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YOUTH BEAR WITNESS TO MENTORING OF THE BLACK CHURCH FOR COLLEGE

READINESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Mary Louise Buckley

August 2017

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
ED.D. IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

Presented by:

Mary Louise Buckley
DMIN, Urban Ministry, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2005
MDIV, Divinity, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2000

June 30, 2017

YOUTH BEAR WITNESS TO MENTORING OF THE BLACK CHURCH FOR COLLEGE
READINESS

_____, Chair
Darius Prier, PhD
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations & Leadership
Duquesne University

_____, Member
Anne Marie FitzGerald, EdD
Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Foundations & Leadership
Duquesne University

_____, Member
William H. Curtis, DMIN
Senior Pastor
Mt. Ararat Baptist Church

Program Director
Connie M. Moss, EdD
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations Leadership and Director, Ed.D. in Educational
Leadership Program
Duquesne University School of Education

ABSTRACT

YOUTH BEAR WITNESS TO MENTORING OF THE BLACK CHURCH FOR COLLEGE

READINESS

By

Mary Louise Buckley

August 2017

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Darius Prier

      This dissertation in practice examines the college readiness of five African American

high school male students in urban schools in Pittsburgh, PA based on their participation in a

middle school mentoring program sponsored by an urban Black church. Situated within Michael

Dantley's critical spirituality theory and critical race theory, the author analyzed youths' counter-

narrative experiences of being mentored for college readiness in the Black church. The students

had informal conversations with the researcher using a grounded theory approach to the semi-

structured interview format. Students found mentors to be relatable advocates to their lived

experiences in schools. In addition, the mentoring program provided students motivation for

future aspirations to attend college. Finally, faith inspired students for success in school; even as

they continued to grow in understanding the fullness of what faith means for their lives.

Keywords: critical spirituality, critical race theory, Black church, urban education, Black males,
and mentoring

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all African American males and their positive, productive, and successful educational elementary, middle school, high school, trade school and college lives. Your voices are important and you can succeed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I discuss why I chose my problem of practice, including my experiences growing up in public schools in Memphis, TN. As an overview of my problem of practice, I discuss the social maladies facing black males in education including: racism; incarceration; societal violence; the school to-prison-pipeline; out of school suspensions; and the low education levels of parents. Finally, I discuss the role of Black urban churches in helping Black male students graduate from high school college ready.

Introduction

Growing up in the St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis, TN, I witnessed the leadership and strength of the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement. I was sixteen years old when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated while fighting for the civil rights of sanitation workers in Memphis. My uncle, Henry James Buckley, was one of those sanitation workers.

The Black churches in Memphis and throughout the South provided safe havens for civil rights' activists, both Black and White, during the Civil Rights Movement. The Black Pastors served as key stakeholders in the fight for civil rights. My Pastor, the late Rev. Dr. Samuel Herring, Sr., served as one of the key civil rights stakeholders in Memphis. Rev. Herring and Rev. King were personal friends. My Pastor served as the pulpit worship leader on April 3, 1968 when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached his last sermon.

While growing up in Memphis, the education of Black students was always a key issue. The civil rights of Black students were always under scrutiny. Black students were often educated in old dilapidated buildings that threatened the lives of the students and their teachers

and administrators. Other challenges that Black students encountered included out dated books, no computers, and few college preparatory classes.

I attended and graduated from Lester High School, a Memphis Public School, located in the urban community of Binghampton. My mother was an educator who taught first grade students in the Memphis Public School system for almost thirty years. My four siblings also attended and graduated from Lester High School. My church and our parents provided support for us and we all attended college. We were the exception and not the norm. How many students didn't graduate and attend college because they didn't have the support of their parents or the Black church?

Fast forward my life forty-seven years since I graduated from high school and many of the same problems that I faced in urban public schools still exists. Black students are still attending schools in dilapidated buildings, and their text books are outdated. Computers are still scarce in predominately urban schools who have a large enrollment of Black students. Many Black students are not graduating from public high school, and not attending universities or trade schools. This is a social justice issue that needs to be addressed. As a minister of the Gospel and a community educator this is a matter of injustice.

The Black Church can be even more forceful in helping to right the injustice concerning the education of Black students in public schools. I agree with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his letter to the White clergy in Birmingham, Alabama while he was in prison fighting for Civil Rights in 1963. Dr. King stated, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here" (King, 1963, p. 1). I am addressing this problem because injustice is here.

My areas of expertise are in urban ministry and education. I've served as a Baptist Minister at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church in East Pittsburgh for more than eighteen years. I

coordinated the Male Mentoring program at the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center from 2003-2005. I continue to sit on the Advisory (Core) Committee for this mentoring program that now serves middle school girls and middle school boys. I earned a Doctor of Ministry degree in Urban Ministry from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2005. I've mentored African American males for more than thirty-five years. Finally, I coordinated the Knowledge Connection program, computer learning centers, for children living in seven public housing communities in Allegheny County.

Black urban churches play a significant role in improving high school graduation rates of Black males from public high schools. Black churches' community involvement increases public school success. Regular church attendance helps eliminate the academic achievement gap. Black churches provide a community where Black boys are nurtured and valued as human beings. In my eighteen years as an urban minister, I've seen Black boys thrive and excel in school when the Black urban church embraces them. The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, where I serve as an Associate Minister, has collaborated with the Pittsburgh Public Schools to help Black boys thrive and excel since 2003.

Rev. Dr. William Curtis, the Senior Pastor of Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, decided to first mentor African American males because while he walked the halls of the Florence Reizenstein Middle School in 2003, he noticed the males especially seemed to be despondent and needed more guidance than the African American females. More than 91% of the students at Reizenstein were African American, and more than 51% of those students were male (Buckley, 2005, p. 12). The Mentoring Core Planning Committee thought it was important to mentor the predominately African American male students, because of their dim future of survival and success in America. Janice Hale, a sociologist, reflects on this critical issue, "The most critical

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issue facing the African American community and American society as a whole is improving the futures of African American males" (Hale, 2001, p. 37). Hale further points out that one third of all the African American males in America are either in prison, on probation, or on parole (Hale, 2001).

This male mentoring project was developed to intentionally pair Christian male mentors with African American male students at the Reizenstein Middle School. It was hoped that the grades, attendance and conduct of the African American male students would improve. A byproduct of these unions would enhance the chances that the African American male students would succeed in life, and avoid going to jail, a tragic but realistic probability.

Social Maladies Facing Black Males in Education

There are many social maladies and causal factors facing African American male students in public education. The causal factors include: poverty, racism, school-to prison-pipeline, the out of school suspensions, and the low education levels of parents of African American students. African American students come from some of the economically poorest homes in this country. "Black children are far more likely to live in households that are low-income, extremely poor, food-insecure, or receiving long term welfare support" (Cook, 2015, p. 6).

Racism appears in the form of tracking students to deny African American students access to AP courses. Tracking is "designating students for separate educational paths based on their academic performance as teens or younger" (Kohli, 2014, p. 3). "The DoE and advocates have said tracking perpetuates a modern system of segregation that favors white students and keeps students of color, many of them black, from long-term equal achievement" (Kohli, 2014). The U. S. does not have a policy for tracking students.

Incarceration is a social ill faced by Black males in urban education. According to Michelle Alexander, once you become a felon in our criminal justice system you lose all rights. She states, "Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service-are suddenly legal" (Alexander, 2012, p.30). In making this comment, Alexander argues that Black males are denied basic rights, including education, when they become felons in our criminal justice system.

There is a race gap in high school honors classes. A recent study in the *National Journal* revealed that only 57% of African American students have access to advanced math and science courses compared to 81% Asian students and 71% White students (Quinton, 2014, p. 2). In the New Jersey South Orange Maplewood School District only 11.6% of African American students were enrolled in an AP math class compared to 73.2% of White students, even though the total enrollment of the school is 44.1% White students and 47. 4% African American students (Kohli, 2014, p. 5). In the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the district enrollment is 54% African American and 33% White, but the AP enrollment is 35% African American and 55% White (Polke, 2014, p. 5). Similarly, in the Penn Hills School district the enrollment is 60% African American and 34% White, but the AP enrollment is 33% African American and 66% White (Polke, 2014).

Violence is another social ill faced by Black males in urban education. There is an urgency for Black churches to help Black males achieve academically and graduate from public high school college-ready. African American males are dying due to violence in our country. "Black victims of homicide were more likely to be male (85%) and between the ages 17 and 29 (51%)" (Harrell, 2007, p. 1). This same report revealed that younger Black males are usually victims of violence instead of older Black males.

The school-to-prison pipeline is also a social malady that African American male students face in education. African American students are pushed out of schools and into prisons. "The School-to-Prison Pipeline is one of the most urgent challenges in education today" (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., 2005, p. 1). Exclusionary discipline policies of some schools are the cause of many African American students, especially boys being expelled from schools. "Many of these policies not only label children as criminals, but they encourage children to lose hope, making it more likely that they will wind up behind bars" (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., 2005, p. 10). Essentially, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund is suggesting that the school-to-prison pipeline allows African American students to see themselves as criminals and not students. Consequently, the African American students lose hope of completing their education.

Out of school suspensions add to the social maladies that African American male students face in education. Black students receive a disproportionate number of out of school suspensions compared to White students. "They make up 16 percent of school enrollment, but account for 32 percent of students who receive in-school suspensions, 42 percent of students who receive multiple out-of-school suspensions and 34 percent of students who are expelled" (Cook, 2014, p. 5). Those suspended are primarily Black males.

Finally, the low education levels of parents are also included in the social maladies of African American students in education. African American parents receive fewer college degrees than White parents. A recent study revealed that 21% of White parents receive Bachelor degrees compared to 13% of African American parents (Cook, 2014, p. 2). The same study showed that 12% of White parents receive Advanced degrees compared to 6% of African American parents (Cook, 2014). "Black parents may have less access to materials, have less

time because of job and family obligations or be less comfortable reading" (Cook, 2014, p. 3).

Cook is insisting that African American students are at a disadvantage due to the lack of

educational opportunities not afforded to their parents, as has been the case with White parents.

Subsequently, many African American parents have been less able to provide the necessary

resources for their children to succeed academically. Therefore, Cook is saying that African

American parents may feel that their lack of education is an obstacle for their children receiving

an equitable education.

The root causes of African American students' institutional and social challenges started

many years ago. The root causes include slavery (1619 – 1865), Plessy v. Ferguson (1895),

Brown v. Board of Education (1954), and the Civil Rights Act (1964). (Spring, 2011). During

slavery, African Americans were not allowed the privilege to learn to read or write. When

Blacks attended public schools, they were in segregated schools throughout the country,

especially in the South. The Plessy vs. Ferguson case in 1895 confirmed "separate but equal

schools". "In 1896, the protection provided under the Fourteenth Amendment was severely

restricted by a U. S. Supreme Court decision that declared segregation of blacks from whites,

including segregation of schools, constitutional" (Spring, 2011, p. 185). This is a historical

argument, reminding us that African American students have endured institutional challenges in

public education as far back as slavery in this country (Spring, 2011). In this context, segregated

public schools were legally sanctioned.

The *Plessy* decision was upheld until the Supreme Court case, Brown v. Board of

Education in 1954. "The overturning of the "separate but equal" doctrine and a broader

application of the Fourteenth Amendment came in 1954 in the historic and controversial

Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*" (Spring, 2011, p. 388). The

Brown case demanded that schools be desegregated. "In 1955 the Supreme Court issued its enforcement decree for the desegregation of schools" (Spring, 2011. p. 388). However, it took ten years to enforce desegregation in schools. The *Brown* decision was not implemented until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. "Title IV and VI of the legislation were intended to end school segregation and provide authority for implementing the *Brown* decision" (Spring, 2011, p. 391). Title VI was the more important of the two. "Title VI, the most important section, established the precedent for using disbursement of government money as a means of controlling educational policies" (Spring, 2011, p. 391). According to Spring, this means it took ten years to enforce the desegregation of public schools in America, after the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954 (2011).

Black churches in urban areas play a significant role in improving high school graduation rates of black males from public high schools. Black churches' community involvement increases public school success. Regular church attendance helps eliminate the academic achievement gap, and school suspensions. Black churches provide a community where black boys are nurtured and valued as human beings.

While growing up in Memphis, TN, I witnessed the positive role the Black Churches played in the education of Black students in public schools. I also witnessed the negative roles that the public schools played in the education of Black students. This chapter has focused on some of the social maladies facing Black males in education. These social maladies include: racism; incarceration; violence; the school-to-prison pipeline; out of school suspensions; and the low education levels of African American parents. Regardless of these social maladies, the Black Church remains a beacon in the lives of Black students' success in school and life.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

In this chapter, I discuss literature related to my problem of practice, including current statistics, and promising programs. Next, I talk about the achievement gap, the tenets of African American spirituality, how spirituality differs from religion, critical spirituality, my research question, and the history of African American churches and education. Finally, I discuss the stakeholders, present work being done, and school and community partnerships.

Problem of Practice

My problem of practice focuses on how Black Churches can help prepare African American males to be college ready. Some African American males are underrepresented in being college-ready. The definition of college- ready for this research is, "Students who are considered equipped with the knowledge and skills deemed essential for success in university, college, and community-college programs" (Hidden Curriculum, 2014, p. 1). According to the National Center for Education statistics (NCES, 2007) there are disparities in postsecondary education. "Specifically, students who are of low socioeconomic status (SES), are African American, or Hispanic tend to be left out of postsecondary options" (NCES) (Parikh, 2013, p. 220). This same report noted that there is also a disparity in first generation college students. "Reid and Moore (2008) noted that oftentimes first generation urban college students are at a disadvantage when it comes to postsecondary access due to lack of support from schools, high expectations, and adequate academic preparation" (Parikh, 2013, p. 222). African American students are among those who are least equipped to succeed in college. The National Center for Education statistics provides evidence in the disparity of African American students being college

ready. Basically, Parikh reiterates that poor African American and Hispanic students are often not included in postsecondary education.

Students' incomes are negatively affected if they don't attend and graduate from college. Couturier and Cunningham (2006) noted the benefits of earning a college degree include, higher wages, employment benefits and a better life (Parikh, 2013, p. 221). According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) in agreement with the Minorities in Higher Education Report (2011), 16% of Black males hold Bachelor's Degrees compared to 12% Latino males, and 32% White males (Schott Foundation, 2015, p. 36). The Schott Foundation for Public Education in their Black Lives Matter Report (2015) "urges a national standard for high school graduation diplomas that indicate students' readiness for postsecondary schooling, rather than varied diplomas, including lesser quality diplomas that are often granted disproportionately to children of color, especially to Black males" (Schott Foundation, 2015, p. 36). Black males who don't earn a college degree are likely to earn lower wages, little or no employment benefits and have a harder life even if they graduate from high school.

In order for African American male students to be college-ready they must first graduate from high school. According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) there's a slight increase in the graduation rate of Black males from public high schools. However, the same report revealed:

> Black male students were at the bottom of four-year high school
>
> graduation rates in 35 of the 48 states and the District of Columbia where
>
> estimates could be projected for the 2012-2013 school year. (Schott
>
> Foundation, 2015, p. 2)

Black males are in a state of emergency in our public education system.

The Twenty-First Century Foundation, an African American endowed foundation, has a dream for Black men and boys' lives to improve. We Dream A World: The 2025 Vision for Black Men and Boys Report (2010) shares the dreams of the national collaborative (The 2025 Campaign for Black Men and Boys) of stakeholders who are working to improve the lives of Black men and Black boys. Improving the education of Black boys is key to their mission. This report concludes that "The precarious situation of our nation's Black men and boys is due to a complex intersection of race, class, structural/institutional racism, personal responsibility, and lack of equal access to opportunity" (The Twenty-First Century Foundation, 2010, p. 3).

The We Dream A World Report (Schott Foundation, 2010) concluded that "less than half of Black male students graduate from high school on time, and there are still more than two million Black men in America without a high school level education" (The Twenty-First Century Foundation, 2010, p. 10). However, this report found that some single-sex schools serving Black boys have been successful. They highlighted the Eagle Academy Foundation in the Bronx and Brooklyn, New York and the Urban Prep Academies in Chicago, Illinois. The Eagle Academy Foundation reported that 80 percent of their students graduated and continued to college. "In the spring of 2010, Urban Prep was recognized in national media for having 100 percent of its graduates accepted into college" (The Twenty-First Century Foundation, 2010, p. 16). Although there are numerous Black males who don't have a high school diploma, some Black males are graduating from high school and continuing to college due to single sex schools like the Eagle Academy Foundation in the Bronx and Brooklyn, New York, and the Urban Prep Academies in Chicago Illinois.

Urban high schools face several challenges in preparing their students for college. Those challenges according to an African American male student includes "Limited exposure to

advanced and AP courses, less rigorous assignments, inadequate resources (e.g., computers) and technology, and remedial courses that were required" (Strayhorn, 2015, p. 54). Urban high schools lack specific college-ready standards. "To turn college aspirations into college attainment, high schools and teachers need clear indicators of college readiness and clear performance standards for those indicators" (Roderick, et al., 2009, p. 185). Urban students need to know where they stand academically, and what progress needs to be made in order to be college-ready. "The standards must also give clear guidance about what students need to improve" (Roderick, et al., 2009, p. 185). Some urban high schools are now providing afterschool college readiness-programs.

The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federally funded afterschool college readiness program. "The federally funded program provided low-income and minority students information and access to services that lead to increased opportunities for post-secondary education" (Parkh, 2013, p. 121). One of GEAR UP's goal is to increase the number of minority students in post-secondary education.

Ten urban high school students who participated in a recent (2013) GEAR UP afterschool program were interviewed about the program. The students agreed that the college readiness after school program helped them realize the importance of knowing how to navigate the college system before they arrived on campus. The GEAR UP afterschool program provided college tours for the participants. During these college tours the high school students were allowed to talk to designated college students. One of the participants said, "I was excited to talk to somebody who went through the college experience" (Parkh, 2013, p, 125). College readiness should be approached differently for minority students.

Some scholars argue that there should be a culturally responsive approach to college readiness for students of color (SOC), (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Students of color include "Latina/o, African American/Black, Asian, and multi-ethnic students" (Welton & Martinez, 2014, p. 198). The students of color in this study felt that it's important to establish relationships built on trust and authentic caring. These relationships include teachers, administrators, but especially school counselors. One student said, "I think it would be better if they [counselors] would actually sit and talk to the people [students] that are gonna graduate this year so they can know [about how to apply to college and financial aid]" (Welton & Martinez, 2014, p. 216). Some students of color believe that it's important for school teachers, administrators, and especially school counselors to hear directly from them to discuss their concerns about attending college based on their culture.

Although, it is not realistic for every guidance counselor to meet one-on-one with every graduating student, it is important for them to communicate with all students who are college-ready, especially students of color. In addition to African American males in public high schools not being college ready there is also an achievement gap that hinders them from being academically eligible for college.

Achievement Gap

There is an achievement gap between African American males and their counterparts in America. The Schott Foundation's 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males (2012), reveals that it will take 50 years for Black males to catch up with their White counterparts in graduating from high school. Can we afford to take 50 years before we see equity in academic achievement for Black males in public high schools? This same report shows

that nationally 52% of Black males graduate from high school compared to 58% Latino males, and 78% White males (Schott, 2012, p. 7).

Jawanza Kunjufu argues that the achievement gap starts as early as the fourth grade for Black boys. He calls this theory the "Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome" (Kunjufu, 1982). He contends that Black boys make a poor transition between the primary and intermediate grades. According to Kunjufu, there are several contributing factors to the decline of Black boys' achievement scores and grades at the elementary education level. These contributing factors include: "a decline in parental involvement; an increase in peer pressure, a decline in nurturance; a decline in teacher expectation; a lack of understanding of learning styles, and a lack of male teachers" (Kunjufu, 1982, p. 9). The achievement gap for Black boys starts in the fourth grade, much earlier than previously thought, once they leave the primary grades, according to Jwanza Kunjufu.

In discussions of underachievement of African American males in public schools in America, one controversial issue has been the achievement gap. On the one hand, Pedro Noguera (2008) argues that the underachievement of African American males is due to the role and influence of environmental and cultural factors. "Learning how to influence the attitudes and behaviors of African American males must begin with an understanding of the ways in which structural and cultural forces shape their experiences in school and influence the construction of their identities" (Noguera, 2008, p. 452). In addition, Noguera, suggests that it's important to ask African American males for their input in helping to improve their academic performance.

Further, Noguera points out the direct correlation between the anger of African American males and their poor academic performance. African American male students' anger comes

from their reaction to how they are treated in the classroom, according to Noguera. "It is not just that they are more likely to be punished or placed in remedial classes, it is also that they are more likely to act out in the classroom and to avoid challenging themselves academically" (Noguera, 2003, p. 437). In making this comment, Noguera argues that there's a direct correlation in how poorly African American male students perform academically, and how they are treated in their classrooms.

On the other hand, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) contends that we need to focus on the "education debt" instead of the achievement gap. "I am arguing that our focus on the achievement gap is akin to a focus on the budget deficit, but what is actually happening to African American and Latina/o students is really more like the national debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5). She points out four components of the "education debt" as historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). In addition, Ladson-Billings stresses the importance of examining all four components by looking at our past, present, and future educational system in relationship to helping all students to succeed academically.

Others like John Fantuzzo, Whitney LeBoeuf, Heather Rouse, and Chin-Chih Chen (2012) even maintain that African American males are resilient while facing public risk and still manage to succeed academically. Fantuzzo states:

> In light of persistent Black-White achievement gaps for boys, this study
> examined publicly monitored risks believed to be associated with being
> behind academically for an entire subpopulation of African American
> boys in a large urban public school district. (Fantuzzo et al., 2012, p. 559)

The essence of Fantuzzo's argument is that despite public risk some African American boys still succeed academically. The study revealed that the community, home, and school should

collaborate to help African American males succeed academically. In addition, the teacher and student interaction should be increased. Finally, professional development should be provided to teachers to help them understand the importance of race and gender in teaching African American males.

Similarly, Donna Y. Ford and James L. Moore, III (2013) focuses on understanding and reversing underachievement and achievement gaps among high-ability African American males in urban schools. "Another fundamental aspect of this discussion is the need for urban educators to adopt a social justice or civil rights approach to their work, which means an equity-based and culturally responsive approach in philosophy and action" (Ford & Moore, 2013, p. 399). Ford and Moore focus on several factors that contribute to underachievement and low achievement of African American males in urban schools. Those several factors were:

> Curriculum rigor; teacher preparation; teacher experience; teacher absence
> and turnover; class size; instructional technology; fear and safety; parent-
> pupil ratio; parent participation; student mobility; talking and reading;
> excessive TV watching; and summer achievement gains and losses (Ford
> and Moore, 2013, pp. 402-407)

Ford and Moore believe that African-American males are capable of higher academic achievement "when educators are formally prepared to be culturally competent, when families are supported and empowered, and when efforts focus on improving their academic potential and identities" (Ford & Moore, 2013, p. 409). Thus, Ford and Moore argue African American male students need the support of their culturally competent teachers, supported and empowered families, and positive reinforcement that they can excel academically.

In discussions of underachievement of African American males in public schools in America, another important issue has been minority academic success and urban education. Ebony O. McGee (2013) studied how high achieving African American males in urban high schools are threatened and placed at risk. McGee points out that not all African American males are failing in urban public schools. "Every respondent in this study expressed being placed at risk from the plethora of stereotypes that plague Black males and their urban communities" (McGee, 2013, p. 459). McGee concluded that the African American males in this study were not deterred by the dangers they encountered in their urban communities, nor the fears of their teachers and administrators viewing them as dangerous, nor the fact that they were considered less intelligent. They all excelled in mathematics at their urban charter high schools.

On the other hand, Iesha Jackson, Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz and Wanda Watson (2014) examined the effect that mentoring African American and Latino males had on their academic success in an urban high school. This phenomenological study focused on a mentor and 14 Black and Latino males from the Umoja Network for Young Men (UMOJA) program. This mentoring program was administered at an alternative high school for older low achieving students (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 394). This study found that "encountering reciprocal love in a caring environment can be a restorative, healing, educative experience" (Jackson et al, 2014, p. 411). The African American males and the Latino males created a bond of brotherhood in this mentoring program.

Linda Darling-Hammond (2007) argues that America's commitment to equity in education will determine our future. "This article outlines current disparities in educational access; illustrates the relationships between race, educational resources, and student achievement; and proposes reforms needed to equalize opportunities to learn" (Darling-

Hammond, 2007, p. 318). Darling-Hammond recommends recruiting high needs teachers, improve teachers' preparation, and support mentoring for all beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 331). Darling-Hammond notes:

> If "no child left behind" is to be anything more than empty rhetoric, we
> will need a policy strategy that equalizes access to school resources,
> creates a 21st-century curriculum for all students, and supports it with
> thoughtful assessments and access to knowledgeable, well-supported
> teachers. (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 331)

The essence of Darling-Hammond's argument is that 'no child left behind' will be irrelevant unless there's a change in policy strategy, school access, curriculum, and teachers. Darling-Hammond's assessments have proven to be true. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has been replaced by the Every Student Success Act (2015).

The culture and pedagogy of African American students play a role in the underachievement of African American males in public schools. Tyrone C. Howard (2001) argues that African American students should be allowed to tell their stories concerning culturally relevant teaching. Howard examined a study of African American elementary students who told their stories about teachers who honored their culture (Howard, 2001). This study revealed that these students like teachers who are caring, who create a family atmosphere in their classrooms, and teachers who made learning fun (Howard, 2011).

Howard argues our focus should not be to "fix Black males, but on how to fix schools and practices that serve Black males" (Howard, 2014, p. 13). In other words, Howard believes that it's the schools responsibility to create learning atmospheres where Black male students can

excel academically. I now turn to critical spirituality as an educational leadership framework that creates a learning environment by Black males can flourish in urban education.

Conceptual Framework: Tenets of African American Spirituality

Michael Dantley argues that "spirituality is the grounding for the values and principles we espouse that inform our personal and professional behavior" (2003, p. 274). Our spirituality should lead us to be courageous enough to change the status quo found in our educational systems. School leaders and teachers should practice their spirituality to help them see students beyond their test scores. Dantley (2003) argues that teachers and school leaders must practice purpose-driven leadership in order to exercise their spirituality, "A purpose-driven leader becomes one who is focused on helping those in the learning community cope with elusive and volatile matters while maintaining a vision and hope that transcends them" (Dantley, 2003, p. 281). Dantley argues that "spirituality is separate from religion" (Dantley, 2005, p. 653). "Religion emphasizes conformity and adaptive behaviors, whereas spirituality inspires creativity, inquiry, and transformative conduct" (Dantley, 2005, p. 654). Dantley further argues that spirituality is present but hidden in schools that serve African American students (Dantley, 2005).

Historically, African Americans, according to Dantley, have used their spirituality to cope with racism, sexism, and classism. Spirituality has allowed African Americans to overcome their adversities and still hope and dream of a better world. "Dreaming and visioning is a spiritual matter that demands courage and great faith" (Dantley, 2005, p. 655).

Dantley (2005) suggested that educational leaders should use spirituality as a tool while working with African American students. Educators who practice spirituality encourage African American students to relate their academic learning to their everyday living. Dantley believes:

> Essentially, the school becomes more than a site to perpetuate academic
>
> achievement. Although intellectual progress is an important end,
>
> schools for African American children that are grounded in spirituality
>
> become places where the discourse is replete with notions of hope,
>
> struggle, purpose, victory, and accountability. (Dantley, 2005, p. 656)

The school and the community are intricately connected.

Dantley (2005) encourages educators to inspire African American students to bring their total selves to the classroom. "It is that spiritual dimension along with the intellectual, emotional, and physical personae that compose a fully whole person" (Dantley, 2005, p. 658). Dantley (2005) envisions schools where teachers and administrators allow the curriculum to extend to the community and invite their African American students to use their academics to help improve their communities and the world. "Students may work with grassroots tutoring and mentoring organizations, housing and economic development projects, or any other projects designed to better the lives of those persons in the community" (Dantley, 2005, p. 659).

Dantley (2005) argues that social justice issues, confronting African American students is best addressed by school leaders recognizing their spirituality. "Historically, for many African Americans, their spiritual selves have been what sustains them through persistent institutionalized acts of racism and social injustice" (Dantley, 2005, p. 660). Further, school leaders who are concerned with African American students practicing their spirituality should provide safe places for them to dialogue. "For African American students, such schools must include substantive spiritual dialogue in the context of academic pursuits that also lay bare institutional and societal inequities" (Dantley, 2005, p. 660). Essentially, Dantley argues that

African American students should be allowed to openly discuss their spirituality as it relates to their academics, school and societal experiences.

Dantley argues that schools that recognize both African American spirituality and Cornel West's prophetic pragmatism build strong African American students and communities. Dantley states:

> When schools are perceived by the students as being integral participants
>
> in the life of the community, they are more likely to see academic
>
> achievement as not only an expectation maintained in the schoolhouse
>
> but also in the church, community recreation center, grocery store,
>
> bank, and individual homes. (Dantley, 2005, pp. 663-664)

School leaders who practice prophetic pragmatism also practice self-critique and self-correction. "As principals and teacher-leaders examine their behavior and mind-sets through a critical theoretical lens, they are more able to see how they either enhance or diminish community and inclusion in their schools (Brown, 2004; Foster, 1986; Rusch, 2004)" (Dantley, 2005, p. 665). Self-correction comes after one has seriously examined themselves.

"Self-critique is powerful in itself, but self-correction is a courageous step often initiated through a spiritual motivation that celebrates the human dynamics of individuality and community at the same time" (Dantley, 2005, p. 665). Teacher-leaders who practice both self-critique and self-correction become sensitive to how they label their students. "For example, they are sensitive to the over labeling of African American male students as intellectually deficient and socially deviant" (Dantley, 2005, p. 665). They focus on democracy, equity and fairness in their schools (Dantley, 2005).

Dantley (2005) calls for a radical reconstruction of school leadership. This radical reconstruction calls for school leaders to collaborate with community leaders, churches, and civic organizations such as the National Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Urban League. "Principals, teacher-leaders, students, and parents join in the efforts of these extra-parliamentary groups in attempting to bring a greater degree of democracy to the lived realities of the people of the community" (Dantley, 2005, p. 667). The radical reconstruction of school leaders properly identifies the issues, but see them as challenges not problems.

According to Michael Dantley (2010), we build community through our spirituality. "A person's spirituality is that ethereal part that establishes meaning in one's life" (Dantley, 2010, p. 214). Also, our sense of equity and our compassion comes from our spirituality. "It is from one's spirituality that compassion, a sense of equity, understanding and passion toward others as well as the life's work to which one has been 'called' emanate", (Dantley, 2010, p. 215). Dantley noted that school leaders who practice their spirituality while leading for change are civil rights activists.

"Critical spirituality is an amalgam of the tenets of African American spirituality and critical race theory" (Dantley, 2010, p. 214). African American spirituality helped them to overcome injustice and oppression during slavery. "African American spirituality, while often expressed through traditional religious rituals, nonetheless, is grounded in juxtaposing the truth of social, cultural, and political realities with a hope of dismantling and constructing a different reality grounded in equity and social justice" (Dantley, 2010, p. 16). Critical spirituality allows teachers and administrators the freedom to use their spirituality to help transform urban schools into equitable schools for all students.

I argue that teachers and administrators in urban public high schools need to be supported to help meet the needs of African American male students. Dantley points out that when school principals and administrators are being trained they should be taught about critical spirituality. Also, Dantley believes that school leaders should be encouraged to practice critical spirituality while leading their students and schools. Critical spirituality, according to Dantley, allows school leaders to first wrestle with their assumptions and thoughts concerning inequities in their schools. Dantley offers critical spirituality as another weapon that teachers and school administrators can use to help fight injustice in the classroom.

Spirituality differs from religion, according to Dantley. "Religion is the formally recognized space where spirituality is legitimately to reside" (Dantley, 2010, p. 214). However, spirituality can be practiced outside of the church. The Black church practices critical spirituality to help fight the injustices African American students face in public schools. "Critical spirituality is composed of four elements: (a) a psychology of critical self-reflection, (b) deconstructive interpretation, (c) performative creativity, and (d) transformative action" (Dantley, 2010, p. 216). The Black church must first come to an understanding of themselves concerning the state of African American students in public schools. This calls for a true and accurate interpretation of the current condition of African American students in public schools in this country.

Once the Black church properly and correctly assesses the condition of Black students in public schools, then they must decide what action they must take to correct the injustices. The Black church must see this critical problem as a 'calling' from God to take action to help correct the problem. "Notions of calling, seeing their work as ministry, and serving and grounding their decisions on morality or social justice mark the work of principals who subscribe to the tenets of

critical spirituality" (Dantley, 2010, p. 218). The Black church should also be challenged to see their work with public schools to be a ministry to help Black students succeed.

The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church through its Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center practices critical spirituality by mentoring African American males at the Westinghouse Academy, and providing academic support to them through after school tutoring. Additionally, they support the "Be A Middle School Mentor" program through the Pittsburgh Public Schools at the Obama Academy, Sterrett Middle School, and Collfax Middle School. Recently, they started the High School Professional Development Academy at the Obama Academy and Tyler Academy.

This research study will be viewed through the theoretical lens of critical spirituality. The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church through its' community outreach believes that it's important to work with the Tyler Academy by mentoring African American males, and supporting them academically through an after school tutoring program. MABC sees college as a possibility for every student they mentor. Therefore, the High School Professional Academy is designed to help prepare those students for college. This program equips the students with how to apply for college and financial aid, and takes students on college tours. It also focuses on what courses the students should take in to be college-ready.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study is: How are 9th through 12th grade African American male students making sense of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program to improve their college readiness? It is through their counter-narratives where I will gain access to their perspectives in the role the church can play into the improvement of their readiness for college.

History of African American Churches and Education

Historically, African American churches have been a support for African American families and the education of their children. The African American church is highly respected in the African American community; it serves as both a religious and social institution. Several studies involving the African American church, public schools and African American families have been conducted. Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph Nicholson published a study in 1933 and they found that black urban churches participated in community outreach, especially education (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991).

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya conducted a study on the Black church and education in 1990. Lincoln and Mamiya concluded that Black churches supported education on all levels. They found that rural Black churches supported Black colleges through special collections and annual contributions (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991).

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) conducted a national study of Black churches. "This was the first national study of Black churches that focused exclusively on community outreach programs" (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991, p. 431). This study found that Black churches were involved in nonreligious educational programs in the community, especially tutoring programs (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991).

Billingsley and Caldwell suggest that the African American church can have its greatest impact in education by using its influence to help public schools improve the academics and behavior of African American students. They argue that the African American church, the African American family and educational institutions can successfully work together to help African American males succeed in school. Their study documents community programs

YOUTH BEAR WITNESS

sponsored by African American churches to improve the academics and behavior of African American males.

African American adolescents are influenced in a positive way by their families, communities, and churches. Church involvement indirectly leads African American adolescents to achieve in school, and display positive behavior both in and out of school (Sanders, 1998). These students are more likely to succeed if they are receiving support from the home, community and the African American church. Sanders points out that the African American church should help families to encourage their children to display good behavior at school. She offers concrete evidence that African American adolescents can succeed in schools if they receive additional support from their families, communities and churches (Sanders, 1998).

Similarly, Fulgham argues that Christians can and should do something to improve public education for low-income children (Fulgham, 2013). She believes that Christians have been silent for too long and absent from the debate on public education. She further states, "Christians should realize that every child has potential." (Fulgham, 2013, p. 95). She examines three themes based on Scripture concerning God's argument why Christians should be concerned with the academic achievement gap. Those three themes are: "God's concern for children, God's focus on the poor and disenfranchised, and God's heart for justice." (Fulgham, 2013, p. 95). God values children as precious human beings. African American urban churches provide a community where African American children are valued as human beings.

Is it the responsibility of the African American urban church to meet the social, economic, and spiritual needs of its community? This question remains critical to the African American church as it constructs its biblical and theological understanding of itself in ways that privileged the socio-cultural and spiritual issues of the African American community. Some

urban churches certainly answer this question in the affirmative. This affirmative response moves many churches to form 501 (c) (3) non-profit organizations. By forming these non-profit organizations, they position themselves to receive outside funding from local, national, and corporate foundations. The donations from these sources are being used to run community programs that feed, clothe, and educate African American urban residents. In particular, these donations contribute toward churches opening day care centers, after school programs, and computer laboratories (Buckley, 2005).

The African American urban church, when answering the above question in the affirmative, experiences a resurgence in reclaiming its prominence as the central place in the African American urban community where residents can come to have their social and economic as well as religious needs met. African American urban churches are helping to rebuild urban communities by building new houses, new schools, new businesses, and new community health care centers. This new energy and excitement found in African American urban churches facilitates meeting the social and economic needs of the African American urban churches (Buckley, 2005, p. 3). For example, the Harlem Community in Harlem, New York, opened a public school in collaboration with the Teachers College, Columbia University, and the New York City Department of Education in September 2011. Some of the wraparound services available to the students and their families are provided by urban churches located in the community. (www.tc.columbia.edu/communityschool).

African American urban churches are practicing a ministry that Jesus Christ practiced while he lived and ministered on earth. Jesus was always feeding, healing, and providing support for the poor. Perhaps, African American urban churches are taking principle leadership in helping to revitalize urban communities, because it is the Christ-like thing to do (Buckley,

2005, p. 3). African American churches are practicing social ministry by extending the community of the church outside of the church building. Therefore, the church's community includes the residents of the community in which the church is located.

In order for a church to practice social ministry, it must first have a heart to care for the residents of that community. John Perkins, founder of Christian Community Development Association, argues that the social ministry of a church grows disciples for Christ (Perkins, 1995). Social ministry challenges the church to be a nurturing community of faith who sees the wider community as members of its family needing to have their socio-economic and spiritual needs met. Those socio-economic and spiritual needs include actively working with public schools to help improve the academics and behavior of African American males.

Sometimes the economic and social needs of the church community are not met because the worshippers no longer live in the church community. Carl Dudley, a sociologist, who studies congregations, believes that congregates do not live where they worship in today's social reality. Dudley said, "Congregations are places to call home, but the home they create is less likely to be adjacent to where their members live" (Dudley & Ammerman, 2002, p. 6). In this case the church has to decide whether to fulfill its mission to make a positive contribution to its immediate community, despite the fact that most of its members live outside the community.

Some theologically driven and community-based African American churches believe that a more informed congregation is a more powerful advocate for social justice. The more theologically astute a congregation is the more they view social justice as a mission of the church. "Congregations that want to develop a ministry of social advocacy must begin with the fundamental belief that advocacy is essential and integral to the life and mission of the church" (Dudley, 1996, p. 63). Advocacy provides a voice for those who are disinherited in our society,

and congregations can serve as the voice of the voiceless. The African American urban churches can serve as the voice for African American males in public schools. Therefore, African American churches can instill promise in African American males.

African American churches provide a voice for African American males by providing a mentor and adult role models for African American students. For example, the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church (MABC) located in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania adopted the Robinson Middle School (pseudonym) in 2003 and provided male mentors for the African American males. The mentoring project will celebrate fourteenth anniversary in September 1, 2017. Presently, the mentoring project provides mentors for both African American males and females in six middle schools. Theologically, the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church believes that the church should be a shining light in the darkness of the world. This theological metaphor means that God calls Christians to be the light that represents the hope in a dark or hopeless world.

The scriptures support this belief: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of a darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9 NIV). Mt. Ararat believes it is the social responsibility of the church to call those who are in darkness into the light of God. The darkness here is represented by the poor academic grades, high juvenile delinquency crime, and the lack of positive male and female role models in the lives of the African American males and females who are being mentored. The mentors volunteer for at least three years to work with the African American male and female mentees until they graduate from middle school. A number of mentors have mentored their mentees through high school, and even college.

Locally, the Keystone Church through its' Center of Life, faith-based non-profit, in the Hazelwood community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania provides social services to better its

community. The Center of Life is an integral part of the life of the Hazelwood community. They collaborate with the Pittsburgh Public Schools and several social service programs to help meet the physical and social needs of the community residents. They offer a free afterschool program called "Fusion" to academically help all students from kindergarten through the 12th grade.

Black males deserve to be academically prepared to graduate from public high schools fully prepared to attend college or trade schools of their choice. The academic success of Black males depends on the support of the Black urban church, the public schools, and the entire community. Black boys and Black urban churches truly equals academic success.

I agree with Kunjufu's conclusions that the achievement gap between African American boys starts as early as the fourth grade. In my view, there is an achievement gap between African American males and their counterparts in America. Some might object, of course, on the grounds that African American males contribute to their own academic failure. Yet, I would argue that the academic failure of African American males is due to the inequities of the urban public school system in America. Overall, then, I believe that African American males can achieve academically and graduate from urban public high schools prepared to attend college – an important point to make given the inequities of the public school systems in America.

Historically, the Black Church has addressed the social justice issues of its community. "The clarion call and mission of the black church was two-fold: it served as a beacon of hope for the lost-seeking grace and mercy, but it also functioned as an oasis for all issues affecting the community (Harvey, 2010, p. 2). Rev. Dr. Tony Evans, Senior Pastor of the Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Oak Cliff, Texas, argues that the Black Church is biblically mandated to address the social needs of its congregates and communities. Evans (2010) bases his argument on the

following Bible verse, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV). Evans further argues that the "separation of the spiritual from the social" is hindering the Church from fulfilling God's mandate for social outreach (The Turn Around Report, 2010, p. 1). According to Evans, "There is a horrific disconnect between the role of the church on Sunday and the condition of hurting people on Monday" (The Turn Around Report, 2010, p. 1). In other words, Evans believes that the church has an important role to play outside of the church, and that role includes addressing the inequities in our education of Black children.

The Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship has established The Turn Around Agenda, a social outreach non-profit, to provide comprehensive outreach for the community. The community includes both members of the church and the wider community. They have adopted 73 public schools as part of their outreach to the community. They collaborate with six public school districts and provide school-based mentoring, life skills education, and support services for students and their families (The Turn Around Agenda Annual Report, 2010).

Black churches have historically worked with black families to help educate their children. Recently, there's been a surge in the black church to once again play a key role in the education of black children. However, the black church realizes that they are most effective when they collaborate with other community partners. Those community partners include public schools, non-profits and local organizations.

Stakeholders

Janice Hale, Professor of Early Childhood Education, calls on public schools to involve churches more. Hale says, "The challenge for public school educators is to move beyond being a mere recipient of overtures from churches; they must create a vision of how the church can be

involved as a key player in creating the Village" (Hale, 2001, pp. 257-58). The Village that Hale speaks of actively involves the school, the community, and the church. All serve as advocates to help in the raising of African American children.

Bryk (2015) asserts that in order to effectively solve a problem you must not only focus on the problem, but equally on the system that created the problem. He stated:

Effective problem solving demands that a premium be placed not just on

what needs to be fixed but also on knowing *why* systems currently work as

they do and learning *how* they might be reformed toward the goal of

greater efficacy at scale. (Bryk, 2015, p. 32)

Bryk is insisting that in order to solve the problems of inequity in our educational system, we must know how our educational system currently works before we can reform it for the good of all students.

First, my problem of practice focuses on African American male students at Tyler Academy (pseudonym) not being academically eligible to receive the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship. The Pittsburgh Promise is a non-profit organization that gives college scholarships to all eligible graduates from Pittsburgh Public schools. In order to earn a Promise Scholarship each student must maintain a 2.5 grade point average, be a Pittsburgh resident since the 9th grade, and attend school 90% of the time. The lack of eligibility of African American male students at Tyler Academy has been well documented by the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Pittsburgh Promise. Tyler Academy recognizes the problem and is presently working with the 'We Promise Initiative' at the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The 'We Promise Initiative' provides African American male mentors, academic assistance, and professional development to the African American male students at Tyler Academy and Mason High School (pseudonym).

Second, my problem of practice is recognized by the African American male students. Some of them have been active in the mentoring program at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. This program provides Christian male mentors, academic support, fieldtrips, and self-esteem building. The African American male student's parents also participate in this program. The African American male students and their parents realize that their grades need to improve and their attendance needs to be at the 90% level.

Third, my problem of practice addresses how the African American male students' view how the role of the Mt. Ararat Church and their mentors have affected them being college ready. The students through their mentoring experiences express how they feel they are or aren't ready for college. The African American male students express how their mentoring relationships have helped or hindered them academically.

Present Work Being Done

Several stakeholders from the Pittsburgh community presently collaborate with the Tyler Academy 6-12 located in the Homewood community. The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church (MABC) through its' Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center (MACAC) mentors African American (AA) male and female students in grades six through eight. MABC also provides afterschool tutoring for these students. The Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) collaborate with the Tyler Academy 6-12 through its' We Promise Initiative. The 'We Promise Initiative' works with African American male high school students to help prepare them for eligibility for the Pittsburgh Promise Scholarship. Presently, the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and the Tyler Academy 6-12 are collaborating to help African American middle school male and female students succeed academically.

The stakeholders in this research study include: the 9th through 12th grade African American male students at Tyler Academy, Mason High School, and Remington Catholic High School (pseudonym); their parents; the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church; the Rev. Dr. William H. Curtis, Senior Pastor at Mt. Ararat Baptist Church; Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center; and the school administrators at each of the three schools.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools' role is to educate the African American male students. The African American male students' role is to actively participate in maintaining at least a 2.5 grade point average and attend school at least 90 percent of the time. The role of the parents of the African American male students is to encourage their sons, and communicate with their teachers and administrators of each of the schools to ensure their sons are maintaining their grades, behavior, and attendance. The role of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church is to provide male Christian mentors for the male students, model God's love and pray for the students, parents, teachers and administrators.

The role of the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center is to train the Christian mentors, provide activities for the mentors and the mentees to bond, and to provide a year-end trip outside of Pittsburgh. The role of the 'We Promise Initiative' is to provide positive African American professional role models to inspire, and hold the African American male students accountable for their grades, behavior, and attendance. The role of the Pittsburgh Promise is to continue to make their scholarships accessible to all students.

School and Community Partnerships

Urban community partners can play a key role in helping underserved students from public high schools excel academically and be prepared to attend college. The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University was founded in 1995 to help

community and schools work together for the good of all students. "NNPS has examined the relationship between school success indicators, such as student achievement and the school-based involvement of families and communities" (Hong, 2006, p. 272). The diversity among high school students have increased nationally. "Due to the vast spectrum of needs that come with increasing diversity among the student population, collaborative efforts are necessary and pivotal to students' success" (Person et. al., 2014, p. 494). Parental partnerships are paramount to the success of underserved students.

> When family members are involved in their children's education, children
> are more likely to earn higher grades, enroll in rigorous classes, go on to
> college, and have better academic-related behaviors, such as good social
> skills and regular attendance at school. (Bryan, 2005, p. 221)

The most effective community and school partnerships are those that are well organized. "NNPS requires that school members establish an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), which consists of teachers, parents, administrators, community members, and, in high schools, students" (Sheldon, 2003, p. 152). Community and school partnerships should be embraced by both the school administrators, and the community partners with a commitment from both to work as a team for the good of the students.

The ATP should be composed of a representative number of community partners who are willing to serve as role models for the students. "Traditionally, imparting a college-going mindset has been viewed as the responsibility of schools and parents; however, research literature reveals that the environments outside of the school and home also impact a student in every aspect of their lives" (Person et. al., 2014, p. 502).

The realization of college for low-income high school students needs to be a reality. Some high school student's minds need to be changed for the dream to become a reality. "According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), 50% of low-income students enroll in college immediately after high school, compared with 80% of students from high income backgrounds" (Ward et. al., 2013, p. 312). Community and school partnerships have served to increase the number of low-income students in colleges. In order for school and community partnerships to be effective there must be a common vision among all stakeholders.

The Homewood Children's Village (HCV) is a non-profit organization that works to improve the lives and families of the residents of the Homewood urban community in Pittsburgh, PA. The mission of HCV is to "simultaneously improve the lives of Homewood's children and to reweave the fabric of the community in which they live" (http://www.hcv.org). The vision of HCV is to develop a community of learners in which every child succeeds (http://www.hcv.org). The Homewood Children's Village runs a full-service community school program. The Westinghouse Academy, Faison K-5, and Lincoln K-5 schools participate in HCV's full service community program.

The Homewood Children's Village provide services that remove barriers to ensure the success of their students. The full-service community schools program uses an evidence-based model.

> The evidenced-based model has resulted in many benefits,
> especially in urban communities, including increased attendance,
> parent engagement, learning time, and access to resources, and
> decreased suspensions, chronic absenteeism, and drop-out rates.
> (http://www.hcv.org)

Community partners play a significant role in helping the children of Homewood succeed in education and life. Several churches are community partners of the Homewood Children's Village. The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church is a community partner working with the students at the Tyler Academy.

The Homewood Children's Village also has a program to help students earn Pittsburgh Promise scholarships. This program is called the Promise Fulfillment. The Promise Fulfillment Program helps students to graduate from high school, qualify for Pittsburgh Promise scholarships, and helps then earn their degrees. They partner with college and universities to ensure that their students are admitted and graduate in a timely manner. The three major parts of the Promise Fulfillment programs are, the college-readiness program, the bridge to college program, and the Promise Fulfillment Network (http://www.hcv.org).

The Homewood Children's Village have received a Full Service Community Schools Program federal grant from the U. S. Department of Education for the next five years. The grant totals $2,499,633, and $499,633 has been allocated for year one. HCV will pursue additional funding from local and national sources after the five-year grant ends. "Demographically, the targeted area is one of the city's most racially segregated (94% African American) and economically impoverished neighborhoods, comprised of relatively large proportions of children, senior citizens and single parent households" (U. S. Department of Education Technical Review Form, 2015, p. 3).

The collaborative partners for this grant include the University of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Public Schools. The project services include: "family engagement; assistance to students that have been chronically absent, truant, suspended or expelled; mentoring and youth development; nutrition services and physical activities; primary health and dental care; and

mental health services" (Full Service Community Schools Education Grant Recipient Project

Summary, 2015, p. 1). The project services for this grant are holistic since they address the

student, the family, and the student's mental and physical health.

      Collaborative partners from the church, schools, and the community can successfully

work together to help encourage black students to graduate from high school ready to succeed

in college. Stakeholders provide dollars and human capital to help provide the necessary

resources for black students to excel in public schools. The black church can work in harmony

with stakeholders from public schools and the community to ensure that black students are

graduating from high school college ready.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my role as a researcher, the purpose of the study, and repeat my research question. Next, I discuss my data collection methods; a critical race theory approach to counter-narrative storytelling; semi-structured interviews; coding process of grounded theory; and the informed consent procedures. Finally, I discuss the background of the mentoring program at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church; my selection of interview participants; my semi-structured interview questions; my communication and reporting, and my context.

Researcher Positionality

My role as an urban African American minister at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church and a member of the Core (Advisory) Committee of the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center's mentoring program, connects me to the African American male students and the spiritual change we're seeking. While other methodological discourses are what we call "detached observers," it is critical to point out I'm organically and spiritually involved in this work from the ground up. There is no detachment between me and the research participants, because of my role as minister/mentor in their lives.

Subsequently, in critical race studies, there is no separation between researchers of color and the subjects (rather than objects) to which they are studying. Therefore, I have come to this research project as a minister, concerned with the plight and predicament of African American male youth; and the role of spirituality's impact on their ability to be college prepared. Historically, the African American church was at one point, the major institution by which social, political, economic, and spiritual needs were cultivated. Given the challenges African

American males face, it still remains one of the most important social, civic, spiritual, and educational institutions in African American life. Subsequently, the nature of the questions I raise in this dissertation is not separate from my own motivation as a minister, seeking my church's role as a spiritual impetus for the transformation of their educational future.

H. Richard Milner IV (2007) argues that a researcher should be racially and culturally aware of themselves and others while doing educational research (2007, p. 388). "The premise of the argument is that dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen can emerge for researchers when they do not pay careful attention to their own and others' racialized and cultural systems of coming to know, knowing and experiencing the world" (Milner, 2007, p. 388). Milner suggests that a student's learning may be impeded when the teacher ignores both the race and culture of the student and themselves. Milner concludes "that matters of race and culture are important considerations in the process of conducting research" (Milner, 2007, p. 397). Milner is insisting that the researcher consider race and culture while doing educational research in order to more realistically serve all students.

Researchers of color position themselves in their research according to who they are and the experiences they have had. Gloria Ladson-Billings said, "In my own research I have attempted to tell a story about myself as well as about my work" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 416). I'm validated by including myself in my research, according to Ladson-Billings. Similarly, Tillman (2002) argues "that there is a need to consider research frameworks that can help researchers to more fully capture the experiences of African Americans-their struggles as well as their success" (Tillman, 2002, p. 3). The danger in including myself in my research is that I might inaccurately interpret the experiences of the African American male participants. "It is important to consider whether the researcher has the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret

and validate the experiences of African Americans within the context of the phenomenon under study" (Tillman, 2002, p. 4). Researchers of color bring their identity and experiences into their research, which impacts how data is interpreted within a social justice context.

Purpose of the Study

The compelling reason for this study is that every student in the Pittsburgh Public Schools upon graduation are guaranteed a scholarship for four years to any college, university, or trade school in the state of Pennsylvania if the student maintains at least a 2.5 grade point average, and attends school 90 percent of the time. However, African American males are among the students who are receiving the least number of Pittsburgh Promise scholarships. According to the Pittsburgh Promise, 816 African African/Multiracial males have received Promise scholarships compared to 1,348 Caucasian males since 2008 (Pittsburgh Promise website, 2015). In addition, African American males at the Tyler Academy are seldom academically eligible for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship, nor do they attend school 90 percent of the time. Tyler Academy in 2015 had only 20 percent of its students eligible for the Pittsburgh Promise Scholarship (Nuttall, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to determine how the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church can help empower the African American 9th through 12th grade male students at the Tyler Academy, Mason High School, and the Remington Catholic High School to succeed academically. All school names are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the students. This study would like to push forward an agenda that seeks to understand the larger role Black churches can have in assisting African American males to become college-ready. Barrett (2010) argues that the Black church can ensure that Black students are valued as good students and talented human beings who can be productive citizens.

Previous studies have shown that religion plays a role in promoting academic success for Black students. For example, the Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth in 2008 Study, revealed:

> Black students who participated in more religious activities and who had stronger religious convictions were more likely to report higher grades in school, had a positive self-concept, positive feelings about school, parents involved with their education, and fewer disciplinary referrals. (Toldson & Anderson, 2010, p. 205)

Black churches provide a community where Black males' self-esteem is elevated, yet some Black urban churches don't cultivate a relationship with them.

Toldson & Anderson noted that Al-Fadhli and Kersen (2010) made several suggestions to the Black church and community to use the "power of religious faith to improve academic outcomes among Black students" (Toldson & Anderson, 2010, p. 212). They suggested that the Black church monitor the student's grades on a regular basis, and acknowledge their success in front of the congregation. They also suggested that the Black church could also serve as mediators between students and schools when they have been suspended. Black churches can help teach parents the importance of education and how to share that importance with their children. Additionally, Black churches can help parents with their children's homework.

Al-Fadhli and Kersen (2010) concluded that religious, social, and cultural capital influence educational aspirations of African American 8th and 10th graders. They worked with secondary data from The Monitoring the Future Study (2008) from a sample of 4,273 African American students, females (50.6%) and males (49.1%) (Al-Fadhli & Kersen, 2010, p. 383). "It

is expected that students with high levels of family and religious social capital are more likely to have high educational aspirations" (Al-Fadhli & Kersen, 2010, p. 386).

The African American male students will gain their voices by telling their educational journey stories during a semi-structured interview. The African American male educational story has been told by many, but seldom by them. This research study will give the students an opportunity to voice their concerns for how the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church can empower them to excel academically and graduate ready for college.

This research study will build on the findings from Al-Fadhli and Kersen, 2010, concerning the suggestions that were made to the African American church. One African American urban church will be examined to determine what additional steps can be taken to help African American urban high school males become college-ready.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study is: How are 9th through 12th grade African American male students making sense of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program to improve their college readiness? I will gain the insight from the African American male students on how the church has helped prepare them for college through our informal conversations.

Data Collection Methods Introduction

In this section I discuss my data collection methods through a grounded theory approach to counter-narratives of youth. Secondly, I discuss a critical race theory approach to counter-narrative storytelling, semi-structured interviews, and the coding process of grounded theory.

Data Collection Methods – A Grounded Theory Approach to Counter-

Narratives of Youth

Grounded theory is the qualitative method by which I will analyze counter-narratives of Black male youth through semi-structured interviews with five youth from the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center's Mentoring Program. The purpose of grounded theory is to develop an emerging theory from participants' interview data. That is, through the process of coding participant responses through themes/categories of my analysis, data from youth will be helpful in Mt. Ararat's ongoing strategies in promoting college-readiness for Black male youth in its mentoring program. Kathy Charmaz suggest constructivist grounded theory:

> Recognizes that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an
>
> analysis emerges from the researcher's inter-actions within the field and
>
> questions about the data. In short, the narrowing of research questions, the
>
> creation of concepts and categories, and the integration of the constructed
>
> theoretical framework reflect what and how the researcher thinks and does
>
> about shaping and collecting the data (Charmaz, 2003, p. 271)

Grounded theory "allow for varied fundamental assumptions, data gathering approaches, analytic emphases, and theoretical levels" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 252). The researcher is more flexible when using grounded theory. "Grounded theory offers a set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 256). This means grounded theory can be applied to critical race discourses in its approach to methods of data collection.

A Critical Race Theory Approach to Counter-Narrative Storytelling

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) challenges us to think about critical race theory and education. Ladson-Billings argues that critical race theory can help explain the inequities in

education. However, she cautions us that it's too early to tell. "It requires a critique of some of the civil rights era's most cherished legal victories and educational reform movements, such as multiculturalism" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7). In addition, Ladson-Billings highlights the fact that race still matters as Cornel West pointed out in 1992. She concludes, "If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about intense study and careful rethinking of race and education" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 22).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) argue that counter-storytelling can be used as an analytical framework for education research in critical race methodology. "A critical race methodology provides a tool to "counter" deficit storytelling" (Solorzano & Yosso (2002), p. 23). Critical race methodology allows people of color to tell their stories. "We define critical race methodology as a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research project" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). The definition of racism has three parts:

(a) One group deems itself superior to all others, (b) the group that

is superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior, and (c)

racism benefits the superior group while negatively affecting other

racial/or ethnic groups. (Solorzanao & Yossi, 2002, p. 24)

The theoretical foundation for critical race methodology is critical race theory. "Critical race theory draws from and extends a broad literature base in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies" (Solorzano & Yossi, 2002, p. 25). Critical race theory is committed to social justice by addressing race, gender, and class oppression (Solorzano & Yossi, 2002). "A critical race methodology in education challenges White privilege, rejects notions of

"neutral" research or "objective" researchers, and exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of color (Delgado Bernal, 1998)" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

Racism and White privilege play a role in storytelling in our educational system. "It is within the context of racism that "monovocal" stories about the low educational achievement and attainment of students of color are told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). These stories are being told through the lens of White privilege. "Whiteness is a category of privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). Delgado and Stefancic (1997) defined "White privilege as a system of opportunities and benefits conferred upon people simply because they are White" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). These racial stories are called majoritarian stories.

Majoritarian stories can also be told by people of color. For example, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, a Black man, writes against the civil rights of people and women of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). "Whether told by people of color or Whites, majoritarian stories are not often questioned because people do not see them as stories but as "natural" parts of everyday life" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). For example, majoritarian stories tell us bad neighborhoods and bad schools go together, as do dark skin and poverty in our country (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). However, counter-stories allow people of color to tell their stories.

Counter-stories are used by people of color to challenge the majoritarian stories. "Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). African Americans have traditionally told and shared their stories with their communities. Critical race scholars have three types of counter-narratives and/or stories: personal stories or narratives, other people's stories or narratives, and composite stories or narratives.

This research study will examine the personal counter-stories or narratives of five of the 9th through 12th grade African American male students at the Tyler Academy, Mason High School, and the Remington Catholic High School. In this research study five of the 9th through 12th grade African American male students who have participated in the Middle School Mentoring program at the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center told their counter-narrative stories.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The five African American 9th through 12th grade male students from the Tyler Academy, Mason High School, and Remington Catholic High School were asked to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview (SSI) is a research method used to discover information about a certain experience from the participants. "The semi-structured interview maintains a conversational style in which the interviewer probes the respondent and is free to ask questions in a different order for all respondents" (McDougal, 2014, pp. 264-265). SSIs use open-ended questions to allow the participants to provide more complete answers. "The purpose of SSIs is to ascertain participants' perspectives regarding an experience pertaining to the research topic" (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 1). I used SSIs to provide a relaxed atmosphere that allowed the African American male students to completely answer my questions.

I prepared a set of questions prior to the SSIs, but I wasn't restricted to only those questions. "Although a semi-structured interview involves a standard set of questions, it also allows for interviewers to ask sub-questions and develop new questions based on interviewees' responses" (McDougal, 2014, p. 265).

The venue for the SSIs will be the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. I reserved a room prior to the actual day of the SSIs. The venue for the SSIs is important. "Participants must feel comfortable and relaxed enough to really tell the researcher 'how it is'" (Dearnley, 2005, p. 26). The SSIs will last from 30 to 45 minutes. I audiotaped the SSIs with the permission of the students, and their parents/guardians. I also transcribed the interviews. "A one-hour interview may take five hours to type verbatim, and will amount to 20-25 single-spaced pages" (Dearnley, 2005, p. 27). (See Consent Forms in Appendices B & C, pp. 106-113)

In addition to tape recording the SSIs it's important for me to take notes prior to the start of the SSIs during the SSIs, and after the SSIs. "It has been suggested that the interviewer writes down his or her thoughts and feelings before, during and after the interview (Chesney 2000) and that the use of a reflective diary (Clarke 2006) can be beneficial" (Whiting, 2008, p. 37). However, I didn't write any notes during the SSIs, so as not to cause any discomfort of the participants. Carpenter (1999) noted that time should be allowed after the SSIs to allow any participant the opportunity to express any discomfort they may have (Whiting, 2008). "The credibility of the research resides in part in the skill and competence of the researcher (Angen 2000)" (Tuckett, 2005, p. 3).

An interviewer must strive to maintain the quality of the interview. "The quality of the interview can be maintained by paying careful attention to the following three principles: maintain the flow of interviewee's story; maintaining a positive relationship with the interviewee; and avoiding interviewer bias" (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 248). I used several questions to clarify what I heard the students say, and I tried not to inject my opinions during our conversations.

Coding Process of Grounded Theory

Qualitative data may be analyzed through coding. "Coding, or thematic analysis, involves translating or reducing data into categories based on patterns or themes" (McDougal, 2014, p. 275). Thomas, Manusov, Wang, and Livingston (2011) used coding to analyze their data when using semi-structured interviews to determine why Black males where successful in being admitted to and graduating from medical school (McDougal, 2014). I'm using semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection, utilized in grounded theory, and it is the overarching method to interpret and analyze counter-narratives (CRT) of Black male youth.

Charmaz (2003) observes that coding in grounded theory may take us in surprising directions. "Unlike quantitative research that requires data to fit into *preconceived* standardized codes, the researcher's interpretations of data shape his or her emergent codes in grounded theory" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 258). "Ryan and Bernard (2003) identify several things for researchers to look for when they are searching for themes: repetition, indigenous typologies, metaphor and analogies, similarities and differences, linguistic connections, missing data, and theoretical material" (McDougal, 2014, p. 276). I used this method when coding the information from my semi-structured interviews.

Critical race epistemology uncovers or centers marginalized voices of color as a means to transform Mt. Ararat's pre-college preparation of African American male students. I politically insert myself as an African American researcher, along with the selection of my respondents (African American male youth), to center unheard voices of color in their interpretations of Mt. Ararat's mentoring program as a spiritual institution promoting academic success of marginalized Black males.

Informed Consent Procedures

The five African American 9th through 12th grade students and their parents/guardians were asked to complete the Child Assent Form, and the Parent Permission Form. Each were advised that this study was being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Educational Doctorate degree in the Educational Leadership Program, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, School of Education, Duquesne University. The parents' sons were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview (SSI). The semi-structured interview is a research method used to discover information about a certain experience from the participants. I asked seven questions of the participants to determine what effect the Mt. Ararat mentoring program has played in preparing them to be college-ready. This was the only request that was asked of them. There was no compensation (money) for participation in this study. They did not have to pay any money to participate in this study.

Their participation in this study and any personal information that they provide was kept confidential at all times. Questions didn't elicit any psychological, emotional, or physical harm to interviewee participants. Their names will never appear on any survey or research instruments. Pseudonyms will be used instead. All written and electronic forms were kept secure. Any study materials with personal identification information will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed. The semi-structured interview will be audio recorded with the students and their parents'/guardians' permission. The audio tapes will be destroyed after my dissertation has been approved.

The students were not under any obligation to participate in this study. They were free to withdraw their permission to participate at any time by speaking directly with me by telephone or in person. Their data already collected was deleted immediately. A summary of the results of

this research will be supplied to them, at no cost, upon request. After signing the consent forms if they had any concerns or questions students had access to my personal contact information and e-mail. If they have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, they may contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at delmonico@duq.edu.

Background of Mentoring Program at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church

The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program is run by the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center, the community arm of the church. The mentoring program was started in 2003 after Rev. Dr. William Curtis, Senior Pastor of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, visited the Robinson Middle School (pseudonym). Rev. Curtis was invited by the Executive Director of Middle Schools for Pittsburgh Public Schools. The Executive Director, who is also a member of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, felt that Robinson could benefit by allowing Mt. Ararat Church to mentor the African American middle school students. Rev. Curtis was scheduled to spend one hour at the school, but decided to spend the entire afternoon.

Rev. Curtis made an appeal the following Sunday to the men of the church to volunteer to mentor the African American middle school males at Robinson. He received a verbal commitment from the men to serve as mentors. Rev. Curtis immediately formed an advisory committee and the work began to create a mentoring program for the Robinson African American male students. During the initial meeting, Rev. Curtis appointed the Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Pittsburgh, to be the Spiritual Leader, Chair, of the advisory committee. She wrote a federal grant proposal to the U. S. Department of Education to initially fund the mentoring program. The Mt. Ararat Community Center's Male Mentoring program was chosen to receive a three-year grant from the Safe Schools division of the U. S.

Department of Education. I was the Executive Director of the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center at the time, and chosen to be the Coordinator of the Male Mentoring program.

The mission of the Mt. Ararat Mentoring Program is to develop strong spiritual values; achieve academic excellence; enhance positive self-concept; foster health and wellness; advance life-skill development; and provide service to others. The goal of the mentoring program is to help prepare middle school students, both spiritually and academically, for high school and beyond. The purpose of the mentoring program is to intentionally put Christian mentors into the lives of middle school students. The Mentoring Program is now thirteen years old, and mentors middle school boys and girls. The Robinson Middle School closed and now the program provides mentoring services for students from the Obama Academy, Tyler Academy, Sterrett Academy, and Colfax Academy. In addition, ten mentees attend other schools not previously named.

The mentoring program meets every Thursday evening, 6:00 pm -7:30 pm during the regular school year to provide strong spiritual values, and life-skills for the mentees. Spiritual training is provided by the Mt. Ararat Church for the mentors. The mentors also provided mentoring training from the Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern PA.   Additional activities include monthly educational and fun field trips provided by the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center.

The mentors are also encouraged to have contact with their mentees at least once a week. Mentees earn the right to participate in an annual end of the year trip. Mentees must maintain good conduct and improved grades in school. The mentees must also participate in community service projects. The middle school mentees will be visiting Washington, DC this year, June 22nd through June 23rd. Both mentors and mentees will visit Washington, DC. The high school

students will visit New York, June 15th through June 16th. Both trips are fully funded by the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center.

Mentors are encouraged to worship with their mentees twice a month. Also, mentors are encouraged to pray with their mentees on a regular basis. Mentors are trained on how to lead their mentees in memorizing, and discussing Bible verses with their mentees. Mentors also are encouraged to share their faith stories with their mentees. Faith stories are how you view life in relationship to your faith in God.

The mentoring program has been successful with African American males thus far. "Overall, the report cards for the first quarter indicate that Mentees maintained an average of 2.0 GPA or more in all (Math, Reading, and Science subjects)" (Mentoring Program Report, 2016, p. 2). This report also showed that students who participated in at least 12 of the 18 mentoring activities provided by the mentoring program had higher grade point averages, and students who had less than 4 absentees had higher grade point averages (Mentoring Program Report, 2016).

Selection of Interview Participants

In order to qualify for participation in this study participants must be an African American male 9th through 12th grade student at the Tyler Academy, Mason High School, and the Remington Catholic High School. They also have participated in the Middle School Mentoring program for two or three years at the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center. Each participant is 14 to 18 years old. The participants were 11 through 13 years old when they participated in the Middle School Mentoring program. Their present grade point averages range from 2.0 to 2.5. These students have consistently improved their grade point averages from participating in the Middle School Mentoring program. They also attend high school at least 90 percent of the time. Each of the five participants shows potential in graduating from high school college-ready.

Each of the participants' mentors have agreed to mentor them through high school. The Middle School Mentoring program ask each mentor to commit to mentoring their mentee for three years through the completion of middle school. However, these five mentors have committed to mentoring their mentees for four additional years. The Mentoring Director for the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center, assisted me in choosing the five participants.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

I asked the five African American 9th through 12th grade males students seven semi-structured interview questions. Other questions were asked based on the responses of the seven semi-structured interview questions. (See Appendix A for semi-structured interview questions, p. 105)

CONTEXT

Tyler Academy 6-12

Tyler Academy is located in the Homewood community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Recent data for Tyler Academy that appears on the Pittsburgh Public Schools website reveals that there are 516 students, 256 males, and 260 females. The largest demographical group of students (95%) are African American, 3% are Multi-Racial and 1% are Caucasian. Additionally, there are two American Indian students, one Asian student, and one Hispanic student. Presently, 100% of the students at Pittsburgh Public Schools receive Free/Reduced Lunch. However, when this data was gathered 84% of the students received Free/Reduced Lunch (http://www.discoverpps.org).

The latest PSSA data shows that 28.7% of the students are proficient or advanced in reading, and 71.3% are basic or below basic in reading. The African American students are 27.5% proficient or advanced in reading. Only 32.9% of the students are proficient or advanced

in math, and 67.1% are basic or below basic. Only 32.0% of the African American students are proficient or advanced in math. The data shows that 28.1% of the students are proficient or advanced in writing, and 71.9% are basic or below basic. African American students are 28.6% proficient or advanced in writing. Only 7.4% of the students are proficient or advanced in science, and 92.6% are basic or below basic (http://www.discoverpps.org).

The Keystone Exams data show that all students are only 2.6% proficient in Algebra 1, 7.9% proficient in literature, and 0.00% proficient in Biology. African American students are proficient at the same levels as the total student body. Twenty percent of the students are Pittsburgh Promise Ready (http://www.discoverpps.org).

Mason High School

The Mason High School is a public school located in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Mason High School has a partial Engineering Magnet Program. "The program develops skills in critical thinking, problem solving, oral presentation, data analysis, technical writing, CAD and other engineering software" (http://www.discoverpps.org).

Recent data for Mason High School reveals that there are 1,469 students, 766 males, and 703 females. The largest demographical group of students (48%) are Caucasian, 40% are African American, and 5% are Multi-Racial. In 2014-2015, 71% of the seniors were Promise eligible. The Promise eligible seniors had a GPA of 2.5 or higher, and attended school at least 90% of the time. Forty percent of the students at Mason High School are economically disadvantaged (http://www.discoverpps.org).

The latest (2015-16) PSSA data shows that 67% of the students are proficient or advanced in math, and 33% are basic or below in math. African American students are 100% proficient or advanced in math, and 50% Caucasian students are proficient or advanced in math.

The PSSA data further reveals that 67% of the students are proficient or advanced in reading, and 33% are basic or below basic in reading. African American students are 100% proficient or advanced in reading, and 50% Caucasian students are proficient or advanced in reading. The Mason students are not as efficient in science as they are in math and reading. Twenty-five percent of the students are proficient or advanced in science, and 75% are basic or below basic in science. African American students are 50% proficient or advanced in science (http://www.discoverpps.org).

The latest (2015-16) Keystone Exams data shows that all students are 61.74% proficient in Algebra 1, 77.10% proficient in literature, and 51.36% proficient in biology. African American students are 36.89% proficient in Algebra 1, 60.33% proficient in literature, and 24.37% proficient in biology. Caucasian students are 78.47% proficient in Algebra 1, 90.28% proficient in literature, and 71.33% proficient in biology (http://www.discoverpps.org).

Remington Catholic High School

Remington Catholic High School is a private urban Catholic High School for boys located in the Oakland neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The mission of Remington Catholic High School is to encourage boys to practice their faith, their scholarship, and their service. Christian values are emphasized, and life skills are practiced.

Remington Catholic provides a rigorous academic program that includes a College in High School program.   Upperclassmen can earn college credits at Duquesne University, the University of Pittsburgh and LaRoche College. The students are provided an extensive integrative Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) curriculum. They prepare each student for college.

Mt. Ararat Baptist Church

The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church (MABC) is located in the East Liberty community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. MABC is 109 years old. The senior pastor of MABC is the Rev. Dr. William H. Curtis. Rev. Curtis estimates that 60% of MABC's members are actively involved in ministry. MABC has an active membership of 6,208 members of which 4,210 (67.82%) are female, and 1,932 (31.12%) are male, according to the congregational database. An active member is one who has completed their new members' classes, and is included in the congregational database.

MABC's congregation also has 2,769 (44.6%) female heads of households and 1,377 (22.18%) male heads of households according to the congregational database. The racial composition of MABC includes 98% African Americans, and the other 2% of the congregation is composed of White Americans, Native American Indians, Latino Americans, and Native Africans.

Mt. Ararat's congregational database reveals that only 1,947 of its 6,208 active members live within twenty-five miles of the church.   Mt. Ararat, therefore, draws two thirds of its members from outside of the church's immediate neighborhood. This statistic was a factor used to help the Mt. Ararat congregation decide whether to move its congregation outside of the East Liberty community due to overcrowded conditions of the church. While MABC wanted to continue to serve the residents of East Liberty, it struggled with whether to move out of the East Liberty community to be closer to the other two thirds of the congregation.   Mt. Ararat has decided ultimately to remain in East Liberty. MABC seeks to continue to fulfill its mission to make a positive contribution to its immediate community, even though the majority of its congregation live outside of the community of East Liberty.

In 1990 MABC established the Mount Ararat Community Activity Center (MACAC) in order to be more socially responsible to the residents of the East Liberty community. It is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt non-profit organization. MACAC serves as the outreach arm of the church by providing economic and social services to the residents of this East Liberty community. These services include an Early Childhood Development Center (Day Care Center), a summer computer camp; an after-school program, a weekly GED class, a food pantry and clothes closet, a community computer lab, a weekly exercise class, and a weekly computer class for senior citizens.

Community outreach is important to MABC because community outreach is the vehicle used to provide social ministry to the community.   Mt. Ararat, therefore, provides a community outreach budget line-item in its general budget each year to help meet the social and economic needs of the community. For example, MABC has allocated a $200,000 operating grant to the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center (MACAC), more than half of its community outreach budget for 2015. The church plans to allocate this operating grant to the center on an annual basis. Mt. Ararat's community outreach also includes a provision for scholarships to high school graduates who are members of the congregation. This amount totals $20,000 annually.

The Community Tithe Ministry oversees and distributes Mt. Ararat's tithes from the previous year, and will distribute between $100,000 to $200,000 in 2015 to local non-profits in Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas. MABC will accept requests for proposals from local non-profit organizations, including other churches, and decide who should receive the funding. The MABC congregation, in this way, tithes a "seed of hope" into these non-profits. Tithing a "seed of hope" means that Mt. Ararat encourages these non-profits to also practice social ministry in their urban communities.

MABC collaborated with MACAC, and the Robinson Middle School in 2003 to establish a male mentoring project. MABC and MACAC entered into a covenant with the school to address the crisis of poor academic grades, increased dropouts, high juvenile delinquency crime, and the lack of positive male role models in the lives of the males being mentored. MABC and MACAC entered into a covenant with the school because the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church leadership believed that social ministry should extend beyond the physical walls of the church. A covenant is an agreement that God makes with us to accomplish something that could not be done without God. The church, school, and the community center agreed to work together to ensure that the males would be better students and productive citizens of the community.

The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, therefore, covenanted with the school and the community center to provide Christian men to serve as mentors to the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade male students at Robinson Middle School. Robinson Middle School covenanted with the church and the community center, as well, to open the doors of the school to the mentors, and allow them to have access to the boys' teachers, school counselors, and the school administrators. The Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center covenanted with the school and the church to serve as the lead agency to administer and monitor the funds provided in the grant from the U.S. Department of Education and to provide the day-to-day operations of the male mentoring project. The Robinson Middle School, the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, and the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center, all agreed to put the welfare of the male students first. They also agreed to work with the parents and the guardians of the male students to ensure they were living productive lives. The Robinson Middle School closed in 2006.

MABC and MACAC have continued the male mentoring project for middle school males despite the closing of Robinson Middle School in 2006. The mentoring project now includes

middle school females. MABC continues to provide Christian mentors for the students. There are currently four Pittsburgh Public School sites for the middle school mentoring project: Sterrett Academy, Pittsburgh Obama Academy, Colfax, and Tyler Academy. MACAC has added a high school mentoring program called the Professional Development Academy that serves students at the Obama Academy and the Tyler Academy.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Previous studies have shown that religion plays a role in promoting academic success for Black students. Al-Fadhli and Kersen (2010) concluded that religious, social, and cultural capital influence educational aspirations of African American 8th and 10th grades. This research study is built on the findings from Al-Fadhli and Kersen (2010), concerning the suggestions that were made to the African American church. They suggested that the Black church monitor the student's grades on a regular basis, and acknowledge their success in front of the congregation. They also suggested that the Black church could also serve as mediators between students and schools when they have been suspended.

This research study examined one research question: How are 9th through 12th grade African American male students making sense of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program to improve their college readiness? The five African American male students were given the opportunity to tell their stories concerning how the Mt. Ararat Church helped or not helped them to graduate from high school college-ready.

Each of the students have a desire to attend college. They all have at least a 2.4 grade point average, and two of them will graduate this spring and attend college in the fall. The two students who will be attending college in the fall have both been accepted to attend Robert Morris University and North Carolina A&T University, respectively. One of the 9th grade students wants to attend the Berkeley School of Music and major in percussions. The other students are undecided as to where they will be attending college.

The three major themes that emerged through the voices of the five African American male students in my research were: 1) church mentors are relatable advocates, (2) future college preparation, and (3) faith inspiration. The students agreed that it helped to have African American male church mentors as relatable advocates. Also, the students felt that college preparation was extremely helpful and needed. Lastly, the role of faith was understood by some of the male students but not all of them. They acknowledged that faith was important, but still are wrestling with how it helps them to be college ready.

The three themes help to anchor the church mentoring program in assisting African American males in their educational journey. Mentors as relatable advocates can help in the improvement of education for African American male youth in urban school settings. The mentors are relatable because they are sharing their life stories with the male students, and the male students are seeing some similarities and some differences. The similarities are bonding them together, and the differences are creating spaces to further communicate with each other. Urban schools can benefit from these bonding relationships of the mentors and the male students by working side-by-side with the church mentors to help the male students become college ready.

Church Mentors as Relatable Advocates

The church mentors as relatable advocates was the strongest theme arising from analysis of the semi-structured interview data. The African American male students were confident that the church African American male mentors had their best interest at heart. They strongly believed that the church mentors understood their educational journeys. They see them as advocates, or being in their corner. Many felt their mentors would remain in their lives through high school, although the church mentoring program requires that they end their commitment

with the students after the 8th grade. One of the male students said with a smile, "My mentor said he will be with me through college" (Personal Communication, November 5, 2016). Another male student said, "I believe my mentor will be in my life after this program" (Personal Communication, November 19, 2016). The African American male students formed strong bonds with their mentors because they established trusting relationships.

The students believed that the church mentors shared their lived experiences in ways that students could relate to and that could help them with their own struggles. For example, students felt that mentors understood their learning environments in the classroom. The mentors would ask questions about the student's classroom situations, and brainstorm with them about what the students thought their problems were. Also, the mentors would provide tips and ideas on how to solve the problem. The mentors would applaud successes and reward good grades and positive behavior. One student said, "If we get good grades he would reward us, and take us somewhere nice like Dave & Busters" (Personal Communication, November 19, 2016). The African American male students were comfortable sharing their school and life experiences with their mentors, because they believed they understood them since they too had experienced similar situations while growing up.

The church mentors were not only concerned with good grades, but also positive conduct in school. The students would tell their mentors when they were having bad conduct problems in school, and the mentors would share their educational journey stories with the students. The mentors explained to the students that they too had similar behavior problems in school. The mentors would then share with the students some positive ways to address their bad behavior problems. One of the students responded, "When I was going through something, he would break it down to me about what I should do, and what I shouldn't do" (Personal Communication,

December 3, 2016). Another student said, "He shaped me to be a man" (Personal Communication, February 4, 2016). The same student further stated, "My dad too, was a big impact, but my mentor was that push, he helped me to be the man I am today, the gentlemen I am" (Personal Communication, February 4, 2017). The church mentors emphasized the importance of good behavior with their students, and offered them suggestions for correcting their bad behavior.

The church mentoring program provided an after-school tutoring program. Mentors were encouraged to make sure their students attended this tutoring program. The tutoring program emphasized critical thinking skills, homework, and study skills. This program offered a life line for students who were in danger of repeating the same grade. One of the students thought he would lose his mentor if he had to repeat the 8th grade, however the student was pleased to discover that his mentor remains with him. He said, "Last year I had to do the 8th grade twice because when I left Tyler Academy I got held back, but my mentor has still been there with me through the 9th grade" (Personal Communication, November 19, 2016). Basically, this student is saying that his church mentor proved to him that he's not leaving him behind, but walking beside him.

All the students could relate to their mentors because they are African American males like them. They seemed to find a comfort level in knowing that their mentors had experienced some of the same things that they are now experiencing in school. One of the students stated, "My mentor is African American and it kind of made things more relatable, because we have like the same situation, but I'm just younger and he is older" (Personal Communication, November 5, 2016). Another student said, "Yes, there are certain things we can both relate to because we are African American" (November 19, 2016). Some of the students received history

lessons from their mentors concerning what it means to be an African American male in this country.

Future College Preparation Starts Here

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of interview data was that college is not an option but an expectation for the five African American male students in this research study. One student said, "I do have a plan to go to college" (Personal Communication, December 3, 2016). This student is in the 9th grade and he's working hard to improve his 2.5 grade point average. He wants to attend the Berkeley School of Music, and he realizes that his 2.5 grade point average will allow him to apply for the Pittsburgh Promise Scholarship, but will not be high enough to attend Berkley. His biggest problem has been transitioning from middle school to high school. He's discovered that high school is more demanding academically than middle school.

Preparing to attend college starts with a desire to attend college. Additionally, several things need to be accomplished to make college a reality. The student needs an acceptable grade point average, an acceptable college admissions score on the SAT or ACT exams, community service, money (loans or scholarships) to pay for college and a support system both on and off campus. However, many of the students in this research study have not considered all requirements for college. All of the students have visited at least one college campus. Some of the students have participated in an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) tour sponsored by NEED, a non-profit that provides college scholarships for minority students, and the Kingsley Association, a non-profit located in East Liberty Pittsburgh.

Mentors are encouraged to share their college stories with the African American male students. Also, mentors are encouraged to travel with their mentees on the end of the year trips.

The mentors who have chosen to continue to mentor their students in high school actively help them to choose a college, university, or trade school to attend. Some of the mentors help their students to fill out college admission applications, financial aid forms, and make campus visits with them.

The five African American male students who participated in this research study realize that there are few African American male students graduating from high school in Pittsburgh, and fewer who are attending college. However, all are planning on and working toward graduating from high school and attending college. Two have been accepted to college, and three of the students are working toward graduating from high school college ready.

The five African American male high school students expressed an appreciation to the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program for exposing them to various colleges and universities. One of the students said, "The college visits were helpful, because they helped me expand my college options outside of Pittsburgh" (Personal Communication, December 3, 2016). Another noted that he plans to attend the Berkeley School of Music, and major in percussions. He's presently in the 9th grade. Although two of the other students haven't chosen their colleges yet, they said that their mentors were helping them to research various colleges and universities.

Conversely, the two seniors have applied and been accepted to one of their colleges. "I recently got accepted to North Carolina A & T University" (Personal Communication, February 4, 2017). However, that same student also applied to Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), Robert Morris University, Morehouse College, Clarion University, and Point Park University. The other student who is a senior was accepted into Robert Morris University.

Mentors appeared to play a minor role in ensuring that their students were college ready. Although, one mentor is helping his student to research information on colleges in the library. His student visited the U. S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland while on an end of the year mentoring trip. His student is interested in possibly attending the U. S. Naval Academy in the future. The five mentors were trained to mentor middle school students, and not high school students. It appears that additional college-readiness training is needed to help the mentors better serve their students in this area. The mentors are trained in helping their students to excel academically, and to practice good conduct.

Faith Inspiration

The third theme arising from interview data was that faith is what we hope for but can't see. "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1, NIV). In this research study, faith is confidence in the fact the Black urban churches can help African American male students succeed in high school and graduate ready to succeed in college. Spiritual faith is the practice of hoping for what we can't see, but believing that it will happen. In this study, spiritual faith is the mentors sharing with their students the role faith has played in their lives, and encouraging their students to practice faith to help them succeed in high school and encourage them that they can also succeed in college.

The mentors of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program share their faith with their students. They do this by attending worship services with their mentees. Also, they pray with them, and share scripture with them. They encourage their students to develop and practice their faith, both in and outside of the church. The mentors also share how they use their faith at home, work, in the community, and when they play.

One of the missions of the Mt. Ararat Mentoring Program is to develop strong spiritual values in the mentees or students. The African American male students participating in this study were asked: In what way (s) does your spiritual faith help you to succeed in school? Some of them responded with a knowledge of their faith, while others were not sure of what I meant by faith. For example, one student responded, "Well, the church I go to, they stress how important our education is to be successful in society". The same student later responded, "I'm more Catholic than anything right now" (Personal Communication, November 5, 2016). Another student said, "My faith helped me deal spiritually with knowing who I am, and knowing what I need to get pass these high school grades and beyond" (Personal Communication, December 3, 2016).

Several of the students noted that their spiritual faith helps them to succeed in school. One of the students said, "School is hard, and I take time to pray before an exam" (Personal Communication, February 4, 2017). He shared that he believes that his spiritual faith helps him, because he grew up in the church. He further stated that "His faith helps even in life, not just in school" (Personal Communication, February 4, 2017). His spiritual faith was woven through his life. This student equates his spiritual faith to his church. When he is away from the church, does his spiritual faith still help him in school? He shared that his spiritual faith helped him to remember to be respectful in school, and to remember that he can academically succeed because his faith allows him to believe it.

The students who were not connected to a church didn't practice their spiritual faith as often. One of the students said, "In school, I pray every now and then, it's not something that I constantly do" (Personal Communication, December 3, 2016). He further stated that his spiritual faith helps him succeed in school stating, "When I try to apply it as much as I can, a lot of times I

stray away from it, because I'm just in the heat of the moment" (Personal Communication, December 3, 2016). He also shared that he and his mentor seldom prayed or talked about their spiritual faith. Another student who attended church with his mentor twice a month noted that they often prayed together.

Perhaps, the Mt. Ararat mentoring program should think about ways in which the students can understand, in a more specific way, the role and function spirituality plays in their academic and school lives. Mentors first need to realize the role that spirituality plays in their lives in order to help their students to see the connection between faith and academics in school. Dantley argues that 'spirituality is the grounding for the values and principles we espouse that inform our personal and professional behavior" (Dantley, 2003, p. 274). Our spirituality should lead us to be courageous enough to change the status quo found in our educational systems.

Further, our spirituality should lead us to change the paradigm concerning African American male students in our public and private high schools. Public schools often view African American male students as failures and not successes. The negative paradigm shifts when we see through the eyes of our spirituality that African American male students can succeed academically and graduate from high school college-ready.

Three major themes arose from the analysis of the semi-structured interview data. Those three themes were: (1) church mentors were relatable advocates for the students, (2) college is an expectation not an option for the students, and (3) the mentors shared their faith with their students. The strongest theme was that church mentors were relatable advocates for their students. The most challenging theme was that the mentors shared their faith with the students. The African American male students trusted their mentors to listen and respond to their concerns

both at school and in life. Some of the students have an expectation that their mentors will be with them past this mentoring experience.

Limitations and Ethical Concerns

This research study was limited by the fact that it focused on one Black Urban Church, and one Public School System, and one private Catholic school. I fully disclosed that I have served as a minister of the Gospel at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for more than 19 years. I also disclosed that the Male Mentoring program of the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center was started while I worked as the Executive Director of the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center. I continue to serve on the Core (Advisory Committee) of the Mentoring program. I recognize that other community partners are needed to help African American males be college-ready.

Finally, this study primarily focused on how Black male youth understood their mentoring experiences from church mentors in relation to being college ready. It did not include a discussion on the role of spirituality in relation to manhood/masculinity for Black males in relation to aspirations for higher education. This is an important consideration for further research, given the racial and gendered context of this study. Subsequently, further research should be explored, regarding the role of the Black church developing a healthy, spiritual-based, non-oppressive, masculinity for Black males in relation to their growth as students being college ready.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program must make several improvements for the African American male students to achieve academically and be ready to attend college or trade school. For example, the mentors need to

be trained in what it means for African American male students to be college-ready. They must be equipped with the proper information to help guide their students towards success. Also, the mentors need training in how to share their faith with their students to help them in school and in life. One of the missions of the Mt. Ararat Mentoring Program is to develop strong spiritual values in the mentees or students. The recommendation section will offer suggestions on how to help train mentors in college-readiness, and in how to share their faith with their students.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS for IMPROVEMENT

The strength of the Mt. Ararat Mentoring program is its African American male church mentors. The five African American male high school students agreed that their church mentors serve as their advocates. The Mt. Ararat Mentoring program successfully recruited both Christian men and women to mentor middle school African American students in the programs fourteen year history. This research study interviewed five of the African American male high school students who participated in the Mt. Ararat Mentoring program while they were in middle school. At the beginning of this study five of the African American male students had their same mentors from the middle school mentoring program. However, at the end of this study only three of the African American male students retained their same mentors. One mentor moved out of Pittsburgh, and the other mentor got a promotion on his job that requires him to travel extensively.

The male church mentors are asked to commit three years to the students while they are in middle school. However, the students in this study expressed a desire to keep their church mentors through high school. One student said, "In high school you have way more things to do, and having a mentor will kind of keep things in check, and make sure you're doing alright, instead of going off like a lot of kids do" (Personal Communication, December 3, 2016). The Mt. Ararat Mentoring program should be extended through the 12th grade. One way to extend the program is to recruit a new group of African American male church mentors. However, to respond to the desires of the African American male high school students, the Mt. Ararat Church mentoring program could provide additional training for their church middle school mentors.

The additional training would include, college readiness training and spiritual development training.

College Readiness Training

All high school church mentors should have mandatory college readiness training. Middle school church mentors who desire the college readiness training should be allowed to participate. There are numerous college readiness high school programs in the country. However, one local college readiness program can be adapted by the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church Mentoring program. The Riverview Jr./Sr. High School in Oakmont, Pennsylvania have developed an adaptable college program. Their website contains several forms that could be used by the church mentors to track the progress of their students toward being ready for college.

The college readiness training will introduce the church mentors to the requirements that their students need to meet before they are college ready. For example, not only are grades important but so are Keystone test scores in Algebra 1, biology, and literature; college application; references; letters of recommendation; SAT and ACT scores; and financial aid applications. The college readiness training can also help the mentors to navigate through important personnel that could be helpful at their student's school. For example, they would be trained on the rules of visitation at their student's school, and how to meet the principal, teachers, and counselors. Collaboration training could also be included in the college readiness training. The college readiness training would take place throughout the high school years.

The Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center have existing relationships with local colleges and universities. Perhaps, the graduate students from these local colleges and universities can help develop and run the college readiness training. Presently, the Mt. Ararat Mentoring program have limited staff and resources. Another resource that Mt. Ararat's

Mentoring program could tap into are the members of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. The mentoring program could possibly recruit current or retired educators from the congregation to help design and teach the college readiness training. The Mt. Ararat Community Center has a High School Professional Development program that provides college readiness, but those students don't have church mentors. Perhaps, these students could also be mentored by the church mentors.

College Admissions for African American Students

Fewer African American students are qualifying for admission into colleges. Katie Larsen McClarty (2015) notes, "Students who skipped a grade and participated in challenging academic coursework, such as AP, consistently and significantly outperformed their non-accelerated peers, both in high school and in college" (Sparks, 2015, p. 1). Advanced Placement courses are being offered more in affluent White schools, as opposed to poor Black schools. Consequently, there are disparities in course offerings.

African American students are victims of tracking. Tracking is when students are placed in specific courses but denied the opportunity to take other courses. Very few African American students are chosen for the AP track, and if they are chosen for the AP track fewer are passing the AP course exams. The sharing of course selection and career paths with middle school students and their parents can ensure that all students are treated equally in the tracking process. As more parents, teachers, and school counselors recommend college to high school students, attention must be directed to the evaluation of current educational tracking policy, and the quality of educational and career planning offered in elementary and middle school. (Akos & Lambie & Milson, 2007, p. 63)

Advanced Placement courses allow students to earn college credits while still in high school. This can be a tremendous advantage for students to complete their undergraduate degrees early. "Advanced Placement (AP) courses serve as important vehicles for earning college credit before matriculating in higher education by reducing costs and time-to-degree, thus increasing the chances of postgraduate study" (Barnard-Brak, et al., 2011, p. 165). African American students are among students of color who are underrepresented in Advance Placement courses. "Thus, this under enrollment in AP courses may be viewed as another factor contributing to the lower educational attainment of already underrepresented minorities in higher education" (Barnard-Brak, et al., 2011).

School reforms are necessary to allow African American students to have access to Advance Placement courses. "How do school structures, practices and discourses help maintain racial and ethnic discrimination in access to AP courses?" (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004, p. 17). First, school administrators need to establish a pattern to prove that African American students are disproportionately represented in Advanced Placement courses. Second, school administrators need to prove that African American students are at a disadvantage when applying to colleges and universities without having taken any Advanced Placement courses. Advanced Placement courses provide three advantages:

(1) AP courses are an indication of a school's high quality

curriculum; (2) students who take AP courses receive an extra

grade point in their GPA; and (3) AP courses usually lead to

students taking AP exams. In many cases, if they score a "3

or better" on the exam, they receive college course credit.

(Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004, p.23)

Students who have AP courses usually graduate from college earlier, and have an added advantage to enter the work force early or attend graduate school earlier.

African American students who are denied access to Advance Placement courses are put into a place of disadvantage and are denied an opportunity to attend college. "At the macro level, Ford et al. (2008) recommended racial equity plans, where school educators perform rigorous self-studies of access to special programming focusing on demographics, referrals, and instruments" (Barnard-Brak, et al., 2011, p. 172).

Some African American students lack the confidence in asking to take AP courses. A study of African American educators in North Carolina were concerned about this issue. "They were specifically concerned about the students fear and lack of confidence in self-advocating for inclusion in AP and Honors courses" (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008, p. 176). African American students need advocates both in and outside of the school to help them take AP courses.

Ohrt (2008) argues that professional school counselors (PSCs) can serve as school advocates for Latino and African American students who haven't been given access to AP courses. PSCs are in a unique situation to help these students gain access to AP courses because they are already familiar with a student's tracking (Ohrt, et al., 2008). "Therefore, they should work to identify barriers affecting students' access to higher-level courses and design interventions to address these barriers (American School Counselor Association [ASCA]" (Ohrt et al., 2008, p. 59). PSCs have had some success in helping to prepare Latino and African American students for AP courses.

There are several approaches taken by PSCs working with Latino and African American students. One successful approach taken by PSCs at a high school included collaboration with

school administrators, teachers, and parents. Next students were selected, and student group information sessions were held. PSCs provided delivery of support services including mentoring and group counseling. Initial findings indicated that Latino and African American participation in AP courses increased by 37% (Ohrt, et al., 2008, pp. 60-62).

Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) offer several recommendations to begin to address the unequal access to AP courses. The school must create a college-going culture that includes:

1. A school culture supportive of advanced study and college going.

2. Student participation in rigorous academic courses.

3. Student access to qualified teachers.

4. Student access to intensive academic support.

5. The school developing a multicultural college-going identity.

6. The school connects with parents and the community around

    Advanced study. (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004, p. 24)

Perhaps, the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church can begin to discuss and move African American male students at Tyler Academy into Advanced Placement classes. This will improve their chances of being accepted into college, and increase their chances of graduating from college. AP classes will also allow the African American male students to increase their overall grade point averages. Increased grade point averages can lead to scholarship offers, and decrease the possibility that the students will need to take out loans to pay for their college degrees.

Mentor's Spiritual Development Classes

The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church Mentoring program is founded on transformational theology. Transformational theology is Christian religious education that seeks to transform

individuals and the cities in which they live and grow to fulfill their potential as disciples of

Jesus Christ. Urban churches are forced outside of their church buildings to advocate for

systemic change in the community and to fulfill their potential as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Urban churches who practice transformational theology view this systemic change as being their

mission. In this male mentoring program, the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church views the systemic

change of the educational system in Pittsburgh as being their mission.

Spiritual development for mentors could equip them to practice and share their prayer

lives with their students. The students could then begin to practice and share their prayer lives

with their mentors. The Mt. Ararat Mentoring program ought to think about ways in which the

students can understand, in a more specific way, the role and function spirituality plays in their

academic and life success progression. Mentors need to realize the role that spirituality plays in

their lives in order to help students to see the connection between faith and academic life

successes.

Mentors should participate in spiritual development classes once a month. These classes

will allow them to practice their understanding of the scripture and prayer. After the mentors

complete the spiritual development classes they will share what they have learned with their

mentees. These classes would be taught by the Associate Ministers appointed by Pastor William

Curtis, Senior Pastor of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. The classes would focus on such topics

as "How to Apply the Bible to Your Lives", and "How to Develop a Prayer Life." (See

Appendix D & Appendix E, pp. 114 - 115)

Additionally, the mentors should participate in monthly faith-based activities. These

activities should include, a routine prayer and scripture reading schedule. The prayer and

scripture reading schedule could be designed by selected Associate Ministers of the Mt. Ararat

Baptist Church chosen by Pastor Curtis. The mentors and their students could develop prayer journals in which they discuss and relate the prayers to their everyday lives in school and at work.

Practical Implications

African American male students will benefit from this collaboration because many of them will now graduate from high school. Some of these African American males will now be eligible to participate in the Pittsburgh Promise. Others, will now have a high school diploma and be eligible to apply for employment. Perhaps, some of the African American males will avoid going to prison. Trade school will be an option for some of them. The East End communities will benefit from having more positive African American male role models. The Pittsburgh Public Schools will increase the number of African American male high school graduates. Finally, African American urban churches will remain the cornerstone of the urban African American community.

Black Urban Church Recommendations for Improvement

Gaines argues that the Black Church should practice some of the tactics used by the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement to help them improve Black student achievement. For example, he suggested that Black churches educate their members to be activist in public school reform. According to Gaines, Black mega churches should take the lead in encouraging their members to become politically active in voting for politicians who will help improve Black student achievement (Gaines, 2010). Gaines points out that some Black churches are contributing to the academic success of Black children on a small scale. However, he observes that until Black churches work together across denominational lines will they have any

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real impact on public school reform concerning the academic success of Black students in public schools (Gaines, 2010).

Similarly, Barrett argues that the Black church can provide social capital in addition to economic capital for Black students to help them succeed academically and socially in life. Also, he points out the importance of the Black church modeling what a successful education can produce for Black children. For example, the focused Black church in Barrett's study opened a fast food restaurant on their church campus. The pastor of this Black church was able to model a positive work ethic for his Black students. This church was able to hire Black students from this Church and the community (Barrett, 2010). Black students also received academic and book scholarships from this church (Barrett, 2010).

This research study supports both Gaines and Barrett. The male mentors of the Mt. Ararat Mentoring program serve as advocates for their male mentees. The mentors have access to their mentees' teachers, and school administrators. They are encouraged to make school visits when they are needed. Additionally, the mentors practice positive work ethics by sharing their work experiences with their mentees. The mentors in the past have occasionally taken their mentees to work with them.

This research study supports the importance of the Black urban churches' need to work with public schools to help improve the academics of African American male students and help them to be prepared for college. Faith plays a role in the success of the African American students. However, further studies need to be conducted to determine how the male students define the role of faith in their lives as it relates to their success as students. The African American male students in this study realize that academics are important, and they have a desire to graduate from high school college ready.

Student voices are valuable, and should be included in each phase of a mentoring program. The students should be included as major stakeholders. The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church is determined to continue to mentor African American male students and collaborate with public schools to help them thrive academically and graduate from high school ready to succeed in college. The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church mentoring model could possibly be replicated by other Black urban churches.

The Mt. Ararat Baptist Church has been successful in mentoring African American male students in middle school. Those students are presently entering high school, and many no longer have a mentor from this successful mentoring program. Conversations with five African American male students support the need for the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church to provide mentors for high school African American males.

The newly recruited male mentors will need to be trained in a new set of skills to help the high school African American males graduate college ready. Those new skills include college readiness training, SAT or ACT college entrance exams training, college academic requirements training, and community service training. Perhaps, an even more important training for the new male mentors will be their spiritual faith training. This spiritual faith training will challenge the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church to collaborate with the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center to ensure the mentors are well equipped to share their spiritual faith with their students, and encourage their students to practice their spiritual faith to make them better academically and socially.

The conversations with the five African American male students highlighted the great job the African American male mentors are doing in relating to them. The students appreciated having men who have experienced in public schools what they are presently experiencing. The

male mentors seemed to think the same language that the students are speaking. The students also appreciated spending time with successful African American men. It offers hope to the students that they too can be successful and graduate from high school and college.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What are your thoughts on the role of the church helping you to succeed academically?

2. In what way (s) does your spiritual faith help you to succeed in school?

3. How do you understand your mentor's role in helping you with student success?

4. What have you learned from your mentor that will help prepare you for college?

5. What things can the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church help you with to make sure you graduate from high school and succeed in college?

6. How have you been helped with your grades and college by having an African American male mentor?

7. What additional opportunities might the mentoring program provide to prepare you for college?

APPENDIX B

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

TITLE:	Youth Bear Witness to Mentoring of the Black Church for College Readiness
INVESTIGATOR:	Mary L. Buckley, Doctoral Candidate, Duquesne University buckley3@duq.edu
ADVISOR:	Darius D. Prier, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Education, Duquesne University prierd@duq.edu
SOURCE OF SUPPORT:	This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ed.D. in the Educational Leadership Program, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, School of Education, Duquesne University.
PURPOSE:	Your son is being asked to participate in a research project that is seeking to understand the larger role the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church can play in assisting African American male students at the Tyler Academy, Mason High School, and the Remington

Catholic High School to be ready to graduate from high school and attend college. (All school names are pseudonyms)

In order to qualify for participation, your son must be a 9th through 12th grade African American male student at the Tyler Academy, Mason High School or the Remington Catholic High School, and have participated in the Middle School Mentoring program at the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center.

PARTICIPANT

PROCEDURES: Your son will also be asked to participate in an individual semi-structured interview (SSI). The semi-structured interview is a research method used to discover information about a certain experience from the participants. Rev. Mary L. Buckley will ask him seven questions about the Mt. Ararat Mentoring Program and school. The SSI will be held at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The transcription will remove any identifying information.

The seven questions that your son will be asked are:

1. What are your thoughts on the role of the church helping you succeed academically?

2. In what way(s) does your spiritual faith help you to succeed in school?

3. How do you understand your mentor's role in helping you with student success?

4. What have you learned from your mentor that will help prepare you for college?

5. What things can the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church help you with to make sure you graduate from high school and succeed in college?

6. How have you been helped with your grades and college by having an African American male mentor?

7. What additional opportunities might the mentoring program provide to prepare you for college?

These are the only requests that will be made of your son.

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RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are minimal risks associated with his participation but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. Your son will play a key role in helping the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church help African American male students graduate ready for college.

COMPENSATION: There will be no compensation (money) for participation in this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your son's participation in this study and any personal information that he provides will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible.

His name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed.

The semi-structured interview will be audio recorded with your permission. The audio tapes will be destroyed after the investigator's dissertation has been approved.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your son is under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your son's consent to participate at any time by speaking directly with the investigator by telephone or in person. His data already collected will be deleted immediately.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of my son. I also understand that my son's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to allow my son to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about his participation in this study, I may e-mail Mary L. Buckley at buckley3@duq.edu.

Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may e-mail Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at delmonico@duq.edu.

_____

Son's Name

_____   _____

Parent's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

CHILD ASSENT FORM

TITLE:	Youth Bear Witness to Mentoring of the Black Church for College Readiness
INVESTIGATOR:	Mary L. Buckley, Doctoral Candidate, Duquesne University buckley3@duq.edu
ADVISOR:	Darius D. Prier, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Education, Duquesne University prierd@duq.edu
SOURCE OF SUPPORT:	This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ed.D. in the Educational Leadership Program, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, School of Education, Duquesne University.
PURPOSE:	You are being asked to participate in a research project that looks at how you make sense of the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church's mentoring program to improve you being ready for college. In order to qualify for participation, you must be a 9th through 12th grade African American male student at the Tyler Academy, Mason High School, or the Remington Catholic High School, and have participated two to three years in the Middle School

Mentoring program at the Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center. You must have a grade point average between 2.0 and 2.5. (All school names are pseudonyms)

PARTICIPANT

PROCEDURES: To participate in this study, you will be asked seven questions during an individual semi-structured interview (SSI). The semi-structured interview will be used to help you tell your story about the mentoring program and school. Rev. Mary L. Buckley will ask you seven questions about your experience with the Mt. Ararat Mentoring Program and school. The interview will be held at the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. The transcription will remove any identifying information.

The seven questions you will be asked are:

1. What are your thoughts on the role of the church helping you to succeed academically?

2. In what way(s) does your spiritual faith help you to succeed in school?

3. How do you understand your mentor's role in helping you with student success?

4. What have you learned from your mentor that will help prepare you for college?

5. What things can the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church help you with to make sure you graduate from high school and succeed in college?

6. How have you been helped with your grades and college by having an African American male mentor?

7. What additional opportunities might the mentoring program provide to prepare you for college?

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are minimal risks associated with your participation but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. You will play a key role in helping the Mt. Ararat Baptist Church help you and other African American male students graduate ready for college. Your voice matters.

COMPENSATION: There will be no compensation (money) for participation in this study. You will not have to pay any money to participate in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your participation in this study and any personal information that you provide will be kept confidential at all times.

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed.

The semi-structured interview will be audio recorded and transcribed with your permission. The transcription will remove any identifying information. The audio tapes will be destroyed after the investigator's dissertation has been approved.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your permission to participate at any time by speaking directly with the investigator, Rev. Buckley, by telephone or in person. Your data already collected will be deleted immediately.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may e-mail Mary L. Buckley at buckley3@duq.edu. Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may e-mail Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at delmonico@duq.edu.

_____   _____

Child's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix D

Mentor Spiritual Development Classes

"How to Apply the Bible to Your Life""

(Developed by Rev. Dr. Mary L. Buckley)

<u>Important Steps</u>

(1).   **Ask God to help us apply His word to our lives.**

(2).   **We should Journal daily.**

(3).   **Make a conscience effort to think about the Bible verse or verses we read that day.**

(4).   **We should intentionally share God's love each day.**

(5).   **Pray to God throughout the day for His wisdom, understanding, direction and strength.**

(6).   **Write our prayer request in our Journals daily.**

(7).   **Make sure to note in our Journals when God answers our prayers.**

***We can create our Journals electronically.

<u>Suggested Books</u>

<u>Getting Through the Tough Stuff by Charles R. Swindoll</u>

<u>Meditations of the Heart by Howard Thurman</u>

Appendix E

Mentor Spiritual Development Classes

"How to Develop a Prayer Life""

(Developed by Rev. Dr. Mary L. Buckley)

<u>The Importance of a Prayer Life</u>

We should be persistent in our prayers. (**Luke 18:1-8** - "The Parable of the Persistent Widow")

We should pray everywhere. (I Timothy 2:8)

Do you pray?

Prayer is communication with God.

Practice communicating through prayer with God daily.

<u>Suggested Scriptures when you desire to learn how to pray:</u>

2 Chronicles 6:13-42
2 Chronicles 20:5-12
Matthew 6:5-15
Mark 11:22-25
Luke 18:9-14
Philippians 4:4-7

<u>What should be included in your prayers:</u>

Thanksgiving to God
Ask for forgiveness of our sins
Offer a prayer of intercession (pray for others)
Pray for yourself
Close the prayer in "Jesus name"

***Some of our prayers should be in silence in order to hear from God