that group needs without them [students] being embarrassed [about
> their low ability] because they all [students in guided reading groups] need the
> same skills, so we can just build on those; they learn so much quicker when you
> just have that one small group and you can teach them on their level, they can
> build up not like having the whole class and some kids being bored because it's
> too easy and things like that . . . those are some of the things we do in the guided
> reading group, is try to work on specific skills . . . (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-
> 9-10)

Teacher-Directed Reading—Teacher-directed lessons are a component of April's

balanced literacy instruction. In her teacher-directed approach April decides what to

assess and how that assessment is interpreted. Teacher-directed instruction occurs four

days a week. April uses the basal text for teacher-directed reading. A new basal story is

introduced every four days. She begins each story by engaging students in vocabulary

study and pre-reading instruction, prior to reading the story. Reading the text is a whole

group activity. After reading half of the story the students engage in a discussion of the

text. After completing the story students receive a study guide containing open-ended

questions to complete for homework. On day four students listen to the previously-read

story on audiotape. The reading culminates in some form of comprehension assessment

which students self-correct together. April told me that teacher-directed reading is a time for her African American males who are reading below grade level to be exposed to grade level text, which will aid in their ability to be successful on EOG assessment in reading. She says,

> . . . it still exposes them [African American males] to everything that the rest of the class is getting, so, I feel like even though these kids might be below grade level and they are going to need this, this, and this before they can get up to grade level, but why should they not be exposed to grade level stuff. Do we not just teach them grade level stuff? They might not ever get the chance to get that type of scaffolding to get up to where they need to be so let's expose them to it anyway . . . Second of all EOG is going to be on grade level. (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Literacy Centers—Literacy center engagement happens four days a week (Monday-Thursday). April provides literacy centers as a means to reinforce skills students have previously learned during other literacy components, including guided reading, teacher directed, working with words, etc. Each day the students engage in independent learning related to vocabulary, word patterns, grammar, and reading. These assignments are made on Mondays at the beginning of the week and each day one literacy center assignment is completed. April facilitates as she moves from student to student to assist, assess, and/or monitor progress. Students are given the choice of which center assignment they work on daily; however, all assignments must be complete by Friday. April says that literacy center times are opportunities for her to work independently with African American males who are below grade level in reading as their needs dictate.

Read Alouds—April has scheduled a read aloud time to occur daily following lunch. During my observation period she was reading a fiction chapter book *Among the Hidden* by Margaret Haddix. This science fiction book is a futuristic story about a little boy named Luke who must live in secrecy because he is a third child and forbidden by the population police. One population policeman makes rounds to their house frequently because he suspects there is a third child. Luke has lived his entire life in hiding but peeps out an attic window after his parents leave for work. He is peeping out the window one day, looking at another house through a clearing, and sees another person staring back at him from the attic of the house. He finds out that the house belongs to the same population police officer who visits his house. During the read aloud time some students were writing and drawing, but they were very attentive. April stopped reading after a couple of chapters. Sighs of disappointment were heard around the classroom by students, especially one African American male. April was excited about their eagerness for her to continue reading and promised the students, as she looked at the African American male that wanted her to continue reading that she would read an extra chapter during the next session. April stated later during our post-observation interview that her students had really connected/identified with the book's main character, a child. She said her students were saying things like, "If I was a third child I would do this and I would do that" (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10). This read aloud was for enjoyment and not connected to any previous content area study. April says that read alouds are times when her African American males enjoy listening. She says,

. . . they're quiet and they are listening and asking question [about the story] and answering questions . . . And for those African American boys who don't read well, they would probably never pick up that novel and read it because it's going to be too hard for them . . . so this [read aloud] is a way for them to read without reading and they really enjoy it. (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Theme 3—Classroom Environment: *Safe, Friendly & Fit for Learning*

As for April, creating a classroom environment that is that safe for student learning means welcoming parents. She begins to establish this environment each school year by conveying to her parents the importance of working together with her for the success of their child. She informs her parents that she has an *open door policy* which encourages participation and involvement. April told me that she understands that not all parents have flexible schedules that enable them to commit to regular classroom involvement; therefore, she encourages them to stop by and visit whenever they are available. This visitation, many times, is a brief check-in with April as parents walk their child to the classroom each morning. April has organized her morning routine to accommodate these visits. When students arrive each morning they follow procedures such as unpacking, organizing all material, and sharpening their pencils etc. to prepare for the instructional day as April chats informally with parents. April told me that some teachers in her school become a bit uptight about impromptu visits however she welcomes such opportunities. She explains,

> One thing I always do and I noticed sometimes other teachers will say something about it is like this parent came in and wanted to talk to me and I was in the middle of teaching. And I said [to the other teacher] yes, I understand that, but you have to realize that all parents are concerned with is their child. They don't see all this [that they are interrupting class] and we feel like as teachers that they should, but they don't. If they are up here [at school] they are only concerned

about their child and what's going on with their child. And no, I'm not saying pull up a chair and sit down and have a conference, but you have to take a minute or two to acknowledge that parent, to at least say, is there a problem, ok can we talk about this later? But I have had parents to say teachers just ignore them, but a lot of teachers are afraid again to approach these parents . . . or think if he [male parent] comes up here there must be a problem, they're going to jump on me about something or whatever . . . But I say, if you just face them . . . I always try to set up a rapport with my parents and let them know I am concerned about your child. When your child is here your child belong to me . . . I can call any of my parents and ask them for anything, to do anything for me because I've set up that rapport with them . . . It's that easy. (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

April's organizational style empowers students to be responsible of their learning. Each week begins with her front loading the weeks' assignments. For example, on Mondays students are introduced to a literacy comprehension skill or genre. During the time I was observing in April's classroom students were learning about the features of a tall tale. New spelling words are introduced. Homework assignments give students practice with this literacy comprehension focus. The following day, April goes over homework assignments and students check/correct their papers during this time. This is also a time for April to have open discussions with students about their responses and misunderstandings, including wrong answers on homework, to determine if re-teaching is needed. At the end of the week when students are tested on the weekly skill, they are able to use their homework assignments as a study guide during such assessment. This organizational style allows families to be involved in the learning process as they help their child with their homework assignments. Additionally, allowing students to correct their assignments gives them immediate feedback about their learning, and empowers them to be able to discuss their learning with their parents.

Also, in creating a safe learning environment and keeping the lines of communication open, April gives parents her personal cell phone number. April also communicates with parents weekly to inform them of their child's progress. She sends all previously completed student assignments home on Monday. A coversheet outlining the weeks' assignments/contents and grades is attached to these completed assignments. Parents keep their child's assignments; however, they are required to sign and return the coversheet which lets April know they have viewed their child's work. There is also a place on the coversheet for parents to make comments. April explained to me that parents have expressed their satisfaction with this weekly update as it allows them to take a proactive stance in the education process as both the teacher and parent work together to solve any problems prior to the report card period. April says, "Whatever it takes to get them involved I'll do it" (April, Interview, 7-28-09).

April acknowledges that staff and teachers' perceptions about African American males sometimes are not correct. In creating a safe learning environment she sometimes has to speak out against negative assumptions. She states,

> Of course the school community is important too. My problem with some of the teachers at school is they don't understand the black male and what it takes to educate them. Once my principal (who was a white female) made a comment about a Black male student, [stating] that he had bad behaviors at school because he got away with it[the bad behaviors] at home. I had to tell her that the majority of our Black students don't act like that at home because they have a different respect for their parents and they know their parents will tear their tails up if they act like that with them. But those same students knew they could get away with it at school. (April, Interview, 7-28-09)

From April's perspective, such assumptions/perceptions/stereotypes are contrary to the notion of creating a positive learning environment for African American males. During my observations April always seemed to be poised and ready to advocate for African American males. This was the case when a new student was placed in her class. This male, who allegedly had academic and behavioral issues, had paperwork that tagged along behind him to Russell Elementary School indicating a testing referral had been initiated for him by his previous school. April reported,

> . . . although this Black male was in a low reading group [in my class] he is performing well and is making gains. I reviewed his [cumulative] folder I saw that he was sent out of the class all the time because of his behavior, he was in timeout and did not learn. I told the committee [Student Intervention Team, or SIT] that we needed to give him a chance . . . that he is doing well in my class and he does not need testing . . . he needed to be in the classroom . . . at his other school he was not in the classroom—he was in timeout all the time. (April, Follow-up Interview, 3-16-10)

April's Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) Analysis

Sociocultural consciousness. April, an African American teacher of 19 years and mother of two, understands that schools are settings that mimic the broader society where privilege for some individuals is the order of the day. Her life's experiences as an African American individual, both personally and professionally, have made issues of privilege salient to her. As a result, April engages students in discussions and learning that help to reveal such issues of privilege. One such discussion I observed was prompted by a literature selection entitled *Watson's Go to Birmingham* by Paul Curtis. April admits that many times efforts to engage students in discussions and learning are complicated by the developmental levels of her African American males as they are not able to able to

completely understand the unfair treatment that African Americans endured in the past. However April feels that these discussions and lessons are important and necessary for her African American males to propel them to become advocates for justice as well as change.

Holding affirming views about diversity. Due to the fact that April is a minority educator she is aware of the privilege and dominance afforded the majority population. She understands that cultures different from the dominate cultures are viewed as inferior. She is probably more powerful in this position than she or the students realize. Her expectations are based on her experiences and all may not be from positive experiences. Her times of societal despair are used as teachable moments about culture and conflict that may prepare her students for a future encounter. Such prejudice view results in minority cultural differences being viewed as a negative, yet April feels an early introduction gives them fair warning and less aggravation later in life. As a result or in spite of these societal beliefs, April maintains a structured environment that promotes high expectation and accountability. She doesn't allow them to 'half-step.' April says this type of environment benefits her African American males because it creates structure and predictability for them, which mimics how society may expect them to respond/act.

Skill to act as agents of change. For April, engaging herself as an agent of change connects with sociocultural consciousness and holding affirming views. Acting as an agent of change requires teachers to act in the best interest of the child, which also means making sound educational decisions for students. In light of this April challenged a teacher's referral of an African American male for testing, based on the student's lack

of academic performance. In advocating for this student April requested that she be given the opportunity to complete her own assessments of the student. Following the completion of this assessment period April had collected no information that warranted testing. She met with the school intervention team and presented her assessment of the student. Based on her findings and April's persistence special education testing procedures ended.

