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AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING,
INSTRUCTIONAL, AND RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership

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2011

AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING,
INSTRUCTIONAL, AND RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Melissa Jenkins, EdD

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This study was conducted to examine African American adolescents' perceptions of their learning, instructional, and relational experiences to provide additional insight into how to eliminate the achievement gap. Research investigating the pedagogical experiences of African American adolescents' is limited. A review of the literature suggested that the theories of pedagogy, culture, and motivation might inform our understanding of their achievement. A multiple-case design and methodological triangulation procedures were used to collect data from a stratified purposive sample of 12 African American eighth-grade students from an urban school district. The sample consisted of four high, four average, and four low achievers. Students' perceptions were assessed using (a) the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales; (b) semi-structured interview questions; and (c) questions related to focus group scenarios. Interpretational analysis was used to identify categories to describe students' perceptions. Within-case analyses were used to document the students' voices, and cross-case analyses were used to generate findings for high, average, and low achievement subgroups. The following major categories emerged: achievement goals, instructional preferences, academic press, affect-care and humor, and collaboration. The results of this study related to learning suggested that African American adolescents' achievement goals (e.g., mastery or performance) are related to their achievement levels. High achievers had mastery goals; average achievers had mastery and performance goals; and low achievers were characterized by performance goals. All African American adolescents preferred communalism (group work) to promote understanding. The results of the study related

to instruction suggested that high and average achievers perceived that their teachers communicated mastery goals in the classroom (e.g., goals focused on effort and understanding), and preferred instructional methods that promoted understanding. All high, average, and low-achieving students preferred diverse instructional methods. The results of the study suggested that high and average achievers perceived that their teachers pressed them to understand. The students also perceived that their teachers cared. High, average, and low achievers responded that humor, and collaboration were important. Additional research is needed with the low achievement subgroup to understand the attitude-achievement paradox they exhibited, and their preferred instructional and relational experiences. To capture the African American adolescents' school experiences more effectively, the use of observations and student voice as methodologies is recommended.

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2011

APPROVAL PAGE



*School of Professional Studies
Department of Education and Educational Psychology
Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership*

Doctor of Education Dissertation

AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING,
INSTRUCTIONAL, AND RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Presented by

Melissa Jenkins, EdD

| | | |
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2011

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Laura and Leo Muller – my parents. Thank you for planting the value of education in my mind and in my heart. Mom, you were my educational warrior and knew that the schools I attended would make a difference. Dad, you have taught me social and political consciousness and because of you, I fight for a better educational future for all children. And for this, I am truly grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The educational reform movement has focused on the development of rigorous standards to ensure that students will be equipped to meet the demands of the new global economy, but all students cannot succeed in meeting these standards if equal educational opportunities are not available (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

Statistical information on the achievement gap is most often presented by comparing the achievement of Black and White students. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics) 2009 reading report indicated that fourth grade African American students scored, on average, 27 points lower than fourth grade White American students on a 0-500 scale. The same report states eighth grade, African American students scored, on average, 27 points lower in reading than White American students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

The achievement gap debate focuses on the fact that Black students have not performed as well as White students on standardized measures of academic achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Hilliard (2003) stated that White students' performance is the normative and universal standard that highlights the low achievement of Black students as measured by standardized testing and other educational attainment measures. While this comparison and definition of the achievement gap is recurrent in the literature, Hilliard pointed out that framing the problem in this way is itself problematic. According to Hilliard, excellence should be determined based on standard levels of performance and more attention needs to be given to how to maximize African American students' opportunities to learn. The gap should not be considered to be a gap between the performances of Black and White students, but rather as "... a wedge between the current performance of African American students and levels of excellence" (Hilliard, 2003, p. 138).

The underachievement of African American students is a multifaceted problem that requires examination from multiple perspectives (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2009), and while this gap has received national attention for the last two decades, no one reason for the low achievement of African-American students has been established (Wiggan, 2007). However, a number of reasons for the achievement gap have been advanced, including genetic deficiency (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), effects of wealth and class (Orr, 2003), low teacher expectations (Gamoran, 2001), and oppositional identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). According to Wiggan, these analyses encourage deficit theories about the underachievement of African-American students, while only a small number of references have focused on the “savage inequalities” (Kozol, 1991) that African American students face in America’s urban schools (Hilliard, 2003) including fewer financial resources and reduced access to effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Minority and low-income students in urban districts are more likely to have unprepared, inexperienced, or ill-qualified teachers due to funding inequities, dysfunctional hiring practices, or low-level state certification programs and the majority of these teachers were hired by the most disadvantaged schools in inner city and poor rural school districts (Darling-Hammond, 2001), and these conditions indirectly influence students’ perceptions of school.

Thus, poor minority children are more likely to have pedagogically incompetent teachers. A number of studies revealed that teachers who enter education with minimal preparation are less able to plan and adjust instruction to meet the needs of students, less skilled in implementing instruction, and less likely to see it as their job to meet the needs of students with potential difficulties. More than any other school factor, teacher effectiveness makes the difference in what children learn (Darling-Hammond, 2001) and how they perceive learning in the classroom.

Effective teachers are not only knowledgeable about the content they teach, but they also “... (know) how to deliver the content in ways that are sensitive to the needs and requirements of the learner” (Darby, 2005, p. 429). For teachers to connect students to curriculum, they must understand students’ physical, emotional, and social qualities that shape and mold how a child encounters the learning environment (McCaughtry, 2005). According to Van Manen (1999), the practice of pedagogy accentuates the relationship between a student and teacher and what is most important is how students experience them relationally. In fact, students experience instructional relations as personal relations. It matters to them how they matter to their teachers. Basically, students want teachers to be attentive to how they experience life in the classroom instructionally. This study examined students’ instructional and relational experiences.

Peterson (1989) investigated the effects of instruction on the achievement of students and found that students with remedial level math skills can achieve high standards. Sanders and Rivers (1996) defined quality instruction in terms of a teacher’s cumulative effect on student learning over time as measured by standardized testing and student’s access to challenging curriculum. Both Corbett and Wilson (1998) and Howard (2001a, 2001b) studied African American students’ perceptions of instruction and its impact on learning. Howard found the need for instruction grounded in the students’ cultural orientations. Corbett and Wilson (1998) found students wanted: teachers who were strict but nice, able to explain content, and they wanted to be challenged by meaningful projects. Student interviews were the primary source of data in both studies.

Wiggan (2007) urged researchers to continue the research on student achievement using the voice of the student, the clientele most affected by the achievement debate. Wiggan recommended student-based research and stressed the need to capture their perceptions of school-level processes. Riehl (2001) contended that more studies were needed to document

students' experiences with school achievement to increase the representation of student voice in the achievement literature.

Statement of the Problem

Previous research (Corbett & Wilson, 1998; Howard, 2001a, 2001b) provided examples of the African American students' voice in research on pedagogy; however, research summarizing the African American adolescents' perceptions of pedagogy is limited. Waxman and Huang (1997) argued that little research has examined students' perceptions of instructional practices and hypothesized that the classroom students experience may be quite different from what is observed or intended. Howard (2001a, 2001b) stated that African American students' thoughts and behavior are diverse, making it even more important to gather multiple descriptions of instruction. Wiggan (2007) stated that additional studies are needed that describe students' perceptions of the instruction they receive. Schmakel (2008) stated research on student voice has mostly targeted high school and elementary students and not middle school. Additionally, Wiggan noted that "students might very well have important insights based on their experiences that would benefit research and intervention programs" (p. 325).

We need to better understand the impact of dramatically different learning opportunities in schools and classrooms (Corbett & Wilson, 1998). We know that African American students can meet the criterion for success as measured by standardized tests with quality instruction (Sanders & Rivers, 1996) and we know that some African American students respond favorably to culturally relevant pedagogy (Howard, 2001a, 2001b). We still need to know how instruction influences the African American adolescents' development in schools and classrooms. To address the achievement gap, this study will add and extend the research on students' perceptions of teaching and learning using a standardized self-report instrument with interviews and focus

groups. This research will also target African American middle school students, a group less represented in this area of research.

Significance of the Study

The literature on African American achievement substantiated a concern and need to eradicate achievement differences between African American and White students (Darling-Hammond, 2001, 2007; Kozol, 2005). To reach this goal, research from the perspectives of African American students can inform school reform policy. Several studies indicate that African American children can learn if quality instruction is available but describing what quality instruction is must come from the recipients of the instruction - - and their perspectives are diverse. Understanding the African American adolescents' perspective could lend insight on the teaching practices that can help to alleviate the racial and socioeconomic achievement gap between African American and White students.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. *Pedagogical content knowledge* is “a way of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others, includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult” (Shulman, 1986, p. 9-10).
2. *Pedagogy* “means the study and practice of actively distinguishing what is appropriate from what is less appropriate for young people” (Van Manen, 1999, p. 19).
3. *Culturally relevant pedagogy* is instruction that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20).
4. *Learning* is “a change in performance or performance potential as a result of the learner's experience and interaction with the world” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 9).

5. *Instructional factors* are “teaching methods that assist in student understanding” (Darby, 2005, p. 428).
6. *Relational factors* describe “how the teacher nurtures a relationship with the students” (Darby, 2005, p. 428).
7. *Achievement goal theory* consists of two categories: (a) “learning goals, in which learners seek to increase their competence, to understand or master new skills and (b) performance goals, in which learners seek to gain favorable judgments of their competence or to avoid negative judgments of their competence” (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040). Students’ perceptions and interpretations of achievement environments influence their goal orientation (Kaplan & Maehr, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Over two decades ago, Shulman (1986) defined pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as a combination of knowing subject matter, pedagogy, curriculum, and students’ needs. Since then, researchers have expanded upon this definition in an effort to understand how teachers make decisions on behalf of children. Darling-Hammond (2001) stated that pedagogically competent teachers are aware of students’ misunderstandings and know how to transform those misunderstandings when they arise. McCaughtry (2005) extended PCK beyond cognitive understandings. She stated that teachers must understand students more deeply than traditional pedagogical content knowledge. She stated that teachers’ need to understand students’ social and emotional tenors to help them connect with the curriculum and to develop students’ emotional and intellectual attitudes. Van Manen (1999) wrote that we can only be “pedagogically perceptive” if we develop an understanding of how the young people we teach experience instruction and this inquiry is limited. Howard (2001a, 2001b) emphasized the need to

understand African American adolescents' perceptions of instruction to expand educators' pedagogical awareness of this population's needs.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Howard (2003) stated that American schools have become more diverse and with this diversity the need to develop different approaches to address students' learning. Ladson-Billings (1990) studied the link between school and culture in an attempt to locate the discontinuity between what students experience in school and at home. She advocated for improving pedagogy for culturally diverse students by embracing what she calls culturally relevant teaching. She described culturally relevant teaching as "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria: "Students must experience academic success, develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Howard (2001a, 2001b) and Ladson-Billings (1990) documented how teachers implement culturally relevant teaching practices, but only a few studies have captured African American students' perceptions of culturally relevant practices (Howard, 2001a, 2001b, 2002).

Achievement Goal Theory

Schunk and Meece (1992) stated that students' perceptions of the classroom and school affect their orientation toward learning and achievement goal theory is used to describe how students perceive and understand school and learning and how they define success and achievement (Kaplan & Maehr, 2000). Achievement goal theorists suggest that characteristics of the educational environments may influence students' patterns for learning. As a result, some students will pursue learning goals and some students will pursue performance goals (Dweck,

1986). Learning goals are concerned with improvement and mastery of learning. Performance goals promote social comparison and evaluation. Consequently, the goals students decide to pursue will manifest different cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns. Kaplan and Maehr (2000) found that African American students' perceptions of school as emphasizing learning goals were positively related to perceptions of high academic competence and negatively related to disruptive behavior. While there is an excess of research on the motivational characteristics of African American students, there is no consensus on the goal orientation of these students (Freeman, Gutman, & Midgley, 2002), which are grounds for additional research on how student perceptions mediate achievement motivation. Understanding African American student learning behaviors could lend some insight into how they approach achievement related contexts such as school. In addition, understanding African American students' learning patterns will enhance teachers' capacity to get students to "choose" academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Review of Related Literature

Both the quantitative and qualitative research paradigms have contributed to the evolution of the research questions for this study. The quantitative studies substantiate African American students' ability to learn when engaged in quality instruction and the qualitative studies provide a foundation for students' perceptions of teaching and learning. The literature reviewed suggested a need for research on student perceptions of their learning, teaching, and relationships to understand how the achievement gap can be minimized and eventually closed.

Peterson (1989) investigated the effects of different mathematics programs on remedial students. Three hundred seventh grade students were selected from three Utah school districts. One hundred students were identified as remedial, 100 students were identified as average and 100 students were identified as accelerated as determined by the California Test of Basic Skills. These groups were matched according to IQ scores, grouped into classes of 30, and taught using

three different programs for one year. Group A was taught mechanical math skills that had not been mastered. Group B used a standard math text and were taught at a slower pace. Group C spent the entire year in a pre-algebra class for accelerated students and were taught with no ability grouping. At the end of the year, differences in achievement with computation, problem solving, and mathematical concepts were measured among the ability groups, among the programs, and among teachers using analysis of covariance to adjust for initial differences among matched groups.

Peterson (1989) found that remedial students in the pre-algebra program demonstrated significantly more improvement at the .01 level in all three-skill areas in comparison to remedial students in the other programs and the results were independent of teacher or school. While the remedial students in the pre-algebra program did not learn a great deal of mathematical concepts and pre-algebra, they learned computation and problem-solving skills by using pre-algebra indirectly. However, it is still unknown how students perceived the instruction they received and how their perceptions influenced their learning. Pedagogy is more than a cognitive process. Pedagogy is also an understanding of how students experience the instruction and their relations with their teachers. Through qualitative inquires, we can begin to understand how African American students, who are often in remedial track classes in urban areas, experience teaching and relations with their teachers.

Sanders and Rivers (1996) investigated the cumulative effects of teachers on students' mathematics achievement from grades three to five using data from two of Tennessee's larger metropolitan systems. Since the data were restricted to a cohort of students, teacher effects were estimated based on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), which was designed and demonstrated to be an efficient and effective method for determining individual influence on the rate of academic growth for student populations. The results of the study

suggested that an effective teacher could mitigate the academic loss of students who had an ineffective teacher within a one-year sequence; however, the residual effects of ineffective teachers can be measured in achievement scores in subsequent years. Additionally, as teacher effectiveness increases, students performing at the lowest quintile are the first to benefit from increased teacher effectiveness with students from ethnically diverse backgrounds responding comparably within the quintile of teacher effectiveness. Thus, African American students who receive effective instruction can perform at high academic levels. The question that still emerges is how do African American students perceive this instruction?

Corbett and Wilson (1998) studied the instructional differences urban middle school students experienced daily and the effects of the differences on student learning. The sample consisted of students in grades six through eight from five middle schools. The majority of the students participating in the study received free lunch and 98-100% of the sample was African American. Interviews were conducted over two years. Year one interviews focused on students' perceptions of school. Using year one responses that concentrated on classroom differences students experienced, Corbett and Wilson asked about these differences during year two interviews.

The findings of Corbett and Wilson (1998) described students' perceptions of good teachers as those who were willing to help, were strict but nice, and were able to explain content clearly. Good teachers also provided projects and experiments, created fun activities, and allowed students to work in small groups. Students also shared how disruptive classes' impacted student learning and described the instructional differences that occurred across classrooms, which connected to the study's implications that reform needed to occur within schools and not just across a large number of schools.

Freeman (2002) examined the achievement goals African American middle school students pursued and what these students perceived from their learning context. The study consisted of 24 African American students. Fourteen boys and 10 girls participated. Fifteen students had cumulative GPAs between 2.0 and 3.0, four students had GPAs greater than 3.0, and five students held GPAs below 2.0. Interviews were the primary method for data collection. In addition, weekly participant observations occurred four months prior to the interviews to establish rapport with teachers and students and to become familiar with the school setting. The primary aim of the interviews was to assess students' personal achievement goals and their perceptions of teacher practices.