Constructivist views of learning. Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) state that teachers begin their formal careers with transmission views of knowledge and learning. Although April engages students in some learning that is consistent with constructivist views, her primary mode of delivery is direct-teaching. The exception, is that she does say she believes in making learning fun and she often engages her students in discussions based on things they are interested in, or for which they have questions. Nevertheless her teaching style is very didactic.

Learning about students. To plan lessons that are meaningful and connect to students' interests and learning styles, April makes a concerted effort to learn about her students' lives. To gain this information she engages in getting to know you activities, surveys and informal conversations at lunch or during non-instructional times. Collaborating with parents is another way that April is able to gain such information.

Culturally relevant teaching practices. No data were coded that was considered to include culturally relevant teaching practices based on the interviews, my observations, or the questionnaire. However, when April does consider her students' interests in her lessons, she displays glimmers of culturally relevant teaching. This is especially true

when she makes connections from something they are reading or learning about to how, as African American males, they need to act both inside and outside of school in order to be perceived positively.

Summary. April provided reading instruction that helped her African American males grow as learners. She is structured and is consistent with rules. She says that her African America males learn best in a predictable environment. She also has close relationships with her parents that she also attributes to the success of her African American males.

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Cross-Case Analysis

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Teacher Beliefs and Practices

Teacher beliefs about learning. Overall, teachers (April, Mae, June, Julie, Augusta, and Octavia) in the research study believed that all students entered their classrooms as capable learners. They all prefaced their beliefs with the statement, "*all children can learn.*" However each teacher felt that various factors impact a student's ability to learn.

Four of the six teachers (April, June, Julie, and Octavia) revealed that they see themselves as the important entity responsible for the planning and the implementation of lessons that result in the learning of their students. The following excerpts recorded from interviews sums up and make apparent these teachers' beliefs about their children. Julie said during one interview session that it was her responsibility as the teacher to, "give her best each day" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10). She said that being dedicated to her students frequently means, "putting in extra time needed to implement new strategies"

she is learning (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 1-11-10). For Julie, extra time is consumed engaging in for example professional development as a means to staying abreast of best practices in literacy, collaborating with staff and/or parents, using assessment data to plan follow-up instruction for a student and various kinds of scaffolding.

June said, "I believe that every child can learn and it is my responsibility to find the ways to reach them" (June, Interview, 7-22-09). Important to June's beliefs is that learning about her students is based on information that she learns by spending time with her students building relationships and assessments which she has conducted. Experience has taught her not to rely on the say-so of previous teachers and staff about students' abilities but on that which she has assessed or experienced firsthand. On questionnaire data June reported that a major consideration given to lesson design are based on the knowledge that her students bring to the classroom however she felt that she needed professional development on the logistics (nuts and bolts) of bridging home and school. One way that June gets to know her students is through relationship building. A primary way that she builds relationships and classroom community is by incorporating a structure referred to as Morning Meeting.

Three of the six participants (Octavia, Mae, and Julie) spoke about the fact that believing that all students can learn requires the teacher to address their individual needs. Octavia shares the fact that not all students come to the learning environment with the internal confidence of their teachers' reality about learning. She views students' learning as an individual act as she states that, "all children come to you [the classroom teacher] with a variety of knowledge, skills, and needs" (Octavia, Follow-up Interview,

1-12-10). She says it is her job as the teacher, ". . . to get to know each one of my students and understand their needs so that I can appropriately differentiate instruction and provide a variety of experiences to meet the needs of each child" (Octavia, Follow-up Interview, 1-12-10). Octavia meets students' literacy needs as she implements Reader's Workshop model.

Mae's Montessori background influences her beliefs about her students. She says every child in her class is a different kind of learner. She views students' prior knowledge as a source of information on which to build new knowledge. Mae said, ". . . every child is a different learner and they bring with them, not necessarily baggage, but different experiences to the table [classroom setting] and that can really affect their learning background knowledge . . ." (Mae, Interview, 7-27-09).

Teacher beliefs about African American male learning. Three teachers (April, Augusta, and Mae) reflected on their beliefs about African American males and learning. Two of the three addressed the African American male learning styles in a positive light as a means to helping them to be successful. April on the other hand sees her connection to the academic development in a resistant light. She feels that the African American males in her fifth grade class are those who in many cases she has seen in previous years as they are sent to her class for timeout due to her strong disciplinary style. This relationship is a result of prior teachers and their fear of parental confrontation therefore her belief about the learning of African American males emphasizes consistency to make growth.

Although Julie did not speak specifically about her beliefs about African American males she is a strong believer in differentiated learning for all learners.

Teacher beliefs about literacy teaching. All teachers believed in an approach to literacy instruction which consisted of guided reading, teacher-directed instruction/mini-lesson instruction. During the teacher observation period I observed five (April, Mae, June, Julie, Augusta, and Octavia) of the six teachers engaging students in read alouds. Four of the teacher (Julie, April, Augusta, and Mae) used literacy stations/word study components to impact the literacy development of their students. Although I observed the classroom libraries of the six teachers in the study and teachers talked about the importance of students reading during designated times I only observed three participants (Julie, June, and Octavia) engaging in self-selected reading. Writing instruction was observed during the researcher period by four of the teacher participants (Augusta, Octavia, June, and Julie).

Teacher beliefs about literacy teaching of African American males. Three of the six teachers (April, June, and Julie) commented on the benefits of read alouds for African American males. Overall teachers feel that read alouds are opportunities to interests African American males in reading at a higher level. They also have learned that read aloud times are enjoyable times for their African American males.

One of April's beliefs was that reading should be fun. Read aloud times for her males are just that fun and engaging. April shared that her read alouds expose African American males to text that may be too difficult for them to read on their own but it is a way for them to read the text without the difficulty. April says read aloud times are

engaging times for her African American males. She says, ". . . they're quiet and they are listening and asking question [about the story] and answering questions . . . and they really enjoy it [read aloud times]" (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10). I observed April engaging students in a read aloud. Her African American males were very attentive. The read aloud had very descriptive vocabulary which made it a good selection of visualizing. April read two to three chapters and stopped. As she announced to the class that she was going to stop the reading until later her African American males began to plead with her to read more.

June finds that read aloud times are beneficial for her African American males as it is an opportunity for her to expose them to new vocabulary. She states, "What I strive to do with my read aloud for my African American males is to make them broaden their vocabularies is my main focus [of the read aloud] . . ." (June, Follow-up Interview, 4-14-10). Julie says that read aloud times are opportunities for exposing her African American males to literature that they would not ordinarily seek out on their own: "Grab their [African American males] attention usually they are more interested in listening more often than reading themselves . . ." (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10). Again, restating what the other teacher participants have said, Julie says the following about read aloud opportunities for African American males, ". . . it's a way for me to expose them to literature as opposed to them doing it on their own which is not their favorite . . . they usually enjoy the read aloud so that's enjoyment and reading at the same time" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10).

All six teachers (April, Mae, June, Julie, Augusta, and Octavia) commented on the benefits of guided reading and the academic importance of it for African American males. They found guided reading to be a time in which teachers are able impact the reading level of African American males as they work with them in small groups of on their instructional levels to teach and model reading strategies, differentiated instruction, and expose them to text that will help them grow as readers. In addition, April uses guided reading time to conduct book clubs that allow her African American males to take on leadership roles. April was quick to point out that not all of her African American males were reading below grade level. She says,

> I find that when I put my African American males in charge of a group they feel proud to be responsible for something, so they try harder, they take on the role as leader and they start even demanding respect from their peers . . . (April, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Mae places more value on the benefits of guided reading compared to teacher-directed reading for African American males. She told me,

> . . . it [guided reading] is a time when they can feel like they're [African American males] a part of the group and they are all on the same page I think TDI is kind of, it's something that we have to do, I don't know if it's the for them [African American males] . . . because it's not differentiated enough for them. It's not as effective as guided reading or literacy stations where I can work with them on their levels. (Mae, Follow-up Interview, 4-9-10)

Julie made the following comments about the benefits of guided reading instruction for her African American males. She says, "It [guided reading] is the best way to meet their

individual [reading] needs, they tend to be more focused when it's a small group and [teacher] instruction is on their instructional level" (Julie, Follow-up Interview, 4-15-10).

Four of the six teachers (Julie, Augusta, April, and Mae) have found literacy station and/or word study to be beneficial for African American males. They see this type of engagement as a way to differentiate learning content for their males. April says that this is a time that she can work individually with her males to assess learning and plan other literacy engagement for her African American males. Julie and Augusta use literacy stations as a time to differentiate content according to their African American's males learning styles.

Two of the six teachers (Augusta and June) shared the benefits of interactive or shared reading instruction for their African American males. Shared reading is a literacy approach which allows the teacher to model a number of strategies from predicting to grammar to fluency in a interactive manner. Augusta and June combine the rhythmic nature of African American males with shared reading. Augusta said her African American males enjoy rhythm. She says they often use their pencils to tap out rhythmic patterns, or rapping (singing) during inappropriate times of the school day. Augusta incorporates her African American males' need for rhythm with shared reading instruction.

June uses shared readings to engage students in the practice of fluency. She uses group readings and sing alongs. June insists that the incorporation of shared reading into her literacy instruction allowed one of her African American males, who experienced difficulties, to read out loud with his peers and participant in the group activities without

feeling the pressure associated with being a below grade level reader. Shared reading for June's class is also a time that students read poetry selections that are appealing to African American males because of their rhyme and rhythmic flow. Shared readings for Augusta and June were ways to connect literacy instruction with the interest of their African American males as they helped them to grow as readers. As I observed in both classrooms, African American males who were performing below grade level or were struggling readers and apprehensive about reading aloud found favor in shared readings.

Teacher beliefs about relationships. All six teachers (April, Mae, June, Julie, Augusta, and Octavia) shared the belief that positive relationships impacted the academic performance of their students. They reported that getting to know students interest, incorporating a positive and safe classroom environment, and parental involvement all to be positive ways of building relationships with their students. To learn about students teachers used surveys, writing assignments, conversations, kid watching, parent conferences, etc. to learn about their students. Augusta uses out of school time to get to know her students.

Teacher beliefs about parent involvement. Overwhelmingly, teachers expressed their views about the benefits of parent involvement as it relates to the development and academic success of students. However, evidence of teachers' beliefs about parent involvement was found to be minimal when comparing teachers across cases. Many times teachers named parents transient lifestyles as barriers to parent involvement.

All teachers availed themselves to keep parents informed of their child's progress. To keep parents informed on the academic status of their child, five (April, Mae, Julie,

Augusta, and Octavia) of the six teachers reported sending home progress reports weekly.

To create two-way communication each progress report has a section for parents to make

comments before returning the weekly report to the teacher.

Mae, Julie and April spoke specifically about ways in which they welcome parents to the

classroom and their attempts to involve parents.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

During the research period each teacher was asked to select a metaphor to

describe herself as a teacher. These are the metaphors they provided: April—*Indian*

Chief, Augusta—*Chauffer*, June—*Copy Machine*, Mae—*Ladder*, Octavia—*Maestro*, and

Julie—*Mother Hen*. As a part of completing the cross-case analysis for this study, I will

use their metaphors provided to describe certain aspects of these teachers, their teaching

style, and their expectations for students.

In addition, as Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) explain, teachers who are

culturally relevant (a) are socioculturally conscious, (b) have affirming views of students

from diverse backgrounds, (c) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing

about change to make schools more equitable, (d) understand how learners construct

knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction, (e) know about the

lives of their students, and (f) design instruction that builds on what their students already

know while stretching them beyond the familiar. Because I elected to use Villegas and

Lucas's model to assess these teachers' ability to effectively educate African American

males in culturally relevant manner, I will discuss the metaphors that each teacher

selected in conjunction with this model of culturally-relevant teaching in order to present

my findings across all six cases. While Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) were talking about preservice teachers in their work, I believe their ideas about what it takes to be a culturally-relevant teacher are also applicable to the inservice teachers who participated in this study.

      Sociocultural consciousness. Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) challenge teachers to expand their sociocultural consciousness. Sociocultural consciousness means understanding that a child's way of knowing the world is deeply impacted by his or her cultural knowledge and background. Failure to expand one's sociocultural consciousness results in sociocultural dysconsciousness, or the belief that one's own worldview is universal. Students who encounter teachers with little sociocultural consciousness are exposed to the status quo, which is in direct opposition to meeting their needs, especially the need of students from diverse populations. In order for teachers to expand their sociocultural consciousness, Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) suggest that teachers engage in self analysis. Villegas and Lucas further state that a teacher who is lacking in sociocultural consciousness probably will also be lacking in the other five areas they outline as necessary components of preparing teachers to teach diverse student populations.

      In this research study, I found that four of the six teachers participants (Augusta, April, Mae, and Julie) had developed some sense of sociocultural consciousness based on their responses to the questionnaire, my interview questions, and my observations. Augusta and April seemed to have the most developed sense of sociocultural consciousness toward their African American males. Perhaps this is because both are

African American mothers raising African American males of their own, unlike the other research study participants who are either White or not parents. Augusta and April were also the most senior participants in the study with April being the teacher with the most experience. Additionally, April and Augusta talked about situations in which people's actions were not in the best interest of their children, and as a result school was not a positive experience for them or their children. These personal experiences seemed to have helped them develop their sociocultural consciousness and act on it as well.

Augusta and April identified metaphors (chauffer and Indian chief, respectively) that are typically seen as non-mainstream roles. However, the roles of chauffer and Indian chief position these teachers as leaders. Further, their leadership is manifested by what is needed by those around them: their passengers and their tribe. Again, the fact that they are mothers of African American males seemed to be the reason for this cultural connection with similar students.

Although as a White teacher who was not a parent herself, Mae's sense of sociocultural consciousness was apparently developed as she was reared and spent time in the home of her Jamaican nanny. Mae also spent time in Africa working at a school for boys. Julie, who I consider a novice in the development of sociocultural consciousness, has engaged in quite a bit of self-analysis because she recognizes the gap between herself as a White teacher and the diverse students in her classroom and in particular her African American males.

Mae describes herself as a ladder. Mae's ethnicity may be different from her African American male students, but she sees herself in a supportive role, which is to be

physically connected to her students. Her physical connection apparently allows her to feel as though she is breaking down barriers for her students. Her support, by acting as a ladder, also allows her students to reach higher ground and achieve as they move upwards, while she is in close proximity for encouragement and providing firm support.

Julie sees herself as a mother hen and her students as her chicks. I interpreted this metaphor as Julie depicting herself as the motherly type, keeping a close eye on her *brood*, and rarely letting them out of her sight. In her role as the teacher and mother hen, however, Julie is the *alpha chick*, the main provider and teacher until she feels they are ready to join the other chickens in the barn yard.

June identifies with a copy machine, which I interpreted as reproducing who she is as an individual. I found this metaphor to be contrary and unhelpful to students of diversity. June is a White teacher, but unlike Mae and Julie who are also White teachers, I believe that June's comparison of herself to a copy machine demonstrates a lack of sociocultural consciousness. June told me that her first encounters with diverse populations occurred in college and during student teaching. Although June feels she is well-rounded, and that her parents provided many positive experiences for her, she admits that meeting the diverse needs of students can be problematic for her, but she is still learning.

Octavia compared herself to a maestro. A maestro is a composer, teacher, and conductor of music. As a conductor the maestro makes a number of decisions. For example, the maestro selects the music, decides which musician perform solo, identifies who qualifies for first chair in each section, etc. The maestro as conductor is responsible

for leading the musicians in each section of the orchestra. In keeping with tradition of the maestro, Octavia sees that her role is to lead the musicians (students) in playing classical compositions (the curriculum), which may appear outdated for some of her new millennial students. Like a maestro conducting the orchestra, Octavia sees herself as the person responsible for composing, teaching and then making all of the learning come together in a blended manner. During the research period I found Octavia to be resourceful and willing to meet the literacy needs of all her students; however, in reporting evidence of her sociocultural consciousness I found her to be lacking in her development in this area. Compared to Julie or Mae, for example, there was also less evidence that Octavia had examined her own sociocultural consciousness as a White female coming from a privilege background. She seemed not to notice that schools were places that privileged her as a White teacher, and her majority population compared to her students of color.

   An affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b), teachers who fail to have affirming views for culturally diverse students are said to view their students from a deficit perspective. Teachers who view students through a deficit lens often side with the belief that the majority culture is essentially superior to minority cultures. Furthermore, teachers' affirming attitudes and actions towards diverse populations are connected to their sociocultural consciousness. For the teacher participants in this study, their affirming attitudes resulted in their holding high expectations for students, exposing students to rigorous curriculum, and providing a positive learning environment.

Three of the six teachers (Augusta, April, and Julie) demonstrated their ability to hold high expectations, expose students to rigorous curriculum, and provide a positive learning environment. This was evidenced, for example, by their using cooperative learning groups, peer tutoring, and using structured routines with their students to promote learning. Again, Augusta and April seemed to provide positive learning environments and make themselves available to their African American males for lunch dates, to discuss issues, and meeting with them after school. These activities seemed to be the result of Augusta and April both overcompensating for the negative experiences their own male children had encountered while in school. Julie also made an effort to avail herself before and after school to meet the needs and interests of African American males in her classroom, although she said this was a work in progress as she continues to learn a different culture.

Commitment and skill to act as agents of change. Teachers who act as agents of change exercise their ability to advocate for their students even when such involvement and support goes against the norm. Three of the six teacher participants in this study (June, Augusta, and April) acted as agents of change when they advocated for African American males. June was successful in placing an African American male who had been retained two times in the next grade. Using her keen knowledge of grade-level standards, June felt this student was capable of handling the curriculum. Augusta and April also demonstrated their ability to act as agents of change as they protested the labeling and placement of African American males into special education classrooms. Although acting as an agent of change is reported in the literature to be a moral

imperative (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b), Mae felt that she was not in a position to advocate for her students in a manner that would result in teacher empowerment and positive change. She felt tied in to the dictates of the administrate staff.

Constructivist views of learning. Four of the six teacher participants (Julie, June, Octavia, and Augusta) provided learning opportunities for students consistent with a constructivist view of learning. These opportunities consisted of small group instruction, inquiry approaches used during Reader's and Writer's workshop, and cooperative/collaborative learning opportunities during book clubs and literature circles. A walk into each of their classrooms would reveal their constructivist beliefs about how children learn because the students' desks were clustered in groups to promote collaborative inquiry, student work was posted around the room, and students were able to move around and interact with one another and the teacher. Activities like literacy stations were planned to engage students in the construction of knowledge. Readers and writers workshops were other types of engagement that allowed students to construct knowledge in a social setting. Other social learning that promoted the construction of knowledge occurred as teachers' scheduled short moments during instructional lessons for students to discuss their learning with their classroom peers. The other teachers' classrooms were much more structured with the teacher usually positioned at the front of the room, and the students' desks were positioned in rows, which limited opportunities for students to interact with each other.

Learning about students. Learning about students' lives requires teachers to know about their students, even during their outside of school time. All six teachers were

especially competent in accomplishing this task. All teachers employed some system of learning about their African American males. Some examples used in order to acquire information included using both general and instructional interest inventories, lunchtime conversations, formative assessments, parent contacts, daily observations, and individual conversations. All teachers stated that they used the information they gathered from their students to plan lessons.

Augusta and Julie, in particular, made a concerted effort to learn about their students. They both spoke about attending the extracurricular activities and even church services of their African American males. Nevertheless, all six teachers talked several times about the importance of getting to know their students.

Culturally relevant teaching practices. Three of the six teacher participants employed instructional practices, which I interpreted as culturally relevant, based on the fact that they were engaging and beneficial for African American males. However, conscious efforts were made by all six teachers to provide multicultural literature and other types of literature that were of interest to their African American males. Augusta, Octavia, Julie, and April used budget allotments and personal funds to purchase book for their classroom libraries, especially for their African American males. Augusta purchased a number of multicultural books that students could win as prizes and add to their personal libraries at home. A number of these books were displayed at the front of her room during the observation period.

All six teachers used an approach to literacy instruction that involved read alouds, guided reading groups, teacher-directed instruction and mini-lessons, and literacy stations

or centers. Five of the six teacher incorporated writing instruction in their literacy block.

June, Augusta, and Julie used a Writer's Workshop format. Augusta reported that her

African American males preferred narrative writing. She explained that narrative

compositions allowed them to write about themselves, which they enjoyed. Augusta also

reported that her African American males were motivated by group writings. Teacher

read alouds were reported by all six teachers to be beneficial for African American males,

and the teachers reported their African American males enjoyed listening to stories as

opposed to reading them on their own. Julie had a listening center equipped with a

number of literature selections and stories on DVD. Julie also said that her African

American males checked out a number of books from the class listening center.

Two of the six teacher participants (Augusta and June) used a shared reading

component with poetry, and found it to be a beneficial structure for their African

American males. Augusta incorporated rhythm into shared reading time, which was also

enjoyed by her African American males.

Julie and Augusta were found to be firm believers in differentiated instruction.

According to Augusta, product differentiation was helpful in allowing her African

American males to demonstrate their literacy learning. I observed this product

differentiation during one of my researcher observation sessions when several African

American males were asked to summarize a particular chapter from a novel. Although

students had the option of writing a summary, Augusta's African American males chose

other creative means to demonstrate their understanding of the reading, such as drawing,

creating a rap, or writing a poem. Octavia met students' individual needs via Reader's

Workshop during which she held conferences with students about their reading and learning. All six teachers used small group instruction to meet their students' needs, which they stated was particularly beneficial to their African American males.

Two of the teacher participants (Octavia and June) used Morning Meetings as a way to create classroom community, which they felt was beneficial to their African American males, as well as to others. April created a discussion time for her students to talk about topics of their choice, which her African American males enjoyed and participated in because the topics were typically related to personal issues or came from their readings in class. Three of the six teacher participants (Julie, June, and Octavia) also explored looping as a way to build classroom community and to develop and continue positive relationships with students and their families from year to year.

Summary

Villegas and Lucas's (2002a, 2002b) six characteristics culturally relevant teaching framework was used to guide the cross-case analysis. Teachers' sociocultural consciousness, ability to hold affirming views of students, and ability to act as an agent of change were characteristics found to exist at varying levels of development depending on their personal experiences and professional growth. All six teachers were able to plan student-centered environments as they learned about their students' lives outside of school. They also planned learning activities that they associated with the academic success of their African American males. However, it is my interpretation that teachers' attention to the six characteristics would improve their ability to engage African American males more effectively.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The "single largest factor affecting academic growth of populations of students is differences in effectiveness of individual classroom teachers" (Sanders, 1998, p. 27).

The purpose of this research was to examine the beliefs and literacy practices of six teachers in the intermediate grades who had been identified as successful teachers of African American males. It was my assumption that successful teachers of African American males would also be culturally relevant teachers; therefore I wanted to examine and identify their use of culturally-relevant teaching practices in their literacy instruction. In this study, three teacher participants in grades 3, 4, and 5 taught in an urban school district, and the other three participants in grades 3, 4, and 5 taught in a rural school district. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the personal and professional beliefs of teachers who have been successful with teaching African American males?

2. What are the literacy practices of teachers who are successful with African American males?

3. How do teachers who are successful with African American males use culturally relevant teaching practices?

A qualitative case study approach was used to delve into the literacy practices of six teachers. I conducted teacher interviews, classroom observations, asked the teachers

to answer a questionnaire about culturally-relevant teaching, and conducted follow-up interviews between August and May during one school year. Data collection began as I conducted my initial interview with each teacher participant. Six observations of each teacher were conducted over a two-week time period during each teacher's literacy instruction block. Six post-observation interviews were conducted, one following each of the literacy observations. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed with participants between December and April as a means to clarify previously collected data responses. I was able to gather more data when teachers began to expound on certain aspects of their lives and work with their African American male students after the participants read their cases during member checks in February and March,.

I assumed the role of participant observer during this study, and during this study my participation was well received at both research sites because the students were comfortable with having extra hands in the classroom. Additionally, I was an accepted fixture around Marsh Elementary School where I have worked with pre-service teachers who were assigned there as interns and student teachers for several years.

In this chapter I will summarize the findings related to my research questions followed by implications and recommendations for teacher educators in schools of education, school administrators, and teachers. I will also address the limitations and challenges of this study, and discuss future research needs.

Teacher Beliefs

In answer to the first research question regarding the personal and professional beliefs of the six teachers identified as successful in teaching African American males, I

found that the basic belief of all of them was that all children can learn. While all six teachers expressed their belief that all children can learn, only four of the six teachers addressed the needs and learning styles of students in their literacy practices with their African American males. These four teachers provided instruction that was differentiated, included peer collaboration, used small group instruction, and promoted active engagement. Trehearne (2005) states primary factors impacting teacher effectiveness are beliefs and understandings. Trehearne (2005) states true to teacher beliefs are all students are effective literacy learners. Additionally, the thoughts and discussions of these four teachers were devoid of excuses that blame students for not achieving.

Delving deeper into these four teachers' personal and professional beliefs revealed another level of understanding in which teachers commented that it was *their responsibility* to create a classroom environment and learning that enabled students academically. These four teachers demonstrated this belief by providing instruction that was differentiated according to their students' individual needs, and they planned lessons for their African American males that were learning-style specific. They also planned lessons which allowed African American males to work and collaborate with peers as a part of the learning.

Literacy Practices

In response to my second research question about the practices of teachers who are successful in their literacy efforts with African American males, all six teachers employed features associated with exemplary elementary grades reading instruction as outlined by Allington (2002a). In his study of fourth-grade teachers across six states,

Allington found the following six features common among teachers, which he called the

six T's of effective elementary literacy instruction: time, texts, teaching, talk, task, and

testing. I also think it is important to note that these features associated with exemplary

reading instruction are a result of research Allington conducted in elementary schools

where high poverty, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity were well represented.

Relevant to my study, I found that five of the six teachers felt empowered to plan literacy

instruction that addressed the needs of their students, employed a combination of all six

features of effective literacy instruction described by Allington (2002a), and did not feel

compelled to depend on a particular program. As both Allington (2002a) and Duffy-

Hester (1999) wrote, teachers can have more impact on their students' literacy that any

single, fixed reading program, method, or approach. In other words, it is the teacher who

makes the instructional decisions that will ultimately impact or impede achievement.

Tompkins (2003) also states that effective teachers use a balanced approach to

literacy instruction. In this study, I observed that all six teacher participants successfully

used two components of a balanced literacy model, which were guided reading and mini-

lesson instruction, to benefit their African American males. Additionally, all six teachers

said they found guided reading instruction and read alouds to be the most beneficial and

engaging components of literacy instruction for their African American males. Guided

reading instruction was beneficial because they could target individual needs, and read

alouds consistently engaged their African American males. Use of these two literacy

practices is an example of one way these teachers' literacy practices aligned with their

holding high expectations for their African American males (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1990;

Ladson-Billings, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b). Four of the six teacher

participants also used literacy stations to engage their students, and found the usage of

literacy stations to be beneficial for their African American males because it was a direct

means of addressing individual needs.

During my observations of their literacy instruction, I also noted that all six

teachers made conscious efforts to include multicultural literature in their teaching, which

is another way to integrate culturally relevant teaching practices into their literacy

curriculum. In fact, I noted that the classroom libraries of all six teacher contained books

of various genres. I also learned that many books were selected and purchased based on

the interests of these teachers' African American male students. Two of the six teachers,

Augusta and April, made race and culture explicit parts of their interactions with

students.

In summary, while all six teachers stated their beliefs that all children can learn,

only five of the six teachers specifically addressed the needs and learning styles of their

African American males as they provided literacy instruction that was differentiated, and

included peer collaboration, small group instruction, active engagement and ultimately

purposeful learning.

The Four Cs: Compassionate, Consistency, Connected, and Collaboration

In my initial decision to study successful teachers of African American males, it

was my assumption that these teachers would employ practices consistent with culturally

relevant teaching. I expected to find teacher practices that catered to the African

American male in ways that addressed their learning styles, academic needs, as well as

cultural experiences. For example, I expected to see these teachers building relationships through lunch conversations and by attending their students' extracurricular activities. I also expected to see teachers who were tuned in to their students' home situations, such as dad's job change or the birth of a new sibling. During my cross-case analysis, I identified the following four themes, which I call the *Four Cs of Cultural Relevance,* to be present in the cases of five of the six teachers in this study. They are Compassionate—*building student-teacher relationships*; Consistency—*routinely teaching literacy components;* Connected—*bridging home and school cultures; and* Collaboration—*communicating with parents and colleagues*. I will elaborate on these themes next as they describe the bridges in my conceptual framework described in Chapter I, which is centered on teachers' understanding and knowledge of (a) African American male dispositions, (b) literacy best practices, and (c) culturally relevant teaching.

Compassionate

One commonality that describes the teacher participants in the research study was their level of compassion for the African American male. These teachers are described as compassionate teachers. A compassionate teacher yields herself to recognizing and addressing the needs of all students they work with daily. The teachers in this study understood the importance of having structures planned each instructional day to impact learning, which created an environment where students felt emotionally and physically safe. At the root of the compassionate teachers is their disposition. Julie, Octavia, and Augusta, for example, always maintained a pleasant tone of voice as they interacted with their students. Even as they redirected their students' attention, it was done using an

appropriate tone of voice which left the student with their dignity. This ability to maintain

a pleasant tone of voice is a quality associate with star teachers. Haberman (1995) says

that star teachers respond as professionals and are not easily shocked. They respond to

emotionally charged situations as thoughtful professionals. In addition to tone, all

teachers reported the benefits of developing relationships with their African American

males.

Consistency

Consistency was observed throughout the observation period as teachers

employed a balanced and comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. In discussions

with some teacher participants I learned a balanced approach was a mandate of the

administrative staff. However, teachers used their own creativity to plan explicit lessons

within each component of the balanced/comprehensive literacy model. These explicit

lessons were beneficial for African American males because they involved teachers

modeling and demonstrating strategies used by good readers as they read. Additionally,

explicit literacy lessons involved teachers modeling and scaffolding for students the

thinking that good readers engage in as they read.

Teachers were also explicit in establishing routines, procedures and instruction to

maximize learning for all students. For example, all lessons began in a similar manner by

teachers stating lesson objectives, rules, and procedures for students to follow for

engagement and learning. Teachers at both schools converted their lesson objectives to a

student friendly essential question (EQ), which they stated verbally and posted on the

board as a strategy to focus students' learning and to reference as needed during the

instruction. April, for example, elaborated on the fact that such rules, consistency, and predictability was beneficial to the success of her African American males.

Connected

Teachers at both schools viewed caretakers as allies in the educational process and understood that keeping them abreast of school-related activities was a way of involving and informing them. They even encouraged parents to visit, participate, and observe, or to send in needed resources. Julie, Augusta, Mae, and April were particularly intentional about their efforts to involve parents. The other two teachers expressed understanding the important roles which parents served in the education of their child; however, their beliefs were not as apparent in their practices.

Emphasizing cultural connectedness, Julie's class (during an observation) engaged in a project based writing lesson about themselves as an instructional strategy to learn about the students and their cultural experiences for later reference. The students used cultural knowledge to scaffold their writing of biographies. Similarly, June scaffold the writing instruction of her students through a phase-in process of writing. Students began with an *All About Me* introduction, progressing to their own autobiography, and then interviewing and writing a biography of another individual within the school. Mae also integrated Social Studies and writing instruction in which students wrote about their families. Not only did this process increase their writing knowledge, but also their awareness of cultures and experiences both similar and different from their own. This cultural alignment and connectedness is the basis of what Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) outline as culturally relevant teaching.

Collaboration

Teachers at both Marsh and Russell Elementary Schools understand the value of working together to meet the needs of all students, in particular their African American males. Their collaborative efforts span across the educational community to include parents, teachers, and administrators. These teachers recognized that parents were part of their educational community and they worked with them as partners. Parents were welcomed into the classroom, which was apparent during one visit at Russell Elementary where I observed parents working with small groups during their stay. Another example of collaboration occurred during Julie's social studies unit on culture that allowed parents to participate. Teachers understood the needs of parents to be informed and found alternative ways to insure that communication happened. However, April's open door policy took on a different look to meet the needs of students. She took advantage of opportunities to collaborate with parents as they dropped their child off at her room in the mornings. These short and regular conversations were informative, and sometimes planned conferences were not needed. Julie stated that collaborative efforts with parents enabled her students to engage in excursions outside of school. Julie even encourages parents to attend field trips as chaperones, and she found them to be essential in making overnight field trips.

Collaboration also occurred when the teachers in this study provided opportunities for students to learn from each other in number of collaborative ways. These opportunities happened during the literacy block as students engaged in small group instruction, book buddies (when partners in their class, grade level, or across grade levels

come together to read/share books of their choosing), literature circles, peer collaboration, and writing instruction. These teachers also provided students with opportunities to collaborate and discuss with their peers what they were learning by providing pauses (a type of think aloud for students to process and share understanding) during instruction. This strategy, also called turn and talk, was especially beneficial for African American males in that it helped to keep them focused when they tended to get restless during the lesson.

More Connections to Culturally Relevant Teaching

To engage in a comparative analysis and answer my third research question I used the characteristics of culturally relevant teachers developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) and introduced in Chapter II, as another analytic lens. Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) state that culturally relevant teachers have, or need to develop, high expectations for all their learners, a sense of sociocultural consciousness, use constructivist teaching practices, develop relationships, and be advocates and agents of change for all their students, but especially for their students of color. Based on these characteristics of culturally relevant teachers and my observations, the following observations were made about the six cases in this study:

- All teachers seemed to hold their African American males to high expectations and accountability. African American males were expected to participate in all aspects of learning. As a result they contributed to group activities, took on leadership roles, and engaged with their peers.

- All teachers understood the educational benefits of constructivist views of learning, although not all were able to employ them as often as possible. Additionally, the teachers in this study understood that inquiry allowed African American males to collaborate and discover in a manner beneficial to student learning.

- All teachers in this study understood the value of developing relationships with their African American males as a means to impacting their learning. I found those teachers who established the best relationships with their African American males were also the ones who maintained close relationships with parents. All teachers understood parents to be a valuable source; however, in practice this was not always found to be the reality.

- Moreover, in studying teacher practices, three of the six teachers were found to be socioculturally conscious as defined by Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b). Apparently it is difficult to exhibit this characteristic as a privileged white female teacher without a personal connection to their African American males, which is contrary to what Ladson-Billings (1994) found in her work. The three participants in this study who had personal experiences relating to the realities of other cultures took these experiences with them into the teaching profession, while the others did not.

- Finally, there were three teachers I found who acted as agents of change for their African American males who were being referred for special education testing, which would potentially result in labeling. These three teachers

advocated for keeping their African American males in their classrooms,

rather than have them referred for special education services.

In synthesizing the research on culturally relevant teaching, lots of commonalities

exist in the frameworks of researchers that may lead classroom teachers pondering the

question, where do I begin in my quest to become culturally relevant? As a result of

exploring the beliefs of research participants my recommendation is for teachers to

engage is self analysis of their sociocultural consciousness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a,

2002b). In fact the ability to recognize and compensate for a weaknesses, in this case

realizing that students from diverse backgrounds have different culture, is a characteristic

of a star teacher (Haberman, 1995).Teachers are viewed today as direct links to the

educational success of students. As Sanders (1998) says, "The single biggest factor

affecting academic growth of any population of youngsters is the effectiveness of the

individual classroom teacher" (p. 27). It is difficult for teachers if they have not explored

their own personal perspectives that shape the beliefs they have about their students. Just

as Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) find sociocultural consciousness to be an important

component of culturally relevant development, I see sociocultural consciousness as the

foundation that supports other components of culturally relevant teaching. I say this

because I believe it allows the teacher to understand that the knowledge and

understanding that they bring to the classroom environment may differ from the cultural

background and experiences of their students. To the extent that teachers are not able to

understand that students come to the school setting from different cultural backgrounds,

they may view their students through a deficit lens, and therefore instruction may not be

congruent with students' needs and learning styles. This results in what Thompson

(2004), Ladson-Billings (1995), and Darling-Hammond (1999) refer to as a cultural

mismatch between teacher and student.

<div align="center">**Recommendations**</div>

The following recommendations for schools of education, school administrators,

and inservice teachers are suggested based on some of the needs expressed by the

participants in this study. For example, June specifically stated that her university studies

failed to prepare her in culturally relevant teaching. Other recommendations are based on

what I learned from completing this study. For example, four of the participants in this

study are White and although they recognized the fact that they come from backgrounds

different than their students, I think their race and privilege also contributed to their

feelings about their preparedness to teach in a culturally relevant manner. These

recommendations require committed efforts on the part of university faculty, school

administrators, and inservice teachers, but this work is needed to prepare both preservice

and inservice teachers for the diverse student populations represented in our public

schools.

Recommendations for Schools of Education

- Develop a K-5 culturally relevant clinical/charter/immersion/laboratory school
  at the university that is equipped with an observation area where individuals
  or groups can observe experienced teachers engaging students in a culturally
  relevant manner. Laboratory schools used to be rather common in schools of
  education, but now are very scarce. However, schools of education could

develop their own charter schools, or at least partner with schools that are
focused on providing culturally relevant teaching, to provide sites for
preservice teachers to observe firsthand what culturally relevant teaching
looks like.

- Require preservice teachers to record their observations of culturally relevant
teaching practices in a journal, which can then be used in follow-up class
discussions, writings, or other assignments. Student enrollment should reflect
the diverse student populations that exist in other urban public schools.

- Offer a Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) program that preservice teachers
can pursue as a minor or for add-on licensure, which requires a 5-year
renewal. This add-on can also be made available to inservice teachers working
on their Masters degree. Such a CRT focus for add-on licensure, as a minor
for preservice teacher licensure, or for Masters-level teachers would be unique
in North Carolina, and would likely appeal to prospective and experienced
teachers wanting to teach in diverse, urban schools.

- Embed culturally relevant teaching practices in all courses.

- Develop a culturally relevant teaching methods course that preservice teachers
are required to take as a part of their licensure requirements, and include
required field experiences as part of this course.

- Develop partnerships with elementary, middle, and high schools with diverse
student populations, especially those schools where a cultural mismatch exist

between students and teachers. Place preservice teachers in such schools for some or all of their field experiences.

- Meet with administrators of such schools to assess the culturally relevant teaching needs of the school and then provide appropriate staff development for the teachers as needed.

- Develop teacher research initiatives where inservice teachers are invited to engage in research related to culturally relevant teaching sponsored by the university.

Recommendations for School Administrators

- Provide staff development opportunities to explore and implement the six components of Culturally Relevant Teaching as outlined by Villegas and Lucas (2002a) (see Appendix I):

    - ***Sociocultural Consciousness:*** Teachers expanding their sociocultural consciousness understand that one's way of thinking, behaving, and being are influenced by their race/ethnicity, social class, and language (Banks, 1994). Therefore, expanding teachers' sociocultural awareness requires them to examine and become more—with their own identities.

    - ***Affirming Attitudes towards Students from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds:*** Teachers viewing students in an affirming manner understand there are many ways of thinking, speaking, behaving, and learning. They also understand diverse students' ways of thinking, speaking, behaving, and learning are not always valued. Ultimately,

teachers view these students as learners who already have a great deal of knowledge and experiences that can be built on to help them learn.

- ***Commitment and Skills to Act as Agents of Change:*** Teachers are moral actors, facilitating the growth and development of diverse students. These teachers actively work for "greater equity in education . . . and can challenge the prevailing perception that differences among students are problems rather than resources" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b, p. 24).

- ***Constructivist Views of Learning:*** Teachers understand that "learning is a process by which students generate meaning in response to new ideas and experiences they encounter in school" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b, p. 25). Therefore, the knowledge students bring to school, acquired from personal and cultural experiences, is essential to learning.

- ***Learning about Students:*** To adequately engage students, teachers need to know about students' lives outside of school (funds of knowledge). Teachers who know about their students and their individual interests both inside and outside of school can bridge those interests within their instructional strategies to enhance students' motivation to learn (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

- ***Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices:*** Culturally relevant teachers use what they know about their students to give them access to learning. This pedagogical practice includes involving students in the "construction of knowledge, building on students' personal and cultural strengths, helping

students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, using varied

assessment practices that promote learning, and making the culture of the

classroom inclusive of all students" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b, p. 27)

- Create a position for a culturally relevant teaching teacher facilitator who will

  be loaned from the university to the elementary school and housed within the

  elementary school. This person will be responsible for staff development,

  working with and coaching teachers, observing and providing feedback, etc.

- Alternatively, a culturally relevant teacher facilitator could be loaned from the

  public school to the university to co-teach with university faculty so both they

  and preservice teachers can learn about effective culturally relevant teaching

  strategies from someone who has firsthand experience.

- Collaborate and develop partnerships with school of education faculty about

  the implementation of culturally relevant teaching in both settings – the public

  schools and the university.

- Collaborate with schools of education to develop a culturally relevant teaching

  protocol which can be used in the hiring process for both new teachers in the

  schools and new faculty members in the university.

- Create and/or add culturally relevant teaching materials to the public schools'

  professional library literature, videos, lessons plans, etc.

- Provide stipends for culturally relevant teaching summer staff development,

  and/or for participation in culturally relevant teaching -focused book clubs or

  learning communities.

- Promote parent involvement.

- Provide a suggestion box for teachers so that teachers can speak anonymously about culturally relevant teaching matters

- Offer classes with continuing education credit for classroom teachers to attend related to culturally relevant teaching with an emphasis on developing sociocultural consciousness.

- Provide staff development opportunities that specifically relate to engaging African American males in the literacy process.

- Create a checklist of items consistent with culturally relevant teaching. Conduct impromptu classroom visits using the culturally relevant teaching checklist to assess teachers' culturally relevant development.

- Create a 5-10 minute forum in which teachers share information about what works African American males. This 5-10 minute sharing time could be incorporated as a routine agenda item occurring at the beginning of a weekly staff meeting, as an ice breaker, or at the end as the ticket out the door. Anytime or place where teachers gather is an opportunity for such sharing. The idea is to acknowledge what works with regard to culturally relevant teaching.

- Require teachers to submit one culturally relevant teaching lesson plan to the school's professional library per quarter.

Recommendations for Teachers

- Organize a book club and read Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b), or other literature about sociocultural consciousness or culturally relevant teaching prior to the beginning of the school year

- Make culturally relevant teaching a professional goal. For example, teachers could make it a goal to visit each child's home during the first semester of school.

- Observe other teachers who are effective in using culturally relevant teaching practices.

- Provide informal ways for parental involvement so that parents can be involved either in school or away from school as their schedules and level of comfort dictate.

- Use parents as resources.

- Provide opportunities for student and their families to share their culture, and then use that knowledge to scaffold new learning.

The goal of these recommendations would be to encourage beliefs and practices related to culturally relevant teaching that would go with teachers into the classroom and become part of their pedagogical style, ultimately impacting the manner in which they plan and implement instruction for their students. As was revealed in this study, teachers acknowledged that they are responsible for providing for their students' learning. Therefore, the implication is that shaping teacher beliefs should serve as a beginning point. Culturally relevant teaching needs to becomes more salient as our classrooms

become racially and ethnically more diverse. As June stated, she had formed beliefs (stereotypes) about students of races different from her as a result of a class she was taking at the master's level. But not all teachers are in a position to attend graduate school, and waiting for teachers to pursue post-graduate studies only subjects marginalized students to unqualified teachers. Additionally, new teachers are not able to pursue advanced degrees as teaching experience is a requirement for admission. The implication can also be made that more opportunities for all teachers are needed, and especially for new teachers, to learn about culturally relevant teaching. Therefore, there should be a requirement for teachers to engage in on-going learning about their personal and professional beliefs about students occurring within each school.

Throughout this research study, data were collected related to the literacy practices that teachers employ. Teachers demonstrated their ability to use literacy practices that engage students in learning to read and write. These were practices that teachers referred to as best practices and indicated that they were research based. These practices engaged students in learning in various ways. The teachers in this study also stated that it was important to plan lessons that built on their students' prior knowledge. They reported that recognizing and building on the knowledge that students bring to school is considered prior knowledge. This knowledge is referred to in the literature as cultural knowledge and using it in teaching is known as culturally relevant teaching.

Limitations of this Study

One limitation of this study rests with the fact that it was limited to a one year time frame and was limited to teachers and students in only six classrooms. A total of six

teachers were selected for this study, two teachers from each of the intermediate grade levels (grades 3, 4, and 5) from both high poverty schools in the Southeastern region of the USA. Limiting the study to six teacher participants was beneficial in that I was able to do an in-depth study of teacher practices; however, it eliminated the generalizability of the findings to a broader population.

The current state of American schools and the mandates of NCLB present another study limitation. Teachers in this research study spent a portion of their week engaged in test prep for the end-of-grade assessments in reading and math. Having to plan such engagement prevented teachers from fully engaging in practices they believe to be appropriate for students, especially African American males.

Another limitation involves the fact that the diversity questionnaire used in this study, although used as a means to providing responses related to their views about their students, was difficult to analyze and integrate into the interview and observation data collected for this study. Nevertheless, the diversity questionnaire was used as a way to triangulate and check the consistency of data about the personal and professional beliefs about diversity from the teachers in this study.

Challenges to Conducting this Research

Prior to the onset of this research study, the participants were explicitly informed as to the purpose of the study. Four of the participants in the study were White and I am African American. One challenge that emerged was the teachers' lack of use of the words African American males and Black males throughout the study. I am not sure if my race served as a factor in this avoidance. I do understand that as our society becomes more

diverse the issues of political correctness become more salient. However, many times specific interview questions were asked by me that required responses from the participants related to their African American males, and they were only were answered as they applied to all students. It was difficult to be sure they were providing information about their literacy practices specific to their African American males, and additional probing was needed, which many times prolonged the interview sessions.

My decision to be a participant observer was a strategic decision for me that was influenced not by me as the researcher but me as the former classroom teacher. It has been my experience that it is difficult to convince a classroom teacher that adults moving in and out of their classroom are not there to criticize their practices or teaching style. I think trust continued to be an underlying factor throughout the study until participants read their cases during member checking. However, once they read the cases I had written about them they became much more open with me in follow-up interviews and I was able to obtain additional information from them about their literacy practices, relationships, and interactions specific to their African American males.

Future Research Needs

Villegas and Lucas (2002a, 2002b) explain teachers' development of sociocultural consciousness to be a crucial step in the process to becoming culturally relevant, because it is all about the teacher being the instructional leader that makes decisions about pedagogy that impact all students. I too see it as an important step and the best place to begin the journey towards becoming teachers of diverse populations, as this leads to teachers understanding that students' cultural experiences are different. This development

is more of an abstract undertaking; therefore, future research needs begin with understanding how teachers develop their sociocultural consciousness would be beneficial.

Studying these teachers has provided a window into a range of practices and experiences which opens the doors for further research on literacy and culturally relevant teaching. Appropriate related research conducted studying how African American males learn was difficult to locate in the research literature; therefore more work on the topic is a possibility. Further research is needed to get a better understanding of culturally relevant teaching, perhaps at a school specifically constructed as a culturally relevant environment. These research opportunities would also allow the researcher to explore other content area subjects to understand how teachers make learning relevant for African American males.

As Marsh and Russell Elementary schools were not identified as culturally relevant schools and practices related to the implementation of culture were a result of teachers' efforts to meet students' needs and not the mandates of the administrator further research is needed in schools specifically organized as a culturally relevant school to get a better understanding of teacher practices associated with culturally relevant teaching.

Future research efforts to explore culturally relevant teaching practices may be accomplished using ethnography or phenomenological research. Ethnographic research conducted at a school identified as a culturally relevant school to understand the culture would be beneficial in understanding how African American male achievement is

impacted. Phenomenological research could be used as a methodology to give meaning to teachers' understanding of culturally relevant teaching.

Conclusion

Throughout the United States there has been a persistent gap in the achievement between races in which the African American male remains at the bottom of all achievement measures. Results of this research offers a window into the beliefs and practices of teachers of African American males that may be used to address this gap in achievement because it was revealed that teachers are aware that refocusing their efforts is needed to ensure the success of their African American male students.

Throughout this research study, data were collected related to the literacy and culturally relevant practices that teachers employ which account for within and cross-cases. Teachers demonstrated their ability to use literacy practices that engage students in learning to read and write. The findings indicate that more work is needed in helping teachers in their efforts to become more socioculturally conscious. It is a result of this consciousness that enables teachers to adequately and knowledgeably meet the needs of the diverse students represented in today's schools.

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Appendix A

Post-Nomination Teacher Contact Protocol

Principle Investigator: Dr. Barbara Levin
Student Researcher: Cynthia B. Wooten

Post-Nomination Teacher Contact Protocol (face to face, phone, or email)

I am a doctoral student (student researcher) in the School of Education, Curriculum and Instruction at UNCG with a research interest in literacy. My dissertation study involves studying exemplary teacher of African American males in grades 3-5. I am interested in understanding how teachers like yourself *tailor* or make reading and writing instruction *relevant* for the African American male learners in your classrooms. Also, an existing body of research speaks to *relevance* as including the *cultural knowledge* of students in the curriculum planning as a way of addressing success for all students. I am particularly interested in understanding how African American male learners' *cultural knowledge* is integrated into your literacy instruction as well.

You were identified as a teacher who consistently provides exemplary literacy instruction for the African American males in your classes. Six teachers will be selected as exemplary teachers. With your consent I would like to include you as one of the teacher participants in my study.

In an attempt to honor your schedule please let me know of a time in July or early August (prior to August 24) that you are available to meet and discuss your participation in my study (signed consent, completion of initial interview, and set up observation schedules).

Appendix B

Conversation with Principals

Principle Investigator: Dr. Barbara Levin
310 Curry Bldg, UNCG Campus
336-334-3443
bblevin@uncg.edu

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education, Curriculum and Instruction at UNCG with a research interest in literacy. My dissertation study involves studying exemplary teacher of African American males in grades 3-5. I am interested in understanding how teachers *tailor* or make reading and writing instruction *relevant* for the African American male learners in their particular classroom setting. Also, an existing body of research speaks to *relevance* as including the ***cultural knowledge*** of students into the curriculum planning as a way of addressing success for all students. I am particularly interested in understanding how African American male learners' ***cultural knowledge*** is integrated into teachers' literacy instruction as well.

_____ was identified as a teacher who demonstrates the above criteria and a potential teacher
Teacher's Name
participant for this study. Participations selected for the study will be observed six different days over a period of two weeks during the literacy instruction block. These observations will involve minimal to no distractions to students. I will also conduct an initial interview (approximately 45 minutes) with study participants and six other interview (approximately 30 minutes each) following each observation. I would like to ask your permission to conduct my research in your school. I have obtained official consent from GCS to conduct my research study (present letter). Should you consent, I am asking you to verbally verify that _____ study meets the criteria described above? You are also giving me permission to
Teacher's Name
contact _____ and inform them of my research study and explain the role they will potentially
Teacher's Name
serve should they consent.

My study is tentatively scheduled to begin around the beginning of July 2009 and conclude December 2009. I will be in your school for two weeks observing _____ during his/her
Teacher's Name
scheduled literacy block on _____.
Date/Time

I will pause now to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you for granting permission, I will leave with you a copy of the proposal that GCS approved complete with my contact information.

Appendix C

Initial Teacher Interview Protocol

INTERVIEWEE'S NAME: _____

SCHOOL/LOCATION: _____

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education, Teacher Education at UNCG with a research interest in literacy. My dissertation study involves understanding how teachers ***tailor*** or make reading and writing instruction ***relevant*** for the African American male learners in their classrooms. An existing body of research speaks to ***relevance*** as including the ***cultural knowledge*** of students into the curriculum planning as a way of addressing success for all students. I am particularly interested in understanding how African American male learners' ***cultural knowledge*** is integrated into your literacy instruction as well. This first interview is to gather information about you as a teacher related to your teaching philosophy, literacy practices, assessment practices, etc. This information will be used for my dissertation study only. All information will be treated as confidential and pseudonym will be used for your name. This interview should last about 45-60 minutes. In an effort to accurately represent your answer responses I will audiotape the interview.

Grand Tour Question

1. Tell me why you think you were nominated as a teacher who is successful with African American males?

Additional Questions/Probes

Reading Philosophy

2. What are some of your beliefs about how students learn to read? About African American males learn to read?

Literacy Assessment

3. What role does assessment serve in literacy development of African American males?
4. When have you decided that assessments are needed?
5. What types of interest inventories have you utilized to gather information about the reading interest of African American males? How did this information your teaching?

Literacy Instruction

6. What type of collaboration do you initiate or engage in to discuss literacy instruction for African American males?
7. What is the one major obstacle you face in teaching African American males how to read? How do you overcome this obstacle?
8. How do you differentiate instruction for African American males?
9. How is writing incorporated into literacy instruction?
10. How much time is allocated for African American males in your class to help in literacy development?
11. How do other adults assist in reading development? Who are these adults?
12. How is outside reading monitored?
13. List ways that you motivate readers?
14. Describe ways that you motivate reluctant readers?

Students' Personal Development

15. How do you demonstrate a sense of personal caring to African American males?
16. How do you help African American males solve personal problems?
17. How do you exhibit a sense of personal caring about students? What does this look like during reading?

Appendix D

Post-Observation Interview Protocol

1. Please share with me any literacy related matters that have occurred since our last visit (content, environment, administrative decisions, etc).

Probes

- Please explain the reason for this change?
- What was the outcome?
- How did the students respond to this change?
- How did the African American males respond to the change?

2. Please share the relevance of any artifacts that you have collected.

Probes

- Why did you think they were important?
- Is there any difference between the one you are sharing and the one for African American males?

3. Please explain today's lesson.

Probes

- Why did you decide to structure your lesson this way?
- What specific decision did you make related to African American males about this lesson?
- How did you assess the success of your African American males in today's lesson?
- What changes would you make to this lesson in reference to African American males before you teach it again?

4. What types of parental involvement has occurred since our last meeting?

5. Is there anything that you would like to share before we end for today?

Closure: Thank you for your time today. My next observation is scheduled for _____.
If anything happens and I cannot honor that time I will call you as far in advance as

possible to cancel. Should you need to talk to me before our next meeting you can reach me at 336-273-7281 or woot2506@bellsouth.net.

Classroom Observation Protocol

Teacher's Name _____   Date: _____

School _____   Grade _____

1. **Lesson Design**
   a. Develops Prior Knowledge
   b. Motivational Experience
   c. Connects to Other Learning
   d. States Lesson Objectives/Goals
   e. Other

2. **Application/Assessment**
   a. Worksheets
   b. Projects/Performance
   c. Other

3. **Closure**
   a. Review (Teacher)
   b. Engagement (Student)
   c. Other

4. **Classroom Climate/Culture**
   a. Active Participation from all Students
   b. Teacher/Student Respect
   c. Risk-Taking
   d. Parent Involvement
   e. Other

5. **Mode of Instruction**
   (type of engagement)
   a. Whole Class
   b. Small Group
   c. Lecture
   d. Centers
   e. Other

6. **Teacher Expectation**
   a. Scaffolding
   b. Explicit Instruction
   c. Feedback
   d. Higher Level Questioning/ Engagement
   e. Other

7. **Classroom Management**
   a. Morning Meeting
   b. Equity
   c. Other

NOTES:	Notes/Hunches

Appendix F

Data Collection Schedule

Classroom Observations and Post-Observation Interviews Schedule

Marsh Elementary	**Russell Elementary**
R Week 1—August 25-31	Week 1—August 25-31
B Week 2—September 1 – 8	Week 2—September 1 - 8
R Week 3—September 9-15	Week 3—September 9-15
B Week 4—September 16-22	Week 4—September 16-22
R Week 5—September 23-29	Week 5—September 23-29
B Week 6—September 30- October 6	Week 6—September 30-October 6
R Week 7—October 7-13	Week 7—October 7-13
B Week 8—October 14-21	Week 8—October 14-21
R Week 9—October 22-28	Week 9—October 21-28

***October 29-December 22—Make-up observations and interviews

R=Red Weeks—Observing Teachers A, B, and C
B=Blue Weeks—Observing Teachers D, E, and F

Appendix G

Five Effective Teacher Attitudes

First Attitude: Demonstrating Caring and Kindness

This attitude pertains to the persona of the teachers. Statements were written in the essays that discussed a realness and genuineness about their teachers' attitudes toward caring and kindness. The effective teachers willingly shared emotions and feelings (i.e., enthusiasm, affection, patience, sadness, disapproval) as well as a sincere interest and care about their students. Communication was also valued in their past classrooms and feelings were openly expressed by both the children and teachers.

Second Attitude: Sharing Responsibility

This attitude focuses on the ability of the teacher to establish a shared environment. The teacher candidates emphasized that an effective teacher must not be overly possessive or need complete control of the children and environment. It is important to allow students both responsibility and freedom within the classroom community. Comments were also shared that both the teachers and students need to contribute to the learning environment for a relationship of closeness and acceptance to develop.

Third Attitude: Sensitively Accepting Diversity

This attitude deals with empathy and the importance of understanding your students. The teacher candidates identified sensitivity, acceptance, and encouragement as critical when approaching the issues associated with the diversity of the children. The candidates found effective teachers understood their students without analyzing or judging. One group shared the comment that teachers have the ability to make each child feel special by verbally sharing individual compliments in front of the class. Another group discussed a teacher who kept a written record of how many times she talked and listened to each child and how that made students feel valued and important.

Fourth Attitude: Fostering Individualized Instruction

This attitude discusses the ability to provide meaningful learning opportunities for all students. The teacher candidates appreciated teachers who helped them succeed with their learning experiences. They also stated that other teachers used intimidation in front of the class which resulted in a reluctance to volunteer. Particular groups felt strongly that effective teachers believe every child can and will learn. Their teachers did not point out

weakness, but instead stressed individual strengths and talents. The preservice teachers credited their teachers for encouraging positive self-confidence and self- esteem.

Fifth Attitude: Encouraging Creativity

This attitude stresses the importance of stimulating the students' creativity. Teacher candidates talked about teachers who listened to their ideas and suggestions for lessons and activities. The effective teachers were open to students' ways of being imaginative and also utilized many approaches to learning. The students appreciated and were personally motivated when teachers designed lessons that considered their interests, skills, and needs.

Ineffective Teacher Attitudes

Elements of learning destruction that were mentioned in the teacher candidates' essays included placing too much emphasis on grades or giving the one and only correct answer to questions. Consequently, the students were overly concerned about finding the correct answers or trying to read their teachers' mind to say what she wanted to hear. Students also were overwhelmed when a teacher added too many details or directions to assignments. With little opportunity for creativity, the students became disengaged from the learning process.

For the teacher candidates there was also a negative response to rewards, bribes, punishments, restriction of choices, and outward signs of competition between the students. Competition created a burden that interfered with learning since the students only worked for the grades and praise from their teachers. Some of their teachers used extrinsic motivators or toke rewards and these methods reduced the students' desire to learn and even lowered their achievement levels. Many preservice teachers felt a more effective method involved building on the students' intrinsic motivation by providing a fun classroom environment. (Gourneau, 2005, pp. 3-4)

Appendix H

Twelve Characteristics of an Effective Teacher

Characteristic 1: Prepared

The most effective teachers come to class each day ready to teach.

1. It is easy to learn in their classes because they are ready for the day.
2. They don't waste instructional time. They start class on time. They teach for the entire class period.
3. Time flies in their classes because students are engaged in learning-i.e., not bored, less likely to fall asleep.

Characteristic 2: Positive

The most effective teachers have optimistic attitudes about teaching and about students. They

1. See the glass as half full (look on the positive side of every situation)
2. Make themselves available to students
3. Communicate with students about their progress
4. Give praise and recognition
5. Have strategies to help students act positively toward one another 65

Characteristic 3: Hold High Expectations

The most effective teachers set no limits on students and believe everyone can be successful. They

1. Hold the highest standards
2. Consistently challenge their students to do their best
3. Build students' confidence and teach them to believe in themselves

Characteristic 4: Creative

The most effective teachers are resourceful and inventive in how they teach their classes. They

1. Kiss a pig if the class reaches its academic goals
2. Wear a clown suit

3. Agree to participate in the school talent show
4. Use technology effectively in the classroom

Characteristic 5: Fair

The most effective teachers handle students and grading fairly. They

1. Allow all students equal opportunities and privileges
2. Provide clear requirements for the class
3. Recognize that "fair" doesn't necessarily mean treating everyone the same but means giving every student an opportunity to succeed
4. Understand that not all students learn in the same way and at the same rate

Characteristic 6: Display a Personal Touch

The most effective teachers are approachable. They

1. Connect with students personally
2. Share personal experiences with their classes
3. Take personal interest in students and find out as much as possible about them
4. Visit the students' world (sit with them in the cafeteria; attend sporting events, plays, and other events outside normal school hours)

Characteristic 7: Cultivate a Sense of Belonging

The most effective teachers have a way of making students feel welcome and comfortable in their classrooms.

1. Students repeatedly mentioned that they felt as though they belonged in classrooms taught by effective teachers.
2. The students knew they had a good teacher who loved teaching and preferred it to other occupations.

Characteristic 8: Compassionate

The most effective teachers are concerned about students' personal problems and can relate to them and their problems. Numerous stories established how the sensitivity and compassion of caring teachers affected them in profound and lasting ways.

Characteristic9: Have a Sense of Humor

The most effective teachers do not take everything seriously and make learning fun. They

1. Use humor to break the ice in difficult situations
2. Bring humor into the everyday classroom
3. Laugh with the class (but not at the expense of any, particular student)

Characteristic 10: Respect Students

The most effective teachers do not deliberately embarrass students. Teachers who give the highest respect, get the highest respect. They

1. Respect students' privacy when returning test papers
2. Speak to students in private concerning grades or conduct
3. Show sensitivity to feelings and consistently avoid situations that unnecessarily embarrass students

Characteristic 11: Forgiving

The most effective teachers do not hold grudges. They

1. Forgive students for inappropriate behavior
2. Habitually start each day with a clean slate
3. Understand that a forgiving attitude is essential to reaching difficult students
4. Understand that disruptive or antisocial behavior can quickly turn a teacher against a student, but that refusing to give up on difficult students can produce success

Characteristic 12: Admit Mistakes

The most effective teachers are quick to admit being wrong. They

1. Apologize to mistakenly accused students
2. Make adjustments when students point out errors in grading or test material that has not been assigned. (Walker, 2008, pp. 64-67)

Appendix I

Six Components of Culturally Relevant Teaching

Gaining Sociocultural Consciousness

Sociocultural dysconsciousness ⟶ ⟶ ⟶ Sociocultural consciousness

Worldview:

Unreflective way of thinking that takes one's worldview as universal; lack of awareness that one's experiences in life, as mediated by factors such as social class, race/ethnicity, and gender, influence how one comes to see the world.

Worldview:

Heightened awareness that there are multiple perspectives on the world and that a person's worldview reflects his/her location in the social order relative to such factors as class, race/ethnicity, and gender; clear insight into one's perspective and how it has been shaped by one's biography.

Power differentials:

Unawareness of power differentials in society and how existing differences in power are structured into the standard practices of the various institutions—including the education system; uncritical belief in the neutrality of school practices; unquestioned adherence to a meritocratic view of American society, which supports justification of existing inequalities.

Power differentials:

Profound understanding that power is differentially distributed in society and that social institutions, including the educational system, are typically organized to advantage the more powerful; critical of existing inequalities.

Developing an Affirming Attitude toward Students from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds

Deficit perspective ⟶⟶⟶⟶⟶ Affirming perspective

Attitude toward the dominant culture:

The culture (e.g., ways of thinking, talking, behaving) of the white middle class is inherently superior and, therefore, the legitimate standard for U.S. society and its institutions.

Attitude toward the dominant culture:

The culture of the white middle class is valid, as are the cultures of other groups. The greater status of this dominant culture derives from the power of the white middle class, not from an inherent superiority.

Attitude toward cultural diversity:

Ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that differ from the dominant cultural norms are inherently inferior. Cultural differences are problems.

Attitude toward cultural diversity:

Ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that differ from the dominant cultural norm are valid (not inherently inferior or deficient). Cultural differences are to be respected and affirmed.

Attitude toward culturally different students:

Students who don't conform to the dominant culture are "deficient" and in need of "fixing." Emphasis is placed on what students are lacking.

Attitude toward culturally different students:

All students—not just those who conform to the dominant cultural norms—have experiences, knowledge, and skills that can be used as resources to help them learn even more.

Developing the Commitment and Skills to Act as Agents of Change

Teachers as technicians ⟶ ⟶ ⟶ ⟶ Teachers as agents of change

View of schools:

Schools are neutral settings that function separately from the struggle for power in society and are not affected by this struggle. They provide all students with an equal opportunity to prove their merit.

View of schools:

Schools are intricately connected to society. Typically, they reproduce existing social inequalities by privileging the culture and interests of the dominant group. However, they have the potential to serve as sites for social transformation.

View of teaching and teachers:

Teaching is principally a technical activity that involves the application of clearly defined instructional procedures or methods. Standard school practices are accepted uncritically. There is no need for teachers to develop a personal vision. The role of teachers is to impart to students the knowledge and skills that are packaged in the school curriculum. Teachers should strive to be "objective" in their words and deeds.

View of teaching and teachers:

Teaching involves much more than applying instructional methods. It is essentially a political and ethical activity. Teachers are participants in a larger struggle to promote equity in society. They must develop a personal vision of why they are teachers and what is important in education and in the larger society. As agents of change, they assume responsibility for identifying and interrupting inequitable school practices. Their actions are never neutral; they either support or challenge the existing social order.

Embracing Constructivist Views of Knowledge, Learning, and Teaching

Transmission Views ⟶⟶⟶⟶⟶ Constructionist Views

Knowledge:

A reality that exists independent of the knower and is waiting to be discovered. "Scientific" methods of discovery, which are considered neutral and objective, lead all knowers to the same conclusions. Objectivity of methods is said to eliminate personal and collective bias. Knowledge is seen as discrete, fixed, and disinterested.

School Knowledge:

Body of accepted facts, concepts, principles, and theories discovered by experts in the different disciplines and packaged into the school curriculum according to subject area. The content of the curriculum is organized sequentially from basic facts and skills to more complex processes and ideas. The curriculum is believed to be fixed, agreed upon, and neutral. Teachers and textbooks are the principal sources of information for students.

School Learning:

A relatively passive act of receiving the content of the school curriculum; memorizing what teachers say and what textbooks report. Students are seen as empty receptacles into which knowledge is poured. The more knowledge a student retains, the more successful a learner he or she is perceived to be.

Teaching:

Transmitting or delivering the content of the school curriculum to students. Emphasis is on "covering" the content of the school curriculum and testing students' recall. The uniform method of instruction involves presentation by teacher and practice by students until mastery is shown on tests. Differences among students are ignored or treated as deficiencies. Use of rewards and punishments to motivate students to learn.

Knowledge:

Always filtered through knowers' frames of reference, which are influenced by their experiences in the world. Given the subjectivity involved in the act of knowing, its product—knowledge—is necessarily a human construction. Knowledge is depicted as value-laden, partial, interpretive, and tentative.

School Knowledge:

The meanings students give to the content of the school curriculum (e.g., collections of facts, concepts, principles, theories, and skills) based on their preexisting knowledge and experiences. Because the curriculum is believed to be value-laden and partial, schools have the responsibility to help students understand the perspective(s) reflected in and excluded from it.

School Learning:

An active process by which students give meaning to new input based on their preexisting knowledge and experience. While each student must construct his or her understanding of new ideas and experiences in his or her own mind, the new conceptions originate in social interactions within a given learning community. Students are seen as builders or constructors of knowledge.

Teaching:

Supporting students in their attempts to make sense of new input by helping them build bridges between their prior knowledge and experiences and that input. Emphasis is on monitoring students' developing understanding of ideas. Teachers motivate students to learn by engaging them in purposeful activities, such as solving problems. Differences among students are acknowledged and treated as resources for learning. The complex nature of learning demands that teachers continuously adjust their plans of action.

**What Teachers Need to Know about Their Students
to Help Them Build Bridges to Learning**

Students' lives outside school

- Family life: family makeup; immigration history, language use, mobility, educational history, child-rearing philosophy and practices, major activities, labor history, skills and knowledge used regularly.
- Social life: use of leisure time, favorite activities, language use, what students excel at, interests, hobbies, concerns.

Students' perceptions of school knowledge and belief in the potential of schooling to improve their lives in the future

- Past experiences in school with subject matter and impressions of school knowledge derived from these experiences (e.g., interesting/boring; relevant/irrelevant, meaningful/meaningless).
- Trust that schools will improve their adult lives.

Students' relationships to subject matter

- Experience of subject matter knowledge outside school.
- Preexisting knowledge and beliefs about specific instructional topics.
- Areas of potential conflict between students' cultural values and the cultural demands built into the various school subjects.

Community life

- Demographic profile: economic makeup, racial/ethnic composition, linguistic makeup, patterns of language use, patterns of segregation.
- Formal and informal holders of power and influence.
- Available resources: businesses, institutions, agencies, people.
- Perceptions of school and school knowledge and participation in schools.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

- *Involving all students in the construction of knowledge*

    > Inquiry projects
    > Having students working collaboratively in small groups of mixed ability
    > Authentic dialogues
    > Having students assume increasing responsibility for their own learning

- *Building on students' personal and cultural strengths*

    > Helping students access prior knowledge and beliefs
    > Building on students' interests
    > Building on students' linguistic resources
    > Using examples and analogies from students' lives
    > Using appropriate instructional materials
    > Tapping community resources
    > Creating different paths to learning by using varied instructional activities

- *Helping students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives*

- *Using varied assessment practices that promote learning*

- *Making the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students*