Freeman (2002) found students held multiple goals (personal mastery, performance, and extrinsic). The four high achieving students held performance goals with a number of students mentioning that they engaged in learning for the sake of learning. Students' perceptions of the classroom in this study revealed that they received low-level work and often were preparing for standardized tests and they were not given choices for the academic tasks. At the end of this study, additional research was recommended to determine other variables that impact the achievement motivation of African American students such as the relationship with the teacher. Additionally, studies on African American students' goal orientations and perceptions of classroom goals are also needed because motivational processes differ based on student backgrounds and classroom experiences.

Howard (2002) studied African American students' perceptions of teacher pedagogy. A purposive sample of 30 students (17 girls and 13 boys) was used. A cross-section of students based on academic achievement and classroom behavior were selected. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Data collection methods also included classroom observations two to three times a week to compare students' interview responses regarding their classroom

performance, engagement, and achievement. Data from the interviews and observations were triangulated to cross check themes and patterns.

Howard (2002) found African American students' need instruction grounded in their preferred cultural orientations. Student interpretations revealed three themes: teachers who established family and community environments; teachers who established culturally caring relationships; and the use of certain types of verbal communication and affirmation. With the increasing diversity within African American students' thoughts, behavior, and interpretations of school, additional studies will lend insight on the learning patterns of African American students.

This study will extend the research on learning goals and pedagogy and the role of relationships between students and teachers by gathering African American adolescents' perceptions of their learning, instructional and relational factors in school and in the classroom. Studies capturing African American students' perceptions are limited and are needed to inform school policy.

Methodology

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do African American adolescents perceive their learning?
2. How do African American adolescents perceive instructional factors?
3. How do African American adolescents perceive relational factors?

Description of Setting and Subjects

The setting for this study was an urban school district in a northeast, urban community. The per capita income for the city was \$16,306 and the school district consisted of 34 public schools. The student population was 45.4% Hispanic, 42.1% Black, 9.4% White, 3.0% Asian American, and 0.2% American Indian. The district spent \$10,190 per pupil in comparison to the

state average of \$9,520 per pupil. The socioeconomic status of the district was assessed as low to low average based on the free/reduce lunch statistics (Connecticut State Department of Education – Strategic School Profile, 2009).

Stratified purposive sampling was used to select 12 African American eighth graders. The sample was stratified based on students' performance on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). Two girls and two boys achieving at each of the three CMT achievement levels (goal/advanced, goal/proficient/basic, and basic/below) were selected to participate in the study. By using stratified purposive sampling, the research findings were reported for each subgroup and across subgroups.

Instrumentation

Patterns of adaptive learning scales (PALS) survey. Three scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) were administered to students to measure the “relation between the learning environment and their motivation, affect, and behavior” (Midgley, et al., 2000, p. 2). The three scales were (a) personal achievement goal orientations, (b) perceptions of teacher goals, and (c) perceptions of achievement-related beliefs, attitudes, and strategies. The subscales representing personal achievement goal orientations included (a) mastery – attention is focused on the task to demonstrate competence; (b) performance-approach – attention is focused on self to demonstrate competence; and (c) performance-avoidance – attention is focused on self to avoid demonstration of incompetence. The subscales representing perceptions of teacher goals included (a) teacher mastery – teacher emphasizes task engagement for learning; (b) teacher performance-approach – teacher emphasizes task engagement to demonstrate competence; and (c) teacher performance-avoidance – teacher emphasizes task engagement to avoid demonstration of incompetence. The subscales representing perceptions of achievement-related beliefs, attitudes and strategies included (a) academic press – teacher presses for

understanding; and (b) self-presentation of low achievement – students’ preference to keep peers from knowing how well they are achieving. A 5-point Likert scale was used to indicate each student’s response to each statement in a subscale. A total of 40 items were included in the survey, and they were mixed to measure a scale and subscale accurately.

The alpha coefficients were reported for each subscale: mastery goal orientation, .85; performance-approach orientation, .89; performance-avoid orientation, .74; teacher mastery goal, .83; teacher performance-approach goal, .79; teacher performance-avoid goal, .71; academic press, .79; and self-presentation of low achievement, .78.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the 14 personal goal orientation survey items to examine the factor structure of the three subscales (mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance). Goodness of fit indices suggested that the model fits the data well (GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.95). Specifically, personal mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoid goals all loaded on different latent factors. Midgley, et al, (2000) did not report the psychometric properties of the other two scales used in this study. The items used in the study from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales appear in Appendix A.

Semi-structured interview questions. The semi-structured interview questions were used in the study to gather students’ perceptions of their learning and teaching during one-to-one interviews. These questions are open-ended and have been created based on the taxonomy of ethnographic questions (Spradley, 1979). Descriptive questions in the categories of grand tour, mini tour, example, and experience were developed. Grand tour questions are used to open up the interview and to establish rapport with the participant. Specific tour questions, which are a segment of grand tour questions, focus on the details of events within a participant experience. Mini tour questions assist with narrowing the focus of a question. Example questions narrow the focus to a particular incident. The validity and reliability of the interview questions will be

confirmed through the data analysis strategy of triangulation. These questions appear in Appendix B.

Focus group scenarios and questions. The researcher and a professor from the Western Connecticut State University counseling program developed the focus group questions. The focus group scenarios and questions were developed from the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy from the work of Boykin, Albury, Tyler, Hurley, Bailey, and Miller (2005); Howard (2001a, 2001b); and Ladson-Billings (1995). The scenarios were based on the themes of individualism, competition, communalism, and verve. Boykin, et al. (2005) used the Afro cultural scenarios in several quantitative studies, and the scenarios for this study were developed using the same themes. The questions for the focus group were aligned to the research questions for the study. These scenarios and questions appear in Appendix C.

Documents. Information from eighth grade students' cumulative records was obtained as a part of the data collection process. Students' Connecticut Mastery Test results were collected as categorical data, the cumulative average for reading and math at the end of eighth grade, and the numbers of years in the current school were obtained.

Description of the Research Design

A qualitative approach was used for this study to give the African American adolescent a voice on how learning occurs and what instructional and relational factors contribute to or hinder learning. A multiple-case study design, "a form of case study research in which the unit of analysis is at least two individuals or two instances of a phenomenon, selected either to be similar or different in some way of interest to the researcher" was used to address the research questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 645). The unit of analysis for this study was African American eighth grade students' perceptions of their learning, instruction, and relationships in urban schools.

Descriptions of Data Collection Procedures and Timeline

Triangulation of methods (demographic, academic, and achievement data, survey, interviews, and focus groups) was used as a strategy to enhance trustworthiness. Quantitative data were collected using a survey, the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales to report the perceptions African American adolescents have of their learning and the classroom. The scales were selected to answer the research questions. Students also provided demographic data (gender, age, school, and number of years at the present school) and academic and achievement data were collected.

Qualitative data were collected using two different types of interviews to gather the perceptions that emerged from the individual and the group process. The semi-structured interview was used to gather the understandings of the participants and was created in alignment with the research questions. The focus group interview allowed for the collection of data focused on the preferred cultural context for learning. Focus groups provide a record of how meaning is negotiated within a group and the focus group questions and scenarios were created in alignment with the research questions. The qualitative data were collected using a micro-recorder and a video camera.

The initial timeline for data collection was June and July 2009. During the month of June, students were scheduled to participate in a focus group of six students. In July, students were scheduled to participate in the semi-structured interviews and at the end of the interview students were scheduled to complete the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (Midgley, et al, 2000).

Description and Justification of the Analysis

The data generated from this study were analyzed using interpretational analysis. Interpretation analysis is the process of examining the case study data closely to identify patterns

and categories. Data files were created and organized using the program HyperRESEARCH 2.7 (2007). This software program allowed the researcher to code and retrieve data to conduct analyses. Data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and coded to establish patterns and categories within each case and then across cases. A description of each case was presented and major findings across cases reported (Creswell, 2007; Gall, et al., 2007). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data generated from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales.

Trustworthiness

Four aspects of trustworthiness were identified and substantiated through the data collection and analysis process. The Guba model of trustworthiness (Krefting, 1999) consists of the criterion truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality to establish merit and worth in a qualitative study. To demonstrate truth value, it is the researcher's job to represent the realities of the participants adequately. To establish applicability, the researcher must provide sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison to another situation or population. To maintain consistency, the researcher must describe the exact methods of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation to provide information on how repeatable the study might be, and to produce neutrality, a researcher must document findings solely from the informants and conditions of the research. The following strategies were used to support trustworthiness: (a) the triangulation of methods (demographic, academic, and achievement data, survey, interviews, and focus groups) to support the establishment of truth value, consistency, and neutrality, (b) a reflexivity journal to minimize bias in the interpretation of the data, to support truth value and neutrality, and (c) a dense background description of participants and the comparison of the sample to demographic data to advance applicability (Krefting, 1999).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include limited applicability to the larger school population based on a small sample. Increasing applicability can be done through specific purposive sampling, in which, the findings can be applied to other cases and to represent the phenomenon. To help a reader with applicability, a thick description of each case was provided so the reader could decide if a case was representative of a similar phenomenon. In addition, the reader could decide to use information from the stratified purposive sample to make naturalistic generalizations (Gall, et al., 2007).

Ethics Statement

Permission to participate in this study was sought from the Institutional Review Board at Western Connecticut State University, the Superintendent of Schools for the urban district in the study, principals at the local schools, parents of students involved, and the students. All consent forms appear in Appendix D. All data were stored in a locked closet in the researcher's office or home to maintain confidentiality and to protect the confidentiality of the organizations and individuals involved with the study. It was communicated to participants their right to discontinue participation at any point in the data collection process and/or the study. Upon the creation and presentation of the dissertation, the data collected from individual students will be destroyed.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of previous research on African American students' achievement and to provide a rationale for the choice of methodology and theoretical constructs in the present study (Calabrese, 2006). The chapter begins with a review of the most common research outcomes used to describe African American students' achievement. This section will critically review how previous research outcomes have influenced the current context of school for African American students and will provide a rationale for investigating the role teaching and learning has in addressing the achievement gap. Next, studies on the use of student voice as a research methodology will be reviewed. This section will argue for the use of student voice to fill a void in the achievement gap literature. Finally, three research theories will be described in relation to student achievement. First, theory on pedagogical content knowledge will be reviewed to understand how instruction and student-teacher relations influence students' performance. Second, theories of cultural-based pedagogy will be reviewed to comprehend the role of culture in African American students' learning. Last, achievement goal theory will be reviewed. Achievement goal theory serves as a lens for analyzing the influence of theories of intelligence and the classroom setting on students' motivation to succeed (Dweck, 1986; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006).

Research Outcomes – African American Student Achievement

Numerous explanations exist to explain the achievement of African American students. Achievement gap research (Ferguson, 2007; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gamoran, 2001; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Orr, 2003) attributed African American students' performance deficits to circumstances outside school. However, there is substantial evidence (Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe 1997; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) that quality instruction minimizes achievement differences. This section of the review will

critically examine the most significant research outcomes on the achievement gap and will provide a rationale for investigating the role of teaching and learning related to the achievement gap.

Twelve years after the *Brown v. the Board of Education* ruling for equal schooling, Congress requested an assessment of educational opportunity for students nationally (Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972). The Equality of Educational Opportunity Report (EEOR) documented the lack of available educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions in the United States. The report investigated numerous characteristics of schooling such as resources and policies expenditures, preschool, physical facilities, and students' access to books, curriculum, and personnel (Jencks, 1972). The final report concluded that schools and teachers make little difference in the academic lives of students (Jencks, 1972; Marzano, 2007). The EEOR also reported that the average minority score was distinctly lower on tests at every level than the average score for a White pupil, which made achievement differences a major educational issue (Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972). As a result, alternative reasons for African American underachievement emerged.

Wiggan (2007) pointed out that the major explanations frequently researched for achievement differences are: (a) genetics, (b) wealth and class, (c) opposition to mainstream education, and (d) low teacher expectations with quality instruction often excluded from the debate. He described these four explanations as deficit theories since they pointed out that genetic deficiency, wealth, and class are rationales that limit explanations for student achievement to heredity and family background. In addition, explaining low achievement in terms of oppositional identification with mainstream education places blame on the student, while explaining it in terms of low teacher expectations assumes that students are passive and that teachers alone determine outcomes. Each explanation (biological differences, wealth and

class differences, oppositional identity, low teacher expectations) will be examined to set the context for the current role of teaching and learning within the sociopolitical context of school-level achievement.

Biological Differences

Hernstein and Murray (1994) promoted the theory of genetic differences after reanalyzing numerous IQ and achievement test results that showed a difference in Black and White students' performance. They investigated the differences in intelligence between Black and White students using an analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). They reported that Blacks have significantly lower IQs than White Americans, with the mean IQ for a Black student being 85, and the mean for a White student, 100. Statistics cited between 1918 and 1990 reinforced the position of Hernstein and Murray. Thus, the intelligence testing process influenced the social and instructional responsiveness to Black student academic needs. Clark, Chein, and Cook (2004) forecasted the re-segregation of Black children based on IQ scores. Clark, the lead psychologist for *Brown v. the Board of Education*, Chein, and Cook argued that inferior learning conditions would be provided for racially disadvantaged students based on their achievement on standardized tests. Proponents of the biological difference explanation believed that instructional interventions had little effect on achievement and failed to account for unequal access to effective instruction (Wiggin, 2007). The outcomes of intelligence testing created a schooling culture that sorted children rather than developing their talent. Ability-based grouping, tracking, and retention were just a few of the unequal accommodations provided to African American students (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). These accommodations persisted despite evidence presented by Hallinan (2001) who found that intelligence changes when students have access to quality instruction. They pointed

out that, due to limitations of wealth and class, equal access to quality education was not available.

Wealth and Class

Wealth and class offer an additional explanation for underachievement of African American students. Beginning with the 1966 EFOR report, wealth, defined by Gamoran (2001) as the total assets of a family minus the debt they owe, began to receive more attention as an explanation for the achievement gap. Merida (1995) reported that Black middle-class families had approximately 15 percent of the wealth of White middle-class families when class is measured by income, education, and occupation. Conley (2001) found significant effects of wealth on high school graduation, college completion, probability of dropping out, the risk of expulsion, and the risk of being held back a grade.

Orr (2003) argued that wealth is a determinant of achievement that can help explain the Black-White test score gap. He presented the idea that wealth has three distinct forms: financial capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Orr defined financial capital as assets that produce income. He defined social capital as activities that influence future outcomes, such as reading to their children, helping them with homework, and being involved with school; and cultural capital as an increase in art, music, and literature knowledge. In a 2003 study, he investigated the impact of wealth on student achievement.

In this study, Orr (2003) sampled a subset of the data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79) entitled “NLSY79 Mothers and Children.” Orr’s sample included Black and White children of approximately 3,000 mothers ages 14-21. Data included interviews with mothers and their children as well as information about socio-emotional, cognitive, and physiological development, family wealth, and educational level. Ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression was used to analyze the data. The dependent variable

was academic achievement measured by standardized test scores. The primary independent variables were wealth (net worth), SES (parental education, occupation, and income), and race. The mediating variables were cultural capital, educational resources in the home, social capital, child self-esteem, and school quality.

The findings revealed that Blacks scored 8.34 points or .6 standard deviations below Whites on the mathematics assessment, a statistically significant difference indicating that wealth influenced math achievement. Children from families with little or no wealth scored lower on the mathematics assessment. Compared to other indicators of SES, wealth had the largest standardized effect on a child's math score, with the standardized coefficients of .077 for wealth, .057 for parental education, and .058 for parental occupation.

Findings for mediating variables revealed that the greater the experience with cultural capital, the greater the mathematics achievement. A child's self-esteem did not appear to have a significant effect on math performance, nor did attending a public school or a school in an urban area. Social capital was negatively associated with math achievement. Supplemental analysis revealed that the effect was dominant with children 10 or older whose parents had helped them; perhaps it was because these students were not doing well in school and required parental help. However, social capital did not have a negative effect on children ages 5-9 whose parents read to them at least three times a week.

While substantial research supports the wealth and class theory of African American student underachievement, closing the wealth-class gap cannot be addressed without further investigation of the social caste system that exists for African Americans as involuntary minorities (Ogbu, 1986). In addition, the wealth-class explanation presumed that the achievement gap is present at birth and formal schooling fails to influence the achievement

outcomes (Wiggan, 2007). This explanation is “intriguing but it assumes students are passive and that schools are not places of agency” (p. 317).

Oppositional Identity

Oppositional identity introduced the idea that Black students underperform because of cultural opposition to “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Ogbu (1986) proposed that involuntary minorities (people whose ancestors came to the United States through slavery) demonstrate opposition to mainstream American values such as academic achievement. Although African Americans are involuntary minorities, not all African American students are oppositional to school achievement. This was substantiated in the following study that examined within-group differences among African American adolescents.

Ford and Harris (1996) surveyed 148 low socioeconomic African American students ages 9 to 14 to examine the aspirations and achievement behaviors of Black early adolescents as well as their attitudes toward school, teachers, achievement, peer relations, perceptions on social issues, and parent achievement orientations. Ford and Harris grouped the students for one of three programs: regular education ($n = 50$), potentially gifted or above average ($n = 50$), and gifted ($n = 48$).

Ford and Harris’s (1996) findings revealed little difference between the groups. Ninety-nine percent of the sample disagreed with the statement that “school is a waste of time.” Only one student in each program reported that “getting good grades is not important.” The statistically significant differences were found with successful students. Half of the successful students reported being teased for academic success and other groups of students ($n = 38$) reported being rejected for getting good grades. Thus, the author reported that low socioeconomic Black students generally had a positive attitude toward school and two-thirds were gifted or potentially gifted.

MacLeod (1987) stated that oppositional attitudes and perceptions do exist among Black students, but they exist among some White students of low socioeconomic status as well. Some Black students see high achievement as a cultural agency and a way to overcome White domination (Hilliard, 2003). Wiggan (2007) pointed out that oppositional identity theory is a viable viewpoint but it does not consider the school processes that influence the perceptions and attitudes of African American adolescents toward the achievement ideology.

Teacher Expectations

Teacher expectations can influence students' achievement, perceptions, and attitudes toward learning, and researchers (Clark, Chein, & Cook, 2004; Gamoran, 2001; Rist, 2000) have proposed low teacher expectations as an explanation for the achievement gap. Good (1987) defined teacher expectations as inferences teachers make about future behavior or academic achievement based on what they know about a student currently. Good pointed out that teacher expectations alone do not affect student outcomes. It is the actions teachers take in alignment to those expectations that affect the outcome. An achievement problem becomes evident when a teacher does not respond appropriately to students who have difficulty learning.

Rist (2000) argued that teacher expectations contribute to the low achievement of African American students. He described in his ethnography how one classroom in an urban, predominately Black public school mirrored the class system of the larger society and how it actively contributed to the maintenance of the class system. He described how a kindergarten teacher created ability-based reading groups, and these groups were maintained throughout elementary school. Consequently, teacher expectations affected students' opportunities to achieve only because the teacher's instructional responses (e.g., assignments of easy tasks) were related to his or her perceptions. The teacher's perception alone did not affect learning.

Ferguson (2007) asked the following question in his review of teacher expectations literature: do teachers treat Black and White students differently? A portion of his inquiry involved the Marylee Taylor (1979) study. In this study, education students were told that they would teach a lesson to students who would be watching behind a screen. The students were described as Black or White, male or female, and high or low ability. Teachers were told that the students could see and hear them and would respond to instruction by pushing buttons on a panel. One adult behind the panel actually provided the “student feedback.” The results of the Taylor study showed that the Black phantom student received briefer feedback after mistakes, less positive feedback after correct responses, and fewer helpful hints, or coaching. Basically, the results revealed that some teachers may help White students more than Black students, and the differences may be large enough to have considerable effects on performance.

Work by both Rist (2000) and Ferguson (2007) revealed that teacher expectations accompanied by an inappropriate instructional response could affect achievement. Guskey (1982) documented that the greater the responsiveness to individual students through corrective feedback, the weaker the link between past and future performance. Good (1987) described teacher expectations as inferences formed with current information. Inferences alone do not impact achievement. It was the differential quality of instruction that shaped student outcomes.

Stereotype Threat

Recently, a large body of research has attributed African Americans students’ underachievement to psychological factors called “stereotype threat” (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Steele, 1995, 1997). Steele noted that the practical focus of stereotype threat is to better understand the processes that interfere with school performance and to learn what can be done to improve it. He also stated that the theoretical focus is on how societal stereotypes about groups influence intellectual functioning and identity development. Aronson, et al. (2002) pointed out

that the basic notion behind stereotype threat is that in situations where the image of African American intellectual ability is relevant – taking a challenging test, speaking in class – African American students bear an extra burden cognitively and emotionally, which would not be experienced by the people for whom the stereotype does not apply. He also pointed out that stereotype threat undermines academic achievement by inducing (a) anxiety and/or (b) “disidentification” with the threatening domain, which, in this case, is achievement (p. 114). Stereotype threat begins with the assumption that students must identify with school achievement, and it should be a part of a students’ self-definition. Steele (1997) pointed out the situational threats to academic identification.

Steele (1997) reported that socioeconomic status, cognitive performance, and cultural patterns are related to school success; however, African Americans have disproportionately been represented in the low socioeconomic classes, have limited access to quality instructional programs, and, as Ogbu (1986) stated, the lower-class Black culture is “oppositional” to school achievement. As a result, these situational threats minimize academic identification because the student feels that there is a possibility of conforming to the stereotype or being treated or judged by those adhering to the stereotype. The possibility of conforming to the stereotype triggers inferiority and self-doubt. Stereotype threat does not affect the whole of the stereotype group but probably affects the confident students more than the unconfident students.

The following situational strategies have been suggested by Steele (1997) to support the academic identification of stereotype-threatened groups. For both academic-identified and academic-unidentified students, Steele suggested that optimistic teacher-student relationships that provide students with critical feedback communicated with optimism about their potential, challenging work over remediation, and teaching the malleability of intelligence. For academic-identified students, he suggested that affirming the domain of belonging and exposing students to

role models, would help them know that stereotype threat is surmountable. For academic-unidentified students, Steele recommended nonjudgmental responsiveness that included little direct praise, use of Socratic direction, and building of self-efficacy. In regards to teaching malleable intelligence, Aronson, et al. (2002) conducted an experiment with African American and White college students in which the college students taught malleable intelligence to middle school pen pals. As a result, both African American and White college students benefited from the experiment with African American students benefiting more from the implicit knowledge that intelligence can grow and change. African American students reported increased academic engagement and higher grade point averages than White and African American students in the nonpen pal control group. While a variety of circumstances outside of school can produce “stereotype threat,” school can be a place of agency for African American students.

Instruction

Darling-Hammond (1997) stated that students’ success and the survival of the nation depends on access to education, but the African American student’s school experiences remain significantly unequal. Darling-Hammond (2001) pointed out the structural and systemic inequalities that perpetuate the achievement gap. She reported that the lack of opportunities to learn from well-qualified teachers and the lack of access to rigorous curriculum and classes contribute to the stark differences in student achievement. Ferguson (2007) reported that teacher performance on certification exams is the single most important predictor of increased student learning. Yet, African American and low-income students are more likely to be in classes with ill-prepared, inexperienced teachers. Darling-Hammond reported that over 25% of the public-school teachers were hired without proper certification in 1994. She has also reported that African American students were twice as likely to be taught by an ineffective teacher, and poor and minority students are twice as likely to have teachers with fewer than three years of teaching

experience. Yet students who had three consecutive years with highly effective teachers obtained a difference in achievement of 50 percentile points, demonstrating that the effects of quality instruction can be cumulative (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Sanders and Rivers (1996) investigated the cumulative effects of teachers on students' mathematics achievement from grade three to five using data from two of Tennessee's larger metropolitan systems. Since the data were restricted to a cohort of students, teacher effects were estimated based on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), which was designed and has been demonstrated to be an efficient and effective method for determining individual influence on the rate of academic growth for student populations. Teacher effects were estimated from a longitudinal analysis using a mixed method model that provided shrinkage estimation for teacher effects. The results of the study suggested that an effective teacher can influence academic gains for students received from an ineffective teacher within a one-year sequence; however, the residual effects of ineffective teachers can be measured in achievement scores in subsequent years. Additionally, as teacher effectiveness increases, students performing at the lowest quintile are the first to benefit, with students from ethnically diverse backgrounds responding comparably within the quintile of teacher effectiveness. For this reason, African American students who receive effective instruction could perform at higher academic levels.

Jordan, Mendro, and Weerasinghe (1997) examined the teacher effects on longitudinal student achievement. The student population was comprised of Dallas Public Schools students with four years of complete testing data from 1993 to 1996. They used a two-stage regression/hierarchical linear model (HLM) to obtain estimates of teacher effects. The first stage of the model controlled for the effects of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, language proficiency, and gender through a modified multiple linear regression procedure applied to pretest and

outcome data. The findings of the study confirmed those reported by Sanders and Rivers. First, it is methodologically reasonable to determine teacher effectiveness related to cumulative student results. Second, the analysis of teacher effectiveness using the procedure efficiently identified a group of teachers whose effect on student achievement was detrimental and who were in need of instructional help.

In 2004, Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges conducted research to answer the question of whether teachers differed in their effectiveness to promote student achievement. Their study extended the education production function studies (Coleman, 1972; Jordan, et al., 1997; Sanders & Rivers, 1996), which examined the relation of a specific teacher, measure or school characteristic (e.g., teacher experience, teacher education, class size) with student achievement. Nye, et al. (2004) used data from a four-year experiment in which teachers and students were randomly assigned to classes to estimate teacher effects on student achievement. The experiment involved students from 79 elementary schools from 42 school districts in Tennessee. Kindergarten students were assigned to three treatment groups: small classes (13 to 17 students); larger classes (22 to 26 students) or larger classes with a full-time aide; then teachers were randomly assigned to the classrooms. The assignment of students was maintained for three years, and teachers were randomly assigned again as the experimental cohort passed through each grade level. Since the classes in the schools were initially equivalent due to random assignment, it was hypothesized that differences in achievement among classes would be attributed to treatment/differences in teacher effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness within-classroom, between-classroom, and between-school differences were analyzed using hierarchical linear model (HLM) to specify the fixed effects and variance between teachers. Nye, et al. (2004) found teacher effects on achievement gains to be similar to previous non-experimental studies, but with a larger effect on mathematics achievement. In addition, teacher effects on

student achievement were greater than school effects on student achievement, suggesting that policies that emphasize school choice fail to attend to teacher effects on student achievement gains. Thus, the results of the study supported the premise that there are significant differences among teachers and their ability to produce achievement gains with their students. The random assignment of teachers and students in this experiment provided stronger evidence about the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Additionally, LaCour (2002) argued that student achievement is increased significantly when students receive high quality instruction. Johnson, Kahle, and Fargo (2006) studied the problem of low student achievement in science in urban areas as a result of ineffective instruction. They pointed out that many science teachers in urban areas do not have science certification; that 30 percent of science and mathematics teachers in urban areas leave within the first 3 years; and that teachers who stay do just enough to get by. Johnson, et al. (2006) assessed the impact of teacher effectiveness on student learning in science by race and the long-term impact of student science learning experiences. The study focused on the relationship between the quality of science instruction and student science achievement.

The participants in this study included all 11 science teachers from Highland Middle School in a Midwestern state. The study was conducted from 2003 to 2005 and involved a diverse, urban population of 850 students with a racial makeup of 72% White and 28% African American, Latino, Asian, and/or Native American. All the teachers were willing to participate and provide student data. A longitudinal cohort design was used and involved the collection of scores on the Discovery Inquiry Test (DIT) during the three years of the study. Teacher effectiveness data were collected through classroom observations using the Local Systemic Change Classroom Observation Protocol (LSCCOP). General linear mixed model analysis was used to assess the change in mean student test scores as a result of the following variables: time,

race/ethnic identity (White or minority), gender, teacher effectiveness (effective, neutral, ineffective), the impact of ineffective teaching during earlier years and on performance in later years, and the time of day of class period (morning or afternoon).

The findings of the study revealed that students who had effective teachers performed significantly better on the achievement test than students who had neutral or ineffective teachers over the three years of the study. The trends did not differ for White or minority students, indicating that teacher effectiveness has the same impact on both ethnic groups. The minority students' gain score (4.81 points) was somewhat greater than that of White students (4.45 points) with effective teachers. In addition, the sequence of effective or ineffective teachers did not affect students' science achievement as much as the effectiveness of the teacher a student had in a given year. For example, students who had ineffective teachers in grades six and seven were able to compensate in grade eight with an effective teacher. Students in grade eight who had ineffective teachers in grades six and seven scored higher ($M = 15.12$, $SD = 2.60$) than students with an ineffective or neutral teacher in grade 8 ($M = 12.07$, $SD = 2.72$).

The results of this study contradicted previous research by Sanders and Rivers (1996) that claimed ineffective teaching has cumulative and had residual negative effects on achievement. This study indicated that students receiving effective instruction performed at high levels despite exposure to ineffective instruction. The results also suggested a way to narrow the achievement gap between White and minority students with effective instruction.

Diamond (2007) also examined the type of instruction in low income and African American schools. His research investigated how the NCLB testing policy influenced instruction. With disparities in educational outcomes between African American and White students, standards-based reform was designed to motivate teachers to expose all students to high quality instruction through two dimensions: content and pedagogy. While these policies get the

attention of stakeholders, they have not been able to initiate change in instruction at the classroom level. Diamond (2007) wrote that the intent of standards-based reform is to provide students from low SES background with conceptual understanding, active engagement in learning, and problem-solving opportunities, while having less exposure to memorization, recitation, and teacher-led instruction that emphasizes lectures and questioning with short answers. He also emphasizes that little was known about the impact of these policies on the actual classroom instruction. In order to address this issue, he examined data from the Distributed Leadership Project, a study of leadership practices in Chicago elementary schools from 1999 to 2000.

Diamond (2007) collected data from eight case-study sites and conducted interviews at five school sites. Across eight schools, approximately 105 observations were conducted. The pre-observation interviews focused on the content and purpose of the lessons, and the post-observation interview asked teachers to reflect on the instructional changes they made and what influenced those changes. The data analysis consisted of coding interviews to identify emerging patterns with content and pedagogy.

The findings from the study revealed that the major influences on teachers' coverage of content are (a) other teachers; (b) textbooks; and (c) the teachers' prior knowledge and interpretation of the content. District standards and testing initiatives had less of an impact on the content outlined for instruction. The findings also uncovered that pedagogy was less influenced by standards and testing and more influenced by other teachers and the teachers' prior experience and background knowledge. In addition, teacher dominated instruction was more predominate in classrooms with students from low SES backgrounds and African American backgrounds, in which teachers asked fewer follow up questions, provided limited feedback, and engaged in minimal interaction with peers.

As a result of this study, Diamond (2007) concluded that the high stakes testing policies of Chicago Public Schools had had limited influence on how instruction occurred for African American and low-income students. Diamond's research implies that the accountability initiative needs to be coupled with systemic supports to help teachers improve instructional development and delivery. Follow up research is needed to understand why instruction varies based on the racial composition and social-class of schools. By exploring the perceptions of African American adolescents, perhaps greater understanding of the effects of school and classroom level process will emerge.

Summary of Research Outcomes

The Coleman Report of 1966 found that the schools do not influence student achievement beyond the student's individual characteristics and social context. This finding led to the achievement research on biological differences, wealth and class, oppositional identity, and teacher expectations. These theories of underachievement do not consider schools to be places of agency. While a number of studies (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gamoran, 2001; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Orr, 2003) substantiate the findings of the Coleman Report, additional findings on the impact of quality of instruction currently challenge these previous studies. Researchers (Johnson, et al., 2006; Jordan, et al., 1997; Nye, et al., 2004; Saunders & River, 1996) have affirmed that students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds can learn with quality instruction.

Wiggin (2007) suggested the review of teaching and learning through the perspectives of African American adolescents to understand to the type of classroom instruction and relations that would support their achievement. The Diamond (2007) study revealed that typical reform initiatives alone cannot change instruction. African American students are the subject of the achievement gap debate, and their perceptions could create a better understanding of teaching

and learning that can help close gaps and provide additional opportunities to learn in the school setting.

Student Voice as a Research Methodology

In the early 1900s, several educators and critics took notice of the absence of student voices from conversations about learning, teaching, and schooling. Cook-Sather (2006) wrote that within educational reform, the relationship between the student and the teacher must be open to the presence and power of the student. She defined student voice as a process of consultation with students as well as the active participation of students in school change and recommended the use of student voice to inform learning, teaching, and schooling. Erickson and Shultz (1992) cited the need for additional research to uncover the variation of student experiences across subjects, within and across grade levels, and across achievement levels and ethnicities. Young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; and their voices need to be included in the discussions about educational change.

Principles of Student Voice

Cook-Sather (2006) described three principles of student voice: (a) rights, (b) respect, and (c) listening. She pointed out that students' rights have existed from the beginning of this nation. As cited in Cook-Sather, Thomas Jefferson stated that all students are entitled to a free public education; the *Brown v. Board of Education* provided equal access to education regardless of race; and the No Child Left Behind legislation attempted to close the achievement gap. But according to Cook-Sather, educators, legislators, and researchers argue that student rights are an essential human right, and yet student voices are often absent from legislation, research, and reform.

Respect is the second principle of student voice. Cook-Sather (2006) pointed out that respect was the seventh most popular response given by 15,000 students in England who were

asked what conditions were needed for learning. She reported that pupils who are involved in their schools and feel respected as individuals and as members of a group feel a greater sense of belonging and are less likely to disengage from school. She also stated that respect is a dynamic built between and among the student and teacher and can only be sustained in a continuous relationship: it cannot be established once and for all but is a process that is shaped with time and effort on the part of adults and students.

Listening, the third principle of student voice was identified as important (the fourth most common response) when students were asked to describe what kind of school they would like as suggested by Cook-Sather (2006). She described that student voice projects, built around listening, signal different kinds of participation, ownership, and agency. The principles of student voice – rights, respect, and listening - create a range of opportunities to reposition students in research and reform. From eliciting student ideas and facilitating multiple levels of listening, to the moral connection with others through mutual respect, the student voice agenda strives to include students in a discourse about learning, teaching, and schooling and to play an active role in shaping their education.

A Call for Student Voice

Researchers (Giroux, 1988; Nieto, 1994; Waxman & Huang, 1997) have made a call for the use of students' viewpoints in school reform initiatives and educational research. Giroux (1988) cited that students' perspectives reveal two important insights. Their perspectives capture (a) important aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom, and (b) represent the views of students who have been silenced or marginalized by schools. Nieto (1994) reaffirmed the need for more students' perspectives of learning environments. She stated that some students' voices reveal the pain young people feel when schools are uncaring and cold. Students spend the most time in the classes, speak the least but have the most to teach educators if educators listen

carefully. Waxman and Huang (1997) argued that research on African American students' perceptions of classroom practices are limited and needed. They believe students perceive instructional practices differently from what is observed or intended. Analyses of students' views are essential to identify what works in regards to teaching and learning.

Studies Using Student Voice

Waxman and Huang (1997) researched the differences between effective and ineffective urban schools for African American students. They used quantitative methods to investigate the differences between effective and ineffective urban schools on (a) "students' classroom behavior and (b) students' motivation and perceptions of their classroom learning environment" (p. 16). Their investigation and findings described below provide a foundation for research using student voice.

Ninety-three percent of the students in the effective schools were African American and 96% of the students in the ineffective schools were African American. The student profiles from both schools were similar, with the exception of achievement results on the third-grade statewide achievement test. The students in the effective schools did twice as well as students in the ineffective schools - 60% of the third-grade students in the effective schools passed all three sections of the statewide test (i.e., reading, writing, and mathematics), while only 31% of the students from the ineffective schools passed all three of the statewide assessments.

Data were collected using observations and surveys. Participants came from eight schools (four effective and four ineffective). Six students from each of 120 classes were randomly selected and observed by the researchers. A total of 713 third, fourth, and fifth grade students were observed: 48% were male and 52% were female. A total of 914 fourth and fifth grade students completed a survey that examined their motivation and perceptions of the classroom environment six weeks before the end of the school year.

Based on classroom observation, African American students in effective schools worked in an individualized setting, interacted with the teacher, and worked on written assignments significantly more often than those students in ineffective schools. African American students in the ineffective schools were observed in whole class settings, not interacting at all, or interacting with students only, and reading independently. In addition, Waxman and Huang found that students from effective schools had significantly higher achievement motivation and academic self-concept scores than students from ineffective schools. They perceived their classroom environment with more task orientation, rule clarity, and future aspirations than students from ineffective schools.

Thus, Waxman and Huang's (1997) findings revealed that classroom instruction, motivation, and learning environment differences existed between effective and ineffective urban schools for African American students. They recommended additional research that included triangulation of multiple perspectives using multiple measures of classroom processes and suggested that "qualitative studies could also be done to specifically examine what classroom factors foster African American students' positive attitudes toward schooling and their own learning" (p. 34).

Corbett and Wilson (1998) investigated instructional variability within urban middle schools and the effect it had on student learning. The overall purpose of the study was to record adolescents' ideas about their experiences with school and to follow how their perceptions developed over a year, while the school district implemented a new school reform initiative.

The participants in the study came from five middle schools within a district that was 98-100% minority and predominately African American. Two-hundred forty-seven sixth-graders and 114 eighth-graders were interviewed over a two-year period. The groups of students were balanced by gender, race, middle school team representation, academic ability/performance,

behavior, and motivation. (Seventh-graders were not included in the study due to high mobility: the year two interviews could not be conducted.)

Corbett and Wilson (1998) conducted the interviews. They kept hand-written field notes, and they entered the notes into a computer for analysis. The authors engaged in several brainstorming sessions to identify themes. They reread data to establish key coding variables within each theme. They found that sixth and eighth grade students valued good teaching, which consisted of teachers who were willing to help and teachers who were strict but nice. Positive instructional experiences consisted of projects, experiments, and fun assignments such as learning through games and working in small groups. The students also cited variability in the distribution of instructional experiences. They reported that they had multiple teachers, and several long-term replacement teachers, and they described school as a waste of time at this point because classes were disorderly. In addition, students stated that in some classes, support was scarce. Teachers did not press them to complete assignments and did not explain work. They just assigned the activities.

Corbett and Wilson (1998) concluded that reform must minimize within school differences. Students in this study emphasized extreme differences across classrooms. A reform agenda needs to maximize a students' access to an excellent teacher at 9 a.m. and at 10 a.m. Using students' perspectives of good instruction can be a gateway for teachers within a school to learn the best practices recommended by students.

In 2007, Wilson and Corbett conducted three additional studies using three different populations and age groups. They reported their findings in a chapter documenting students' experiences in elementary and secondary school. They used student voice to investigate students' perspectives on good teaching and the implications for adult reform behavior. They posed the following research question: "What should adults be held accountable for in order to

encourage schools to support the kind of teaching students say is most beneficial to their learning” (p. 283).

Three different student samples were used to answer the research question. The first sample described the characteristics of good teachers. A three-year study of 250 African American and Hispanic middle school students was conducted, and the students were interviewed annually. Interview notes were hand-written and coded to look for emergent themes. The middle school students in sample one stated that good teachers pressed students to complete assignments, controlled student behavior, provided help, explained things until everyone understood, provided a variety of activities, and understood students’ behavior was not always targeted at the teacher.

The second sample consisted of 280 ninth and tenth grade students from two high schools in the same neighborhood as the middle schools. Some of the students in the high school sample were also in the initial middle school sample. The high school students were interviewed twice over a two-year period. Students in the high school study shared their perspectives on a reform initiative of block scheduling, which consisted of four instructional periods of 90 minutes each. Interview notes were hand-written and coded to look for emergent themes with the second sample. The high school students in sample two stated that the block scheduling supported quality teaching and improved learning. They stated that teachers explained assignments, used a variety of activities in the block schedule, developed relationships with students, tried to understand the work they were doing, gave them time to finish their work, and that they, the students, were able to retain what they had learned because they had only four classes a day instead of seven to eight classes.

The final sample consisted of students from two small city schools. The enrollment of the district was about 10,000. Wilson and Corbett observed classes, talked to teachers, and

interviewed students. The findings revealed that students understood the rules that they must get their class work done, and that it should be done with quality. The grading system was based on A, B, and I for incomplete. Students stated that teachers did not let them get away with a D, and that they were expected to produce quality work.

Wilson and Corbett (2007) summarized their findings by saying educators should be able to answer “yes” to the following three questions: (a) “Does every child complete every assignment at an acceptable level of quality? (b) Is every assignment worth doing?, and (c) Does every adult know the name of every child in the building, and is every child known well by at least several adults in the building” (p. 308)?

Howard (2001a, 2001b) investigated African American students’ perceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices. His investigations extended research on culturally relevant teaching and examined viewpoints of students marginalized by school reform and research studies. Howard wanted to put student viewpoints of their school experiences at the center of discussion for school improvement and he wanted to uncover students’ perceptions of teachers’ pedagogical practices.

The study was conducted across four urban elementary schools located in the northwestern area of the United States during 1997-1998. A purposive sample of 17 students, 10 girls and seven boys, was used for the study. A cross selection based on achievement categories of high, medium, and low was used to group students. All students were interviewed individually, and they participated in a focus group with their classmates. Three findings emerged from the analysis of data: (a) “the importance of caring teachers,” (b) “community/family classroom environment,” and (c) “education as entertainment” (Howard, 2001, p. 136).

Students felt teachers made school feel like home. The explicit strategies that teachers used to support academic success included showing care, using democratic principles to establish community, creating engaging classrooms in which teachers shared personal stories, using meaningful content, and using a variety of interactional styles. Howard (2001a, 2001b) referred to these as practices as culturally relevant, whereas the children did not.

Wyngaard (2005) studied African American high school students' perceptions of culturally relevant education. She utilized case-study methodology using interviews and focus work groups to document high school students' voices. Interpretations were triangulated by also interviewing administrators, educators, and parents. Six students were included in the study. Two female seniors, two male juniors, one female sophomore, and one 20-year-old male alumnus from the same high school shared their voices. Culturally relevant pedagogy was defined by the students in the study as the four Rs theory – Relationships, Respect, Responsibility, and Relevancy, which represented teaching practices and the learning community. The findings of the study mirrored Ladson-Billings (1990) and the work of Ferguson (2007) with the foundational component of the findings being relationships.

In response to the No Child Left Behind legislation, Garcia, Agbemakplido, Abdella, Lopez, and Registe (2006) and four high school students examined secondary students' perceptions of a highly qualified teacher. Garcia, an advisor to the Student Leadership and Action (SLA) course at an urban high school, pointed out the need to recognize the role of youth in school improvement efforts and, in particular, the voices of students who have been marginalized historically when it comes to educational needs such as teacher quality. SLA was a social studies course for credit, in which students conducted participatory action research (PAR) on school issues. The course consisted of questioning and seeking real solutions to school concerns through the development of critical literacy (e.g., critical thinking, reading, writing, and

analysis). PAR allowed students to have an active role in the change process while maintaining a strong commitment to their schoolwork.

The four students in the SLA course used a letter to respond to the question. In preparation for answering the questions, they had to complete preliminary readings, writing assignments, and attend required weekly meetings to discuss the research on the following topics: (a) understanding NCLB legislation, (b) reviewing educational literature, (c) analyzing their learning experiences, and (d) grounding their experiences in local education strategies. When reviewing the NCLB policy, students learned that their voices were not considered, which was evident in the academic focus and the exclusion of criteria that mattered to students. They also read educational literature that addressed race, culture, language, pedagogy, and student-teacher relationships. While the SLA group agreed that teaching should be grounded in the lives of students, they had different ideas about what that would look like in practice. They had to describe powerful learning experiences and decide what teacher qualities would allow replication of these positive learning experiences for other youth. Finally, students examined their school experiences using the district's Principles of Teaching that publicly stated the criteria and expectations for the district's teachers and what they should know and be able to do to meet the needs of students. This document helped students to conceptualize their ideas within the context of their school district.

The findings of the study were reported for each individual student. The first student, a female junior from Ghana, asserted that creating partnerships with family and community needed to be a foundational principle in hiring a quality teacher. She stated in her letter that she wanted teachers who used life lessons to instruct and to educate people to be free of prejudice. The second student, a female senior from the Sudan, declared in her letter that high expectations, instructional planning, and implementation were crucial qualities that teachers should embody.

Teachers should be prepared for class, and their classroom should be orderly and organized. Teachers need to provide opportunities for students to talk because students learn through talking, and finally, students need homework and need to be challenged. The third student, a male junior from Guatemala, stated that monitoring assessment and progress was an important quality in a teacher. He cited in his letter that an English teacher had a great impact because the teacher met one-to-one to give him feedback on his learning to help him move into independence with his learning. And the fourth student, a female junior from the Caribbean, wrote that a safe, respectful, culturally sensitive, and responsive learning community is what she believed a teacher must create in the classroom. In her letter, she urged teachers to have an open mind about other cultures and to be sensitive to the cultures of the students sitting in the class. In addition, opportunities for students to share their thoughts should be provided. This student urged teachers to give students a voice during lessons.

Schmakel (2008) investigated the perspectives and beliefs of seventh-grade students' instructional practices and how the environment affected their motivation, engagement, and achievement. Schmakel hypothesized that if students were given the opportunity, they could inform researchers and practitioners about effective instructional practices and environments for adolescents. She built this study around the framework of TARRGET: task, autonomy, recognition, resources, evaluation, and time and developed a methodology to understand how adolescents perceived the use of TARRGET to motivate and promote achievement.

Schmakel (2008) recruited students for the study from four diverse parochial schools in a Midwestern urban setting. Sixty-seven seventh graders from a K-8 setting were selected, and they came from average to low-income SES backgrounds. Data were collected from high and low achieving students. Three methods were used to create triangulation of data for analysis – essays, focus groups, and interviews. Thirty-one high achievers and 36 low achievers wrote an

essay to the prompt, “If you were a teacher, how would you get your students to improve their school learning and their school environment”? Twenty-six high achievers and 19 low achievers participated in a 45-minute focus group, and five high achievers and five low achievers participated in an interview. Data were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify commonalities, differences, and themes. There was an 89% inter-rater reliability for the coding process.

Nine constructs emerged from the data and were the results of the study. The nine constructs represented what the seventh graders believed would be motivating for academic engagement and achievement. They reported fun, interesting assignments, effective use of time, individual help, challenge, use of student input, updated resources, group work, and combined mastery and performance goals. The students also reported the following motivational constructs: teacher empathy, positive recognition, respectful control, parental push, and teacher relationships. The findings between high and low achievers were mostly similar. They agreed that instruction and teachers were much more interesting and fun in elementary school, and they both pleaded for more individual time with teachers. However, high and low achievers differed in how they were challenged by the junior high school curriculum. High achievers reported that they were effectively challenged, and they had the skills to handle the rigor. Many low achievers reported not being challenged and described losing interest, giving up, and then getting bad grades. Low achievers also reported needing teacher empathy during the developmental stage of adolescence. Schmakel recommended continued research on the use of student voice to interpret classroom instruction and motivation.

Summary of Student Voice Research

Waxman and Huang (1997) used survey and observational findings to advocate for the use of student voice to analyze teaching and learning. They recommended the triangulation of

multiple perspectives and the use of multiple measures. Corbett and Wilson (1998), Howard (2001a, 2001b), and Wilson and Corbett (2007) used only interviews to examine the perceptions of African American students. Schmakel (2008) used essays, focus groups, and interview to investigate student perceptions. Findings across elementary, middle, and high school included pedagogical recommendations that would enhance students' learning, instruction, and relational experiences in classrooms and/or with teachers. Additional qualitative methods in combination could be used to understand how African American adolescents understand pedagogy provided in their classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Pedagogy and the Achievement Gap

Singham (2003) suggested that the implications provided to explain the achievement gap (e.g., lack of motivation, peer pressure, lack of parent involvement, low teacher expectations, bias in standardized styles, mismatch in instruction, and Black students learning styles) are insufficient. He asserted that a linear approach to researching the achievement gap will not solve the problem and suggested that solutions will emerge when a comprehensive approach is considered with a focus on doing what is good for all children instead of just minority children.

Singham's (2003) review of the literature uncovered three best practices for all students that could be used to eliminate the achievement gap. The first best practice is the improvement of the mathematics curriculum. Adelman (1999) reported that the highest level of mathematics completed in high schools is the strongest predictor of college degree completion. Mathematics education has become the gatekeeper course for higher education. Mathematics knowledge allows all students' access to subjects once thought to be qualitative in nature (e.g., biology, psychology, economics, government, and geography), which now consist of more quantitative elements.

Improving curriculum is the second-best practice that could support Black students who historically have underachieved. Adelman (1999) found that students' access to academic resources, which consisted of the high school curriculum, test scores, and class rank, had greater power than SES as a predictor of college degree completion. He also found that the high school curriculum was more positively related to Black and Latino achievement than measures of gender, race, and SES. Schoenfeld (2002) found that the use of mathematics reform curricula significantly narrowed the gap between Whites and underrepresented minorities and increased the performance for both groups. For example, Schoenfeld reported that the math concept scores for White students increased from 20% to 60% (a 200% increase), and the Black students' scores increased from 4% to 40% (a 900% increase).

Schoenfeld (2002) described good teaching as the third best practice for closing the achievement gap. He analyzed the quality of teaching in Pittsburgh's effort to implement math reform curricula and identified two types of teachers (a) strong implementation teachers, and (b) other teachers. The strong implementation teacher used activities and procedures aligned with the math reform movement, and student work showed clear signs that the curriculum had been implemented. Schoenfeld's analysis also revealed that it takes about 10 years of professional development (e.g., collaborative study, observation, curriculum knowledge, and lesson refinement as a component of ongoing, daily professional development) to become a strong implementation teacher. This is important because Haycock, Jerald, and Huang (2001) noted that Black students are most likely to receive poor teaching. Compared to White eighth-graders, Black eighth-graders are twice as likely to have teachers who place minimal emphasis on lab skills, hands-on activities, and data analysis, and who are less likely to have participated in professional development the previous year. Singham (2003) reported that effective teachers produce six times the learning gains produced by less-effective teachers. This is important

because the impact of a teacher is greater for Black students' achievement. He pointed out that the impact of teacher expectations is three times greater for Black students than White and is larger for girls and students from low SES families. Additionally, 81% of Black females and 62% of Black males are eager to please their teacher more than a parent.

Singham (2003) elaborated on what constitutes effective teaching and emphasized the following three components: (a) content knowledge, (b) generic teaching skills, and (c) pedagogical content knowledge. He stated that teachers need to understand the content so they can facilitate the inquiry that encourages active learning through questioning and discussion. To promote active learning, teachers need to have basic teaching skills such as how to organize cooperative learning groups and hands-on instruction, how to use wait time, and how to provide meaningful, neutral feedback. In addition, Singham noted that the final component of effective teaching, pedagogical content knowledge, is often the most overlooked component of effective teaching.

While the examination of African American students' opportunities to learn from qualified teachers has produced mixed results, African American students also have had a lack of access to rigorous curriculum and have had lower quality of instruction. Spielhagen (2006) investigated the problem of achievement gap among underrepresented populations in eighth grade algebra classes. Spielhagen was interested in equitable access to algebra as a means of increasing mathematics literacy and employed a methodology to examine a mathematics tracking policy in a large southwestern suburban school district. He addressed three basic research questions: "first, who got into eighth grade algebra; second, what background circumstances affected the district's mathematics tracking policy; and third, what difference did studying algebra in eighth grade make in student achievement and attainment" (Spielhagen, 2006)?

The study examined the characteristics of students in each of the algebra pools (eighth grade and post eighth grade) ($n = 2,634$) in each pool and the effects of their mathematics courses. The students were members of the district's high school graduating class of 2002. Students in sixth grade took a teacher-made test to assess readiness for algebraic concepts. Scores on the readiness test and teacher nomination were the criteria to enter honors algebra in grade seven. Students who successfully completed seventh grade honors level mathematics advanced to Algebra I in eighth grade. First, a statistical analysis was used to investigate the characteristics of students in Algebra I in grade eight and those in grade eight mathematics, then the achievement of students in each group on standardized tests, and finally, subsequent enrollment in local math courses. Interviews with teachers ($n = 36$) were employed to gain insight in the selection process for Algebra I.

Spielhagen's (2006) findings revealed that greater percentages of Black and Hispanic students were in grade eight mathematics, while a larger portion of Asians were in Grade 8 Algebra. White students were evenly distributed in both groups. In addition, the higher the socioeconomic status derived from free and reduced lunch statistics, the lower the percentage of students participating in Grade 8 Algebra. Controlling for prior achievement and parental educational background differences, the analysis revealed that Caucasian students were 1.4 times more likely to get into an early algebra group. Black students were .84 times as likely, a less than even chance of getting into Grade 8 Algebra.

Inequitable background circumstances affected the selection process. Teachers revealed during interviews that some third-grade students were selected for enriched mathematics experiences, although this was not the case across the district. Some students across the district did not have the same access to enriched math lessons. In seventh grade, not all teachers used the district's official teacher constructed identification test and began to rely on their own

subjective judgment about student readiness. In addition, parents of students in higher socioeconomic populations were known to override the district's placement of students.

The results of Spielhagen's analysis of the effects of early access to algebra on achievement revealed that the students who had early access to Algebra I scored higher on every measure (i.e., end of course test, pre-placement test in seventh grade, the Stanford 9 test) in comparison to their peers in grade eight mathematics. The grade eight mathematics students only scored higher than Algebra I students on the state administered test. The results revealed that tracking does not accelerate achievement or minimize achievement gaps. In addition, the effects of studying algebra in eighth grade had impact on the subsequent math course students took in high school. By eleventh grade, 77% of the Grade 8 Algebra class was enrolled in advanced math classes such as Trigonometry and Mathematics Analysis.

Ultimately, tracking policies did not produce achievement gains or minimize achievement gaps. They, however, created access to higher-level math classes at the high school level. The inequity that exists stems from the selection process that is uneven and subjective across the district and within schools. Students who gained access due to parental advocacy may have struggled initially but went on to perform well and to succeed in high level math classes. Thus, algebra instruction is a way to close achievement gaps. Providing prior performance opportunities as early as third grade to low SES populations will increase equity as will teachers with solid pedagogical content knowledge.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Shulman (1986) defined pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) "as the way of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to others" (p. 9). He proposed that teachers need a repertoire of strategies, developed through research and from the wisdom of classroom practice, that make learning a specific subject easy. He asserted that a

teacher should understand students' misconceptions and how they influence their learning. Shulman (2007) described pedagogical content knowledge as the blending of content and pedagogy that makes it possible for the teacher to instruct. He broke pedagogical content knowledge into six distinctive bodies of knowledge needed for instruction: (a) comprehension, (b) transformation, (c) instruction, (d) evaluation, (e) reflection, and (f) new comprehension.

For Shulman (2007) the first and essential component of pedagogical content knowledge is comprehension. A teacher must critically comprehend the ideas and the purpose of the content to be taught. The teacher must have the capacity to transform the content into forms that are pedagogically strong for the variety of backgrounds and abilities evident in students.

The second component of PCK is transformation. Shulman (2007) stated that transformation consists of the following processes: (a) preparation and critical interpretation of materials, (b) representation of new ideas in forms such as analogies, (c) instructional selections such as lectures, (d) demonstrations, or cooperative learning, (e) adaptation of material to student characteristics such as motivation, culture, and language, and (f) tailoring the adaptations based on the class disposition, size, or interpersonal chemistry. The comprehension and transformation of content components represent the plan and the teacher's ability to pedagogically reason about content. The act of reasoning leads to the third component of PCK – instruction.

Instruction consists of organizing and managing the classroom, presenting clear explanations and descriptions, questioning and discussion, providing direct and trial and error instruction, checking work, and giving praise and feedback. However, Shulman noted that this type instruction occurs only if the comprehension and transformation of content is evident. He reported that the comprehension of a new teacher will inform the style of teaching employed. Therefore, the more a teacher comprehends a content area, the more active the learning will be for students.

The fourth component of PCK is evaluation. Shulman (2007) stated that evaluation of learning involves checking for both understanding and misunderstanding during and after instruction. He also pointed out that what the student understands or does not understand requires a deep comprehension of the materials to be taught and how it is learned. The fifth component is reflection. Shulman reported that teachers' use of analytic knowledge helps them to review their instruction and compare it to the outcome that was intended. The final component of PCK is new comprehension. Shulman wrote that through the process of teaching that is thoughtful, reflective, and reasonable the teacher develops new comprehension of the subject and its purpose, the students, and the process of pedagogy. For Shulman, the components of pedagogical content knowledge are not fixed and sequential but can be fluid and flexible in their application to teaching. Teachers should be able to demonstrate the ability to engage in the processes as needed.

Research supporting Shulman's (2007) notion of pedagogical content knowledge was also conducted by Darby (2005). She researched students' perceptions of teacher pedagogy in science using student voice. The purpose of the study was to investigate experiences that may contribute to how students perceive science. To understand what students were saying, Darby used instructional and relational pedagogy-based theories to analyze student responses related to how teachers helped them to learn.

The study was conducted in 2001 and 2002 in Victoria, Australia: participants were students in year 7 and 8. Participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups of 2-3 students were employed. Thirty-eight observations, 19 semi-structured interviews and two to three focus groups were conducted during each school term. Focus groups were used for member checking to confirm themes that were mentioned during interviews.

Darby (2005) found that students liked it when previously used concepts were employed to create understanding of new topics. In addition, students valued clear explanations, class discussions, and clarification of information by going over it more than one time. These examples supported the theoretical framework of pedagogical content knowledge. The teachers taught for understanding of the content.

Darby (2005) also found that relational factors contributed to science learning. Teachers generated conversation that enhanced the learning process. There was also opportunity for students to negotiate differing opinions and to strive for consensus. Students felt safe to share their ideas with the teacher and other students. The students described several relational characteristics that could be summarized into three categories: passion, comfort, and support. Teachers appeared to enjoy their work, created a friendly environment, and were willing to provide assistance.

The Darby (2005) study basically supported the use of two types of pedagogies to engage students in science learning – instructional and relational pedagogy. One of the final recommendations for teachers of students in middle years was to be perceptive about how relations influence students’ opportunities to learn.

Culture and Pedagogy

Culture consists of the beliefs, customs, and practices that mediate the social behavior of a given group (Parsons, 2005). Vygotsky (1978) asserted that people learn cognitive tasks as a result of the social and cultural context, and that cognition is understood by examining the signs that the culture provides. According to Weisner, Gallimore, and Jordan (1988), the culture of African American students has been studied through a deficit lens for over 40 years; their underachievement has been attributed to a lack of mainstream socialization and inadequate background knowledge and experiences. More recently, researchers such as Boykin (1983),

Howard (2001a), and Ladson-Billings (1992) have described the cultural discontinuity between home and school for African American children and they have begun investigating culturally relevant teaching practices to advance students' academic and social success.

Ladson-Billings (2009) described culturally relevant pedagogy as a context for African American students' achievement. She defined culturally relevant pedagogy as instruction that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 20), and pointed out that the way we teach overpoweringly affects the way students perceive the content and the social relations between the teacher and the student. This definition emerged from her 1990 study of the ideology and practices of eight exemplary teachers of African American children who expected, communicated, and produced academic excellence in their students. This study will be reviewed below.

Earlier, Boykin (1983) had investigated the importance of culture and developed an Afro-cultural framework, using cultural antecedents to increase students' task engagement, motivation, and performance. Boykin's framework described African American culture through three distinct areas of experience: (a) mainstream, (b) minority, and (c) Afro-cultural. Mainstream beliefs are related to the values, beliefs, and practices common to most people in the United States. Minority experience is related to coping strategies used to face an oppressive environment; and Afro-cultural experience is related to traditional West African worldviews. Boykin asserted that there are nine dimensions; he has highlighted two of these in his research, communalism and verve, (Boykin, Lilja, & Tyler, 2004; Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, & Dillhunt, 2005; Marrayshow, Hurley, Allen, Tyler, & Boykin, 2005; Tyler, Boykin, Miller, & Hurley, 2006). Communalism is defined as a commitment to social connectedness, and verve is defined as the receptiveness to high levels of variable stimulation (Allen & Boykin, 1992). Most of

Boykin's research focused on how communalism and *verve* affect student engagement and/or achievement. Both theoretical approaches, Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy and Boykin's Afro-cultural framework, advocate for the combination of culture and cognition to promote student achievement in the classroom. However, Ladson-Billings focuses on teachers' cultural practices (i.e., building academic skills, maintaining cultural identity, and challenging the status quo), while Boykin highlights students' cultural preferences (i.e., communalism and *verve* versus individualism and competition).

Teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1990) and Howard (2001a) studied the practices of teachers who were perceived as successful by parents of African American students, principals, district administrators, and community leaders involved with the schools attended by African American students. Ladson-Billings wanted to discern how teachers' beliefs and behaviors influence the academic success of Black children as well as how these teachers supported students in maintaining their cultural integrity. She began her search for successful teachers of Black students in a predominantly Black city of 18,000 with a process called "community nomination" (p. 337); she asked parents of students aged 9 to 19 who attended a local Black church to discuss the educational outcomes they wanted for their children and to identify which teachers in fourth, fifth, or sixth grades helped to promote these outcomes. She found that parents wanted their children to graduate from high school, complete college, and get jobs, without forgetting who they were and their community. Ladson-Billings also interviewed principals of the community's seven elementary and middle schools asking them to identify their *best* fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers and to specify the criteria for selecting these teachers. The principals' criteria included student achievement growth as measured by standardized tests, classroom management, observed teaching skills, and student enthusiasm. Ladson-Billings decided to include only the teachers identified by both parents and teachers to

validate the perspectives of both home and school. All eight teachers identified for the study were female. Five teachers were Black, and three were White; their teaching experience ranged from 12 to 40 years, with a median experience of 21.5 years.

In an effort to capture what made the teachers successful, Ladson-Billings (1990) used ethnographic interviews and classroom observations. The interviews allowed Ladson-Billings to study the cultural values of teachers and to avoid the application of bias to definitions of excellent teaching. The interviews ranged from 50 minutes to two hours in length. Preliminary analysis revealed themes related to teachers' conceptions of themselves, how social relations were structured in their classrooms, and their understandings about school and content. Ladson-Billings called these themes "culturally relevant teaching" (p. 339). Analysis of these themes revealed a dichotomy between the type of teaching that empowers learners (culturally relevant) and the kind of teaching that maintains the status quo (assimilationist). After analyzing interview data to discover the themes of culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings videotaped the teachers at work in their classroom in an effort to document their practice and to see how their practices aligned with their beliefs and interview statements. The teachers reviewed the videotape as a group and analyzed and interpreted what they did in relation to the conceptual themes that emerged from the interview data.

From this 1990 study, Ladson-Billings concluded that culturally appropriate social relations between the teacher and student: (a) are fluid, equitable, and extend into the community, (b) displayed the teacher's connectedness with all students, (c) supported a community of learners; and (d) advocated for collaborative learning. In contrast, the assimilationist environment promotes (a) hierarchical, formal classroom roles, (b) connections with individual students, (c) competition, and (d) individual, isolated learning. Ladson-Billings also found that culturally relevant conceptions of knowledge: (a) are continuously recreated,

recycled, and shared by teachers and students, (b) are critically viewed, (c) help students develop prerequisite skills, and (d) includes excellence as a complex standard that takes student diversity and individual differences in account. The contrasting assimilationist knowledge framework promoted the idea that knowledge is static and infallible, and identified excellence as independent of student diversity and individual differences.

For Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant pedagogy evolved and rests on three propositions: (a) “students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 160). The goal of culturally relevant teaching is to persuade students to choose academic achievement by developing their literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills so that they are prepared to participate in a democracy. In addition, culturally relevant pedagogy uses students’ culture to develop cultural competence. For example, non-offensive rap music can be used to teach vocabulary, figurative language, rhyme, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. And finally, culturally relevant pedagogy promotes a critical consciousness of society. Students are encouraged to critically examine the information in textbooks, write letters to the editor to express opposition or support of political issues, and to research alternative perspectives when necessary. Through her research, Ladson-Billings highlighted teaching practices to maximize cultural congruence for African American students’ academic success.

Howard (2001a) extended the work of Ladson-Billings. In his study, he investigated school environments that successfully alleviate cultural discontinuity. The purpose of the study was to describe and examine the pedagogical practices that four urban, elementary school teachers used to create learning environments that encouraged students to connect to their cultural identities, while pursuing high academic achievement.

Howard invited 21 nominators (6 elementary school principals, 4 parents, 5 teachers, 3 district administrators, and 3 civic leaders) to identify teachers whose pedagogical practices made a difference in the academic performance of African American students. The nominators identified an initial set of 12 teachers, and then Howard used a conceptual framework of 15 to 20 culturally relevant practices described in previous studies (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2009) to observe all 12 teachers. Four of the 12 teachers were identified as using a minimum of 15 culturally relevant instructional strategies, and they were selected to participate in the study. The four teachers' experience ranged from 5 to 20 years, and each taught in predominately African American school settings in lower to middle class areas of a city in the northwestern region of the United States.

The four teachers were interviewed and then observed in their classrooms over a 4-month period. Each teacher was interviewed three times, and data from informal discussions during observations were recorded, interviews and observational field notes were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. The grounded theory methodology allowed Howard (2001a) to relate findings to existing theories to provide additional descriptions and interpretations of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Howard (2001a) concluded that understanding student culture is essential for student achievement. Three pedagogical practices emerged: "holistic instructional strategies, culturally consistent communicative competencies, and skill-building strategies to promote academic success" (p. 186). Holistic instructional strategies not only consisted of academic strategies but also included social, emotional, and moral growth. The four teachers stressed the importance of character, community service, and citizenship. Culturally consistent communicative competencies included assessing oral expressions as well as written expressions; the appropriate use of Ebonics; and acceptance of the communicative styles that students bring to school. Skill-

building strategies consisted of helping students understand the importance of effort to improve a skill associated with being smart; developing an effort-based theory of learning versus an *I am smart and you are dumb* theory; and stressing the importance of skills such as reading needed to succeed in society. Thus, three key principles were apparent in this study: (a) teachers should develop strategies that are designed to improve the social, psychological, and moral growth of students; (b) teachers should recognize, validate, and use nonstandard English to develop communicative competency; and (c) teachers should combine skill development with the culturally relevant content to build academic success.

Students' perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy. In a second study, Howard (2002) wanted to capture African American students' perceptions of their teacher's pedagogical practices and to find out if students believed their academic and social achievement was influenced by teacher pedagogy. The 30 students who participated in the study were second to eighth graders from five urban elementary and secondary schools in the Northwest and Midwest. This purposive sample consisted of 17 girls and 13 boys and represented a cross-section of academic achievement and classroom behavior based on teachers' classifications. The students fell into low, medium, and high achievement and behavioral categories.

Data collection occurred during the 1998-1999 school year. Howard (2002) conducted semi-structured interviews to understand students' perceptions of school in general and their teachers' pedagogical effectiveness or ineffectiveness. Each student was interviewed individually once and once in a group with two to three other students in the study. The interviews occurred at school, lasted 30 to 60 minutes, were taped recorded, and then transcribed. Howard also conducted classroom observations, which lasted 30 to 90 minutes per visit, two to three times a week to compare the students' interview responses with their classroom performance, engagement, and achievement. All data were analyzed using an interpretivist

framework and a constant comparative method. Data from interviews and observations were triangulated to cross-check themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

Howard (2002) reported that three central themes emerged from the interview data with students concerning what types of teachers and teaching styles promoted their academic achievement: (a) “the presence of family, community, and home characteristics; (b) culturally connected caring; and (c) verbal communication and affirmation” (p. 431). Students mentioned that the classroom seemed like home during morning circle rituals. One student said it made her feel that she would be learning something today, and the ritual provided students with a common and familiar routine. Students also mentioned that the care a teacher demonstrated influenced their effort, and the level of sternness teachers communicated contributed to their effectiveness. Effective teachers were perceived as “warm demanders” (p. 438). Thus, the relational aspects of pedagogy were affirmed through this study.

While Howard (2002) wanted to document students’ perceptions of their teachers’ practices, Ellison, Boykin, Tyler, and Dillihunt (2005) investigated teaching practices through the lens of student learning preferences. These researchers pointed out that there is a need for more research on the learning preferences of ethnically diverse populations. Learning preferences were defined as inclinations toward a type of strategy or structure believed to influence learning. Ellison, et al. (2005) investigated the upper-elementary school students’ preferences for learning strategies identified in the Social Interdependence Scales. White American and African American elementary school students from low-income backgrounds were sampled to identify variation in students’ reported preferences. Based on previous research, Ellison, et al. (2005) expected students to endorse cooperative learning significantly more than competitive and individual learning. They also expected an interaction effect between the variables of race and learning strategy, in which African American students would endorse

cooperative learning significantly more than White American students, and White American would endorse competitive and individual learning preferences more.

A total of 138 fifth and sixth grade students participated in the study. There were 66 African American (33 girls and 33 boys) and 72 White American (39 girls and 33 boys) children. Over 95% of the students participated in the free and reduced lunch program (Ellison, et al., 2005). The Social Interdependence Scales as cited in Ellison, et al. were used to assess students' preferences for cooperative, competitive, and/or individualistic classroom learning. Twelve students were tested at a time, and they were given 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The independent variables in this study were race (African American, White American), gender (male, female), and learning strategy (cooperative, competitive, and individualistic).

Ellison, et al. (2005) analyzed the data using a 2 x 2 x 3 analysis of variance, and they found a statistically significant main effect for learning strategy. Scheffé post hoc analyses revealed that, overall, students held preferences for cooperative learning significantly more than competitive and individualistic learning. There was a significant interaction between race and learning strategy. Post hoc analyses revealed that African American students held significantly higher preferences for cooperative learning than for competitive and individualistic learning, and they held higher preferences for cooperative learning than White American students. White American students also had a preference for cooperative learning but had a greater preference for competitive and individualistic learning than African American students. Pearson product moment correlations coefficients revealed that as preference for cooperative learning increased, preferences for competition and individualistic decreased. A positive relationship between competition and individualistic learning preferences was also revealed.

Overall, Ellison, et al.'s (2005) findings showed that African American students rejected competitive and individualistic learning strategies and highly endorsed cooperation, which is

believed to be more aligned to the values of the African American community. While this research is revealing, additional studies need to be conducted to investigate a variety of ethnic backgrounds, the relationship between learning preferences and student classroom behaviors, teacher perceptions, and achievement outcomes, and how learning preference relate to cultural perceptions.

Marryshow, Hurley, Allen, Tyler, and Boykin (2005) challenged the widely accepted thesis of Fordham and Ogbu (1986) that African American students reject high achievement as a result of negative attitudes toward the educational system. Marryshow, et al., argued that students may not be rejecting high achievement per se but may be rejecting the mainstream model of academic success that is based on competition and individualism. To test this hypothesis, Marryshow, et al., used a behavioral measure of verve, shown to be important in African American culture (Boykin, et al., 2004), to examine the relationship between culture and verve. The students in the study were asked to predict their teachers' attitudes toward four high-achieving students as a way to assess students' tacit knowledge of the relationship between their own and their school's cultural values.

The sample for the Marryshow, et al. (2005) study consisted of 90 African American students, equally divided by gender, ranging from age 10 to 12. All students were from low-income families as indicated by their participation in a free and reduced lunch program. The students were administered the Learning Context Scenario (LCS) and the Pathway Preference Measure (PPM). The LCS measured students' attitudes toward four types of high achievers and their beliefs about their teachers' attitudes toward the same four high-achieving students. The instrument consisted of four scenarios of approximately 90 words. Two of the scenarios represented high achievers in a competitive and individualistic context, and two scenarios represented high achievers in a communal or vervistic context. The LCS consisted of six

questions. The first four questions assessed students' attitudes toward the hypothetical achiever, and the two remaining questions assessed students' predictions of their teachers' perceptions of the four high achievers. "Yes" response received a score of one, and "no" responses received a score of zero.

The Pathway Preference Measure used in the Marryshow, et al. (2005) study measured students' preference for variability. Preference for greater variability was considered indicative of preference for greater verve. The instrument consisted of a multicompartmental rectangular maze in which school is the start box and home, at the other end of the maze, is the destination. The streets of the maze consisted of places commonly found in neighborhoods such as a library, a park, and an ice cream store. The students were asked to trace on a given maze the way they would walk home after school each day on a given week. The nature of the stops was not analyzed, but the variability or tendency toward change, was recorded. A general variability score was obtained by counting the number of pathway compartment openings the child chose to pass through on the way home from school each day. The greater the number of openings passed through, the greater the variability preferred in the route. The most direct route consisted of passing through five openings and represented the lowest variability. The average scored was computed by dividing the total number of pathway openings passed through over the five days by five. The tests were administered to students in groups of 7-15, with students completing the PPM first and the LCS second.

Marryshow, et al., (2005) used a two 2 x 4 analysis of variance to assess differences in attitudes toward high achievers by gender and learning orientation (communal, high-verve, competitive, individualistic). In the first analysis, student attitude was the dependent variable, and in the second analysis, student prediction of the teacher attitude was the dependent variable. There were no main effects for gender but there were significant main effects for learning

orientation for student attitudes and student perceptions of teacher attitude. The results indicated that the cooperatively oriented high achievers were most favored by students, and students predicted that teachers favored high achievers who were communal over high achievers who were described as individualistic or high verve. In addition, correlations revealed that the individualistic and competitive learners were positively correlated, and both were negatively correlated to communal and vervistic learners, with students making a clear distinction between Afrocultural and mainstream cultural achievers. Thus, Marryshow, et al. (2005) concluded that students do not reject high academic achievement but rather prefer high academic achievement in a cultural mode of communalism or verve.

Results of the Howard (2002), Ellison, et al. (2005) and Marryshow, et al. (2005) studies demonstrated the importance of teachers grounding their pedagogy in students' relational and learning preferences and their cultural orientations. While they suggested that students' level of engagement, effort, and willingness to learn increased when teaching is aligned with their preferred cultural orientation, they did not look at the relationship between students' perceptions of culturally relevant practices and academic achievement.

Relationship between culturally relevant pedagogy and academic achievement. The results of research by Boykin, Lilja, and Tyler (2004) suggested that culturally relevant pedagogy does enhance academic performance for African American children. They built their study on two assertions: (a) cultural factors influence academic achievement, and (b) communalism is important in the African American culture, and (c) students often prefer group activities. The purpose of their study was to compare the effects of communal versus individual learning contexts on the recall of geography lessons. They tested three hypotheses: (a) communal learning would enhance both immediate and long-term recall of geography, (b) student performance would increase from trial one to trial two under the communal learning

condition, and (c) students in the communal learning context would outperform students in the individual learning context on the unit examination.

Their sample consisted of 69 African American students from an urban elementary school located in a low-income community in northeastern portion of the United States. Thirty-seven females and 32 males were randomly selected with, 41% of the sample from grade 4 and 59% of the sample from grade 5. Ninety-five percent of the students were receiving free or reduced-priced lunch.

Reading passages from fifth grade geography texts were chosen to assess the impact of the learning context on reading comprehension and recall. Passages consisted of four separate African geography reading selections, with two passages focusing on general African geography and two passages focusing on Egypt-specific geography. Students had prior exposure to the chapters in the textbook. The experimental conditions for the study consisted of a communal learning context and an individual learning context. In the communal learning context, there were three groups of three students, with one male and two females or one female and two males in each group. Students sat in groups of three with their desks placed in a circle in the middle of the classroom, and they were given the geography selection, paper, and pencil to complete the task together. Before completing the task, the communal learning groups were read a prompt that encouraged them to help each other learn the material. In the individual learning context, nine students were placed at individual desks with the desks in rows facing the front of the classroom. The individual learning context had a similar gender distribution – six males or three females or the opposite. Each student received a set of materials and was read a prompt that encouraged them to work independently without help from others.

The study consisted of two experimental trials held one day a week for two weeks. On each day, fourth and fifth grade students were randomly assigned to either the communal or the

individual learning context. There were 36 students in the communal group and 33 students in the individual learning group, with gender and grade equally distributed to each group. For each trial, four experimental sessions were conducted with both learning conditions – communal and individual – with two sessions in the morning and two sessions in the afternoon. Once students were in their assigned learning context, students were instructed to read, study, and retain the information from the geography lessons. The text assignments for the four sessions across the two weeks were fully counterbalanced, which allowed for use as a repeated measure. To minimize the Hawthorne effect, experimenters told the students that their participation in the study would support their learning. At the end of the learning sessions, students were given a 10-minute quiz, and at the end of the third week, students were administered an 18-question comprehensive exam. The study ended with a 20-minute unit examination. The examination items required the students to provide definitions and short answers to questions about the lessons. The questions were taken from the teacher’s edition. Correct answers received a score of one and incorrect answers received a score of zero (Boykin, et al., 2004).

Boykin, et al. (2004) used a 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures for trials to examine the effects of trials (week 1 or week 2), gender (male or female), grade (fourth or fifth), and learning context (communal and individual) on weekly quiz performance. A significant main effect was found for trials: student performance increased from trial 1 to trial 2 under the communal learning condition. A significant main effect also was found for learning context: students in the communal learning context performed better than students in the individual learning context. Thus, this study demonstrated positive academic outcomes for African American students when they were engaged in communal learning.

A second study conducted by Parsons, Travis, and Simpson (2005) investigated how cultural contexts influenced science learning. They examined eighth grade students’ self-

reported instructional preferences in relation to Black Cultural Ethos (BCE) and investigated how BCE influenced science achievement when the preferences were congruent with the instructional context. Black Cultural Ethos (BCE) consists of several dimensions of West African beliefs, values, and traditions that describe the ways Black people perceive, interpret, and interact with the world. For this study, three dimensions of BCE were used: communalism, verve, and movement. (The same characteristics were used in previous research.)

Parsons, et al. (2005) used a multi-case study research design. Two eighth grade classrooms were the focus for the case study with two female science teachers. One science teacher was Euro-American, graduated from a predominately White southeastern university, and had completed 11 years of teaching. The other science teacher was African American who had graduated from a predominately White southeastern university who had completed 20 years of teaching experience.

The context for the study was an urban school district in the southeastern United States with 80 elementary, 27 middle, and 16 high schools, which served 26% American Indian, 4.2% Asian, 6.5% Hispanic, 26.6% African American, 60% Euro-American, and 2.5% Multi-racial populations in 2002-03. The school selected for the study had a large enrollment of African American students from low-income backgrounds. For 2002-03, 45% of the participating school student population was classified as Euro-American and 40% as African American, with 37% of the student eligible for free/reduced priced lunch.

Parsons, et al. (2005) collected numerous forms of data to determine their preferred learning contexts and how they were related to science achievement. Observations were conducted for each classroom at least two days per weeks, the instruction was videotaped, and field notes were taken. The teachers were provided with lesson plans and summaries for the science lessons, and they participated in three 50-minute semi-structured interviews about their

instruction. The students participated in pre and posttests comprised of publicly released multiple-choice and open-ended items. These test questions were read aloud because of the varied literacy development of the students.

The Preference Questionnaire was administered to all students to elicit their preferred instructional strategies and contexts. The strategies consisted of visibly inactive and visibly active methods of instruction. Four students, two African American and two Euro-American, were randomly selected and interviewed six months after the questionnaire to assess the reliability and validity of their initial responses. Three out of the four interview responses directly aligned to the questionnaire's responses.

The students also took pre and post classroom assessments on force and electricity. In classroom A, 18 students (8 African American and 10 Euro-American) were taught the concept of force for eight days and electricity for five days. The pre and posttests contained the same items - seven questions on force and three questions on electricity. In classroom B, 22 students (12 African American and 10 Euro-American) were taught the concept of force for 11 days and electricity for five days and took the same pre and posttest on force and electricity.

For the intervention, the teachers read a short article on Black Cultural Ethos (BCE), and they discussed lesson plans developed by the researcher that incorporated BCE and the implementation of BCE lesson plans. The researchers structured the BCE lesson plans so several activities occurred simultaneously (verve), students moved around the room (movement), and the group work was a requisite to solving problems (communalism). The researcher encouraged the teachers to allow students to interact freely while completing the tasks.

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were completed. The qualitative analysis consisted of two independent interpreters' review of semi-structured interviews in which teachers viewed video clips of their teaching and responded to a set of questions. The

interpreters evaluated the teachers' and students' inactivity and activity in the lesson and found that, out of 168 interpretative instances, only five disagreements were evident. For the quantitative analyses, Parsons, et al. (2005) examined the congruency between students' self-reported preferences with respect to verve, communalism, and movement, and the context incorporating BCE and the context not incorporating BCE. For students' pre and post test scores, the researchers calculated and noted the change in percentage points and rated the quality of change as good, average, poor, or no improvement in relation to the instructional contexts. When reviewing students' congruency scores, score change, and the instructional context, the researchers looked at frequencies and patterns.

Parsons, et al. (2005) found that in the BCE incorporated instructional context, 46% of the students had average to good improvement. As students' preferences became less congruent with BCE, the students' scores showed less improvement in the BCE context. These results suggested that students' preferences for a BCE instructional context and the nature of the instructional context with respect to BCE influences achievement. As for differences based on race, there were no significant differences. African American and Euro-American scores were similar with regard to student preferences for BCE and the instructional context. Thus, Black Cultural Ethos congruent instruction influences the academic achievement of African American and Euro-American students. No racial differences were observed.

Summary of Culture and Pedagogy

Research on the impact of culture on cognition has revealed that culturally relevant teaching practices can support African American students' academic success, maintenance of their cultural identity, and critical consciousness about the society as a whole (Howard, 2001a; Ladson-Billings, 1990). In addition, the impact of culture on African American students' preferred learning contexts has shown that culture influences academic and social achievement

and may influence students' pursuit of, rather than rejection of, academic achievement (Ellison, et al., 2005; Howard, 2002; Marrayshow, et al., 2005). Additionally, culture and pedagogy can influence actual achievement outcomes (Boykin, et al., 2004; Parsons, et al., 2005). Most of the empirical research reviewed in this section has sought to minimize cultural discontinuity in order to investigate culturally relevant pedagogy's effect on motivation and achievement. However, qualitative methodologies are still needed to understand how African American adolescents perceive their learning, instruction, and relationships through cultural contexts.

Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement goal theory is concerned with how students perceive school and learning and how they define success and achievement (Kaplan & Maehr, 2000). Goals fall into two categories: (a) "learning goals, in which learners seek to increase their competence, to understand or master new skills and (b) performance goals, in which learners seek to gain favorable judgments of their competence or to avoid negative judgments of their competence" (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040). Dweck (1986) pointed out that student goals (i.e., learning or performance) promote adaptive or maladaptive motivational processes: whether they seek or avoid challenges, whether they persist or withdraw in the face of difficulty, and whether they apply skills effectively. But she also pointed out that students' theories of intelligence predict the goals they choose (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Based on this theory, she proposed two theories of intelligence: (a) incremental, and (b) entity. Some students favor an incremental theory of intelligence: they believe that intelligence is developed through learning and can be increased through effort; other students favor an entity theory of intelligence. They believe that intelligence is a fixed trait that cannot change. Dweck (2000) noted that theories of intelligence do not only predict students' goal choices, but they also cause students to focus on performance or learning goals, and they predict differences in achievement. Students who have an entity

theory of intelligence often have a performance goal orientation, which is to demonstrate competence or to avoid demonstrating incompetence. Students who have an incremental theory of intelligence have a learning goal orientation, which is to increase competence and to seek challenge. Dweck noted that a student's theory of intelligence and goal orientation will determine how the student responds to challenge and failure. Dweck (1986, 2000) highlighted that when students with an entity theory of intelligence/performance goal orientation fail, they seek challenge and persist in the face of failure if they have high confidence, but if they have low confidence, then they retreat from the challenge and do not persist in the midst of failure. However, if students with an incremental theory of intelligence/learning goal orientation fail, they persist in the face of failure looking for alternatives to learning regardless of whether their confidence is high or low. These students demonstrate mastery (i.e., learning) oriented behavior instead of helplessness at point of difficulty.

Therefore, goal orientation is influenced by two theories of intelligence: entity and incremental (Dweck, 1986, 2000), and students' moving from sixth to seventh grade with a fixed (entity) mindset do not perform as well as students with a growth (incremental) mindset. At point of difficulty, students with a fixed mindset blame their intelligence and do not employ problem solving strategies. However, students with a growth (incremental) mindset see challenge as an opportunity and maintain engagement and effort at point of difficulty. Theories of intelligence predict achievement goals, and achievement goals will affect how students respond to the achievement setting of the classroom.

Achievement Goals and the Classroom. Achievement goal behaviors are purposeful, intentional, and directed toward the accomplishment of goals in relation to the classroom environment (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). According to Schunk and Meece (1992), students' perceptions of the classroom and school affect their orientation toward learning, i.e., the goals or

the learning behaviors they decide to pursue, and these will influence the different cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns they exhibit. Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) pointed out that classroom and teacher goal structures influence students' achievement goals. Dweck (1986) stated that the messages communicated from classrooms and teachers influence the development of adaptive or maladaptive motivational patterns. Ames (1992) pointed out that classroom structures emphasize certain achievement goals, and, consequently, these achievement goals produce different motivational patterns.

For example, students who adopt learning goals know when they understand content, and they know when they do not understand content (Middleton & Midgley, 1997). They also employ strategies such as paraphrasing and summarizing (Ames, 1992), and they positively accept and reasonably justify an occasional failure with adaptive behaviors such as studying more, preparing in advance, or seeking additional support. The research on students who adopt performance goals is less consistent. Students with performance goals often memorize information, use rote-rehearsal strategies to study, and do not employ strategies for deeper understanding (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992), but research suggests that students with performance goals also demonstrate effort with study skills, which supports their desire to outperform others (Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996). Covington (2000) noted that from a self-protective point of view, students with performance approach or avoidance goals strive to minimize fears of incompetency and to avoid failure.

In addition, Covington (2000) pointed out that students' pursuit of social goals can help support school achievement. He noted that the pursuit of social goals such as being a friend and being responsible are important to children. Wentzel (1994) added that the pursuit of social goals is related to students being liked and respected by peers and noted that teachers who are liked by students treat their ideas with respect, provide support, time, materials, positive

feedback, and willingly engage in these behaviors on a frequent basis. In addition, she pointed out that the perceptions of teacher support are positively related to instructional techniques associated with mastery learning. Covington also noted that the quality of student/teacher relations depends not only on personal factors but on the instructional climate of the class.

To motivate students and to promote adaptive learning behaviors, Ames (1992) recommended the development of a learning (mastery) goal structure for classrooms. A learning (mastery) goal structure is created by (a) assigning challenging and meaningful work, (b) recognizing and rewarding improvement, and (c) providing opportunities for choice and autonomy in the classroom. A performance goal structured classroom emphasizes high test scores without the emphasis on the learning strategies needed to get high scores.

Studies investigating achievement goal theory. Ames and Archer (1988) investigated how specific motivational patterns were related to mastery and performance goals. They presented the following three questions: (a) Do learning and performance goal constructs differentiate students' perceptions of their classroom experiences? (b) How are the students' perceptions of the classroom goals related to their task choices, attitudes, and beliefs about the causes of success and failure?, and (c) How do students' perceptions of classroom goals relate to their selection and use of effective learning strategies? Ames and Archer hypothesized that students' perceptions of classroom goals would be related to how they approached and responded to learning tasks.

Ames and Archer (1988) recruited 176 students in grades 8-11 who attended a junior high/high school for academically advanced students to participate in the study. Four to six students were randomly selected from each English, math, science, and social studies class offered during the spring semester, for a total of 176 students. The students answered questions about classroom goals and learning strategies for the class (i.e., English, math, science, or social

studies). A questionnaire was administered to assess classroom goal orientation with the subscales of mastery and performance. Fifteen items from the Learning and Study Strategy Inventory were administered, and two questions were used to assess students' preferences for challenging versus easy tasks. One question was administered to assess students' attitudes toward their class; two sets of attribution questions related to when they did well and not so well in class; and one question rated their ability in the assessed subject. All the questions were answered using a 5-point Likert scale.

Ames and Archer (1988) found that mastery and performance goals provided a means for understanding students' perceptions of the classroom-learning environment. When students perceived their classroom as emphasizing learning (mastery) goals, they reported that they were more likely to use effective learning strategies, prefer challenging tasks, and believe effort and success are related. However, Ames and Archer noted that changing the goal structure of the classroom might not help students who lack certain skills and strategies or students who believe that they are not able.

Friedel, Marachi, and Midgley (2002) investigated how the social context of the classroom affected students' achievement goals. They wanted to know "how...student perceptions of teacher support, enthusiasm, and care taken not to embarrass students related to students' maladaptive classroom behaviors, and (whether) classroom goals have a different relation to students' maladaptive behaviors when student perceptions of teacher characteristics are taken into account" (p. 2). Friedel, Marachi, and Midgley hypothesized that the relationship between performance goals and maladaptive behaviors is dependent on the degree to which the teacher is careful not to embarrass students when they have difficulty doing the work.

The researchers used data from one point in a two-year longitudinal study involving 968 students from four economically and ethnically diverse school districts in the Midwest. The

sample was 51% female and 49% male. Ethnic makeup was 61% White, 29% African American, and 10% other ethnic backgrounds. A survey was administered to assess students' perceptions of classroom goals as well as students' perceptions of teacher characteristics and self-reported academic behaviors. All items were on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 = "Very true" and 1 = "Not true at all." The teacher support items assessed how much students felt their teachers could be counted on for help and emotional support. The achievement goal measure was adapted from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales, which assessed students' perceptions of classroom goals, and three other scales from the PALS assessed the following student outcomes: avoiding help seeking (not asking for help in math), projective coping scale (reason for difficulty with math), and disruptive behavior (tendency to disturb the math lesson). Correlations and hierarchical regressions were used to assess the relations between student perceptions of classroom goals and teacher behaviors and student outcomes (avoiding help seeking, projective coping, and disruptive behavior).

Friedel, Marachi, and Midgley (2002) found that when students perceive that their teachers cared and did not embarrass them, they reported lower levels of maladaptive behaviors. In addition, students' perceptions of teachers' care and effort not to embarrass them moderated the relation between learning (mastery) goal perceptions and the reason they cited for difficulty with math (projective coping) and between performance approach goal perceptions and the avoidance of help-seeking. Students' perceptions of teacher care were predictors of student outcomes; and learning goal perceptions and teacher affective characteristics were correlated.

Researchers (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986) have found that teachers who communicate a learning (mastery) goal structure (e.g., doing school work with the purpose of understanding, developing skills, and promoting self-evaluation of learning) create an environment for motivation and engagement. Patrick and Ryan (2008) investigated the practices middle school

students attend to when they perceive learning (mastery) goals. They wanted to identify and provide examples of teachers' practices that students perceived as evidence of a learning goal structure. One hundred and ninety-seven students in grades six-through-eight (57% female, and 43% male; 94% White, 4% Hispanic, and 1% African American; 85 sixth graders, 69 seventh graders, and 43 eighth graders) from a rural middle school in the Midwest participated in the study.

Patrick and Ryan (2008) used the teacher mastery goals subscale from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (Midgley, et al., 2000). The format for all items was a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from one (not true) to five (very true). After the students responded to a survey item, they were asked to write an explanation for their responses, explaining why they circled the chosen response, and to provide examples of what the teacher does or says to influence a student's response. One teacher taught four seventh-grade classes, one teacher taught four eighth-grade classes, and three teachers taught five sixth-grade classes. All teachers held master's degrees and were White; two were female and three were males; and each had 8 to 23 years of experience. Descriptive statistics and an analysis of variance were used to analyze the quantitative data. Deductive and inductive coding were used for qualitative data using categories from the TARGET framework (task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation, and time), and two categories of social interactions: pedagogical (involving teaching content) and affective (involving affect, support, respect). Other codes were teacher says, cannot tell, and no code.

The results of the study were quantitative and qualitative. An analysis of variance indicated that the learning (mastery) goal structure differed significantly among thirteen classes. The Tukey post hoc tests showed that classes with the same teacher were perceived differently with 70% of variance at the within class level. For the qualitative results, students who had a learning (mastery) classroom goal structure reported that the following teacher practices were

important: attending to the affective characteristics (27%), teacher-student pedagogical interactions (24.8%), and teacher recognition of effort and achievement (19.7%). When students reported that their teacher did not care, yelled, did not reteach, and/or rushed through content, they perceived their teachers' practices as low in learning (mastery) goals in their classroom. Therefore, affective and pedagogical practices influenced students' perceptions of classroom learning (mastery) goals. Patrick and Ryan (2008) recommended expanding research on how students identify learning (mastery) goal structure to help adolescents develop academic skills and motivation.

Achievement goal theory and African American students. Freeman, Gutman, and Midgley (2002) conducted a study to see if there were mean differences in goals by race. They used the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey to collect data from African American and White students. Data were collected from students in grades 5-9 for six years. Four districts in southeastern Michigan were selected to participate and, in three of the four districts, over 50% of the students were African American. The investigation of mean difference by race revealed that African American students selected mastery goals and extrinsic goals significantly more than White students. African American students were more likely to state that they engaged in school work for the purpose of learning. They also reported that they were more likely to engage in work for the purpose of getting good grades or a reward. African American students were also more likely to perceive their classroom as promoting mastery and extrinsic goals than White students. These mean differences refer to the "attitude-achievement paradox" (Mickelson, 1990): African American students often see their self-concept of ability, expectancy of success, and perceptions of competence as equal to White students or higher. However, their positive beliefs are not evident in academic achievement. The question that remains is why the adoption

of mastery goals (e.g., a positive motivational characteristic) does not lead to higher achievement for African American students (Freeman, et al., 2002).

Freeman (2002) examined the achievement goals African American middle school students perceived and pursued in their learning context using interviews and observations. The study consisted of 24 African American students, fourteen boys and 10 girls. Fifteen students had cumulative GPAs between 2.0 and 3.0; four students had GPAs greater than 3.0; and five students had GPAs below 2.0. Interviews were the primary method for data collection. Participant observations were also completed weekly four months prior to the interviews to establish rapport with teachers and students and to become familiar with the school setting. The primary aim of the interviews was to assess students' personal achievement goals and their perceptions of teacher practices.

Freeman (2002) found students held multiple goals (personal mastery, performance, and extrinsic). Only the four high achieving students mentioned performance goals with a number of students mentioning that they engaged in learning for the sake of learning. Students' perceptions of the classroom in this study revealed that they received low-level work and often were preparing for standardized tests, and they were not given a choice with the tasks. At the end of this study, additional research was recommended to determine other variables that impact the performance of African American students, such as the relationship with the teacher. Additionally, studies on African American students' goal orientations and perceptions of classroom goals are also needed because motivational processes will differ based on student backgrounds and classroom experiences.

African Americans and motivation. Graham (1994) reviewed approximately 140 studies on African American students' motivation, including achievement goal theory, attribution theory, and self-perception theory. Three propositions about African American students'

motivation emerged from this review. First, African Americans lack the personality traits (achievement motive, self-efficacy) needed for high-achievement. Second, African American students do not they believe they control the outcome of their achievement, which according to many researchers (e.g., Weiner, Rotter), is an essential belief for high-achievement, and third, African Americans have negative self-concepts of their ability and negative self-perceptions about their competence. Not one of the propositions was supported by this literature review. Graham noted that her review of the literature was disappointing because it highlighted the motivational deficits of African American without addressing the “why” or “why not” of African American motivational patterns of persistence, choice, and engagement. She also pointed out that motivational research on African American students is overly reliant on a comparative racial approach, which consists of comparing African American and White students on motivational constructs. Graham added that motivational research has not considered within-group differences and recommended that future investigations do so.

Summary for Achievement Goal Theory

While there is research on the motivational characteristics of African American students, there is no consensus on the goal orientation of these students (Freeman, et al., 2002), which is grounds for additional research on how student perceptions mediate achievement motivation. Understanding African American students’ learning patterns could lend some insight on how they approach achievement related contexts such as school. In addition, understanding African American students’ learning patterns could enhance teachers’ capacity to get students to “choose” academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The theory of pedagogical content knowledge and research in this area can be used as a basis to understand how students experience instruction intellectually and socially. Discussions

of culturally relevant pedagogy and the Afro-cultural framework deepen our understanding of how culture and cognition must work together to advance African American achievement. Achievement goal theory research underscores a need for additional research on African American adolescents' motivational characteristics and academic self-regulation in relation to actual achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Research on the academic performance of African American students offers numerous explanations for African American students' underachievement (Ferguson, 2007; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gamoran, 2001; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Orr, 2003), but the clientele most affected by the achievement debate has not been given voice. Wiggan (2007) stated that additional research on African American student achievement must emerge through the Black students' voice but only a handful of studies have captured African American adolescents' perceptions of teaching and learning. The purpose of this study was to understand the meanings African American adolescents assign to school-level achievement within the context of culturally diverse urban schools. A review of the literature suggested that the theories related to pedagogy, culture, and motivation (achievement goal theory) might help explain African American students' perceptions of their learning goals, and instructional and relational experiences. As a result, the following questions guided the study:

1. How do African American adolescents perceive their learning?
2. How do African American adolescents perceive instructional factors?
3. How do African American adolescents perceive relational factors?

Research Design

The researcher used a multiple-case study design, selecting cases to show different perspectives on African American adolescents' achievement. As suggested by Gall, et al. (2007), case study design is an emergent process that evolves throughout the study. The researcher used the Maxwell (2005) model of case study design, and he proposed an interactive model for qualitative research. The model consisted of five components: the research purposes,

conceptual framework, research questions, methods, and trustworthiness. Each component forms an integrated and interacting whole as shown in Figure 1.

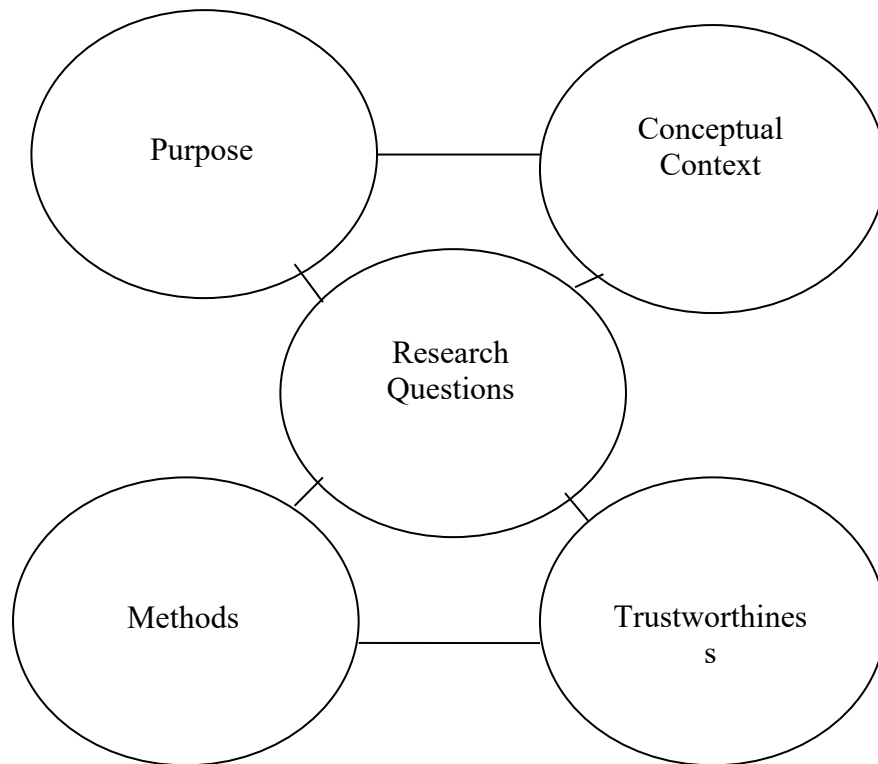


Figure 1. An interactive approach to qualitative research. This model forms an integrated and interacting whole with each component. From *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* by Joseph A. Maxwell (2005).

In Maxwell's model, the research purposes are used to describe the problem and why the study is needed. The conceptual context outlines what the researcher thinks is happening with the subjects. The research questions define what the researcher wants to learn about each case. The methods identify ways to collect and generate understanding of data, answer the research questions, advance the purposes of the study, and verify findings that support or challenge what the researcher thinks is going on with the students in the study. According to Maxwell, the interactive model of qualitative research design demonstrates the interaction and interconnection

between research components. The researcher's thought processes and actions consistently moved through these components throughout the study.

Methods

Based on the methodological components outlined by Maxwell (2005), the researcher used the following methods to guide the research process: the researcher's relationship to the study, sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The researcher was an instrument in the data collection process, so she interacted closely with the data. A stratified purposive sample of eighth grade African American students was selected based on subgroups of high, average, and low achievement. To support trustworthiness in the findings, the researcher triangulated data methods. Multiple methods (interview, focus groups, self-report) and instruments (semi-structured questions, scenarios, survey) were used to collect data. Data analysis consisted of organizing the data, coding, categorizing, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that an interactive, cyclical process helps to make sense of the data. The strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used to increase trustworthiness during data collection and analysis.

Research Relationship

As suggested by Maxwell (2005), the researcher thought about the type of relationship she wanted to have with the participants and how to establish the relationship. Since the researcher is a proponent of the post positivist paradigm, she sought to maintain objectivity with her participants (Hatch, 2002). The relationship with the participants was initiated using semi-formal approaches such as allowing principals to recommend participants based on achievement categories, and using the same instrumentation, and recording procedures for all participants. As a human instrument, the researcher was able to profit from the experience of collecting data from several students, refining her capacity to serve as a data collection tool within in each case.

Researcher as an instrument. In a qualitative study, one of the instruments in the study is the researcher. As described above, she was interested in capturing the perspectives of the participants to approximate their pedagogical experiences, using the data collection techniques of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a survey to understand their views. According to Krefting (1999), the authority of the researcher strengthens the truth value of qualitative research findings. The researcher, who is African American, identified with the participants due to racial similarity. She knew the setting because she was born and raised in the community in which the study took place and attended the schools in the district. In addition, she is currently a principal of a K-8 school in the district and having worked with eighth grade students for five years, has become familiar with adolescent development. As a participant in the study, the researcher also has a strong interest in research and theory. This was a strength as well as a weakness for this qualitative study, since she had to suspend theoretical and experiential knowledge about African American adolescents in an effort to hear the participants' voices and to interpret findings. While a novice in the application of qualitative methodology, she had experience with particular components. She practiced coding and data analysis during a program evaluation class and has used data displays at work to collect and analyze qualitative data.

Bias was minimized during the study through ongoing reflection and the use of a reflexivity journal during the data collection process. The journal contained notes about the study's logistics, methods used, and personal reflections. The logistic log contained the dates participants were recruited and data were collected. The methods log described changes in the data collection procedures. One major methodological change was the elimination of video recording for the focus groups. Audio and video recordings were used for the first focus group but only audio recordings were employed for the other two focus groups because of the negative effect video recording appeared to have on the participants' affect and physical interactions. A

personal diary contained thoughts about establishing rapport, frustrations with background noise in meeting locations (e.g., recording during after school announcements), and thoughts about students' achievement differences between each school.

Access, Permissions, and Ethics. Permission was sought to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Connecticut State University and approval was received in April 2009 (see Appendix D for IRB application). The informed consent letters communicated the purpose of the research, the data to be collected, confidentiality procedures, and the fact that a \$50 gift card was offered to each interviewee as thanks for his or her participation. The parent of each participant received the informed consent letter. Following parental consent and receipt of student assent, dates, times, and meeting locations were negotiated for participation. Ethical guidelines were followed to design, conduct, analyze, and report the findings of the study. To support ethical conduct and judgments, the research proposal and IRB application clearly defined the purpose of the study, participant selection criteria, the risks and benefits of the study for the participants, procedures to protect student participants, confidentiality, and informed consent procedures. These guidelines were followed before the data collection process began in order to minimize possible harm to student participants.

The Superintendent of the urban school district in which the study was conducted granted permission to contact principals and to invite students to participate in the study in May 2009. Permission was received to conduct the study as a professional growth activity that would increase the researcher's capacity as an instructional leader. Five principals were contacted by email and with an in-person follow up. During the month of May 2009, three principals agreed to distribute consent letters to 12 African American students at their schools. Two principals initially contacted did not respond to the email or to the face-to-face request. During the month of July, three additional principals were contacted, and they agreed to distribute letters to their

students attending summer school at their schools. Two of these principals who had doctorates understood the researcher's challenge and agreed to support the study. From this effort, three additional students were recruited. During the month of October, one additional principal distributed informed consent letters to African American students in order to recruit those who met the criteria of the research. The final principal helped to recruit the additional participants needed for the study. Each principal assisted as a professional courtesy. The researcher has acknowledged their assistance with a token of appreciation and a written thank you.

From May to October 2009, a total of 18 informed consent letters were collected. Each parent signed an informed consent form and each student signed an assent form, agreeing to participate in the study. Sixteen consent letters were returned directly to the principals, and two permissions were picked up from the participants' homes. Upon receiving consent, student eligibility was determined based on the grade level and achievement criteria. Fourteen students were eligible to participate. Two students were not eligible because they were in seventh grade, and two parents withdrew their consent for personal reasons.

During the data collection process, additional ethical strategies were used to minimize risk to student participants. Deontological, relational, and ecological ethics were used during data collection. Deontological ethics involve the application of absolute values, such as honesty, fairness, and respect (Gall, et al., 2007). Deontological ethics were practiced when each parent was contacted to discuss the study and to answer questions. The researcher also engaged in deontological ethics when she read the informed consent to the student participants before each interview, survey administration, and focus group. Each student knew that he or she could discontinue the data collection process or a portion of the process at any time.

Relational ethics involves the application of a caring attitude for others (Gall, et al., 2007). Care was demonstrated through informal conversation about high school and the student's

personal interests, by attending to the student's human needs such as offering water, the use of facilities, and the opportunity to eat, if needed. At the end of the data collection process, a copy of the interview transcript was provided, and the researcher told the families that she could be contacted if educational assistance was needed during high school. For example, the researcher told a parent to contact her if she had questions about transferring her son to a technical high school because he was interested in auto repair and maintenance.

Ecological ethics were also implemented. Ecological ethics consists of "researchers judging the morality of their actions and decisions in terms of the participants' culture and the larger social system of which they are part" (Gall, et al., 2007, p. 460). The student participants, all African Americans, were considered as members of a larger culture and social system. The researcher reflected on the status of African American students within the school setting, society at-large, and within the national achievement debate. She also realized that each student might identify with the schooling process a little differently due to race, and limited voice within the classroom, school, and society as a whole. As a race, African Americans have been disenfranchised and marginalized in the society (Nieto, 1994; Waxman & Huang, 1997). With the ecological perspective in mind, data were collected after school to minimize the loss of class time, which could do harm in the form of grading or missed learning. A choice was offered to each participant to complete the survey or the interview first to give the student power in the data collection process.

Sampling

According to Maxwell (2005), the researcher must choose what will be studied, who will participate, and where and when the study will take place. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that the researcher cannot "study everyone everywhere doing everything" (p. 37). They contend

that sampling assists with framing the collection of data by identifying from whom and where the data will be collected.

The Setting. The setting for the study was an urban school district in the northeast. The 12 students who participated in the study came from four different schools identified by the letters A through D in Tables 2-4. One student attended School A, four students attended school B, four students attended school C, and three students attended school D. Three out of the four schools (A, B, and D) were traditional K-8 schools. School C was a K-8 magnet school. The researcher collected data about African American students' reading and mathematics achievement, discipline data for each school, and information about reading and mathematics instruction for the district. The researcher's description of achievement, conduct, and instruction served as an index of transferability to allow readers to assess how transferable findings are to populations of interest (Krefting, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As shown in Tables 1 and 2, reading and mathematics achievement scores were provided, respectively. Table 3 shows discipline data from each of the schools.

Table 1

Reading Performance Percentile Scores for 8th Grade African American Students in Sample Schools 2008-09

| School | Below Basic | Basic | Proficient | Goal | Advanced |
|--------|-------------|-------|------------|------|----------|
| A | 42.6 | 25.9 | 9.3 | 22.2 | 0.0 |
| B | 41.7 | 14.6 | 12.5 | 31.3 | 0.0 |
| C | 0.0 | 14.3 | 9.5 | 66.7 | 9.5 |
| D | 29.4 | 23.5 | 11.7 | 17.6 | 0.0 |

Note. Adapted from Connecticut State Department of Education (2009)
<http://www.ctreports.com>

Table 2

Mathematics Performance Percentile Scores for 8th Grade African American Students in Sample Schools 2008-09

| School | Below Basic | Basic | Proficient | Goal | Advanced |
|--------|-------------|-------|------------|------|----------|
| A | 20.8 | 32.1 | 26.4 | 20.8 | 0.0 |
| B | 22.4 | 28.6 | 22.4 | 22.4 | 24.5 |
| C | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 81.0 | 19.0 |
| D | 29.4 | 17.6 | 17.6 | 11.7 | 0.0 |

Note. Adapted from Connecticut State Department of Education (2009)
<http://www.ctreports.com>

Table 3

The Number of Disciplinary Offenses for Sample Schools for 2006-07

| Schools | Discipline Categories | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|----------|----------------------------------|
| | School Policy Violations | Fighting | Physical/Verbal Confrontation |
| A | 459 | 117 | 34 |
| B | 456 | 64 | 124 |
| C | 5 | 0 | 2 |
| D | 26 | 32 | 6 |

Note. Adapted from the Connecticut Department of Education
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/site/default.asp>

The researcher obtained data on reading and mathematics instruction for each school from the principal. Forty-two minutes of reading and mathematics instruction is provided to eighth grade students daily. Separate reading and Language Arts classes are provided at each school. Students performing at the basic or below basic reading levels receive supplemental reading instruction in school B. Mathematics instruction is provided to students homogeneously grouped by ability level in all the schools except school C. Mathematics courses are leveled as: general mathematics, pre-Algebra, and Algebra, and the students in schools A, B, and D are placed in these courses based their mathematics ability level. All eighth-grade students at school C received high school level Algebra instruction.

Stratified Purposive Sample. Twelve cases were purposively selected to gather a deeper understanding of the multiple perceptions of African American adolescents. Stratified purposive sampling was used to select individuals at defined points of variation. For the purpose of this study, four high-achieving, four average-achieving, and four low-achieving eighth grade African American adolescents were selected. Student ages ranged from 12 to 14. Five girls and seven boys participated in the study.

The researcher defined student achievement using results from the Connecticut Mastery Test (2009). High-achieving students scored at goal or advanced on one or both of the reading and mathematics sections. Average-achieving students scored at the proficient or goal levels on one or both of the reading and mathematics sections. One average-achieving student scored proficient on the reading and at the basic level on mathematics. All the low-achieving students scored below basic on the reading and mathematics sections of the Connecticut Mastery Test. Table 4 provides a description of each performance level.

Table 4

Connecticut Mastery Test Performance Descriptors for Grade Eight Reading and Mathematics

| Level | Reading Description | Mathematics Description |
|-------------|--|--|
| Advanced | Eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrate an <i>exceptional</i> ability to read and respond to a variety of texts and <i>without</i> assistance can construct meaning. | Generally, eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrated <i>exceptional</i> knowledge of grade-level content. Students provide solutions to math problems that are <i>well-organized</i> that include clear and concise explanations. |
| Goal | Eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrate a <i>consistent</i> ability to read and respond to a variety of texts and require <i>minimal</i> assistance to construct meaning. | Generally, eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrated <i>extensive</i> knowledge of grade-level content. Students provide solutions to math problems that are <i>organized</i> and include clear and concise explanations. |
| Proficient | Eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrate an <i>adequate</i> ability to read and respond to a variety of texts and require <i>some</i> assistance to complete reading tasks and to construct meaning. | Generally, eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrated <i>adequate</i> knowledge of grade-level content. Students provide solutions to math problems that are <i>adequate and</i> include <i>sufficient</i> explanations. |
| Basic | Eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrate a <i>limited</i> ability to read and respond to a variety of texts and <i>require</i> assistance to complete reading tasks and to construct meaning. | Generally, eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrated <i>partially developed</i> knowledge of grade-level content. Students provide solutions to math problems that are <i>unorganized</i> include <i>minimal</i> explanations. |
| Below Basic | Eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrate a <i>very limited</i> ability to read and respond to a variety of texts and <i>require significant</i> assistance to complete reading tasks, and to construct meaning. | Generally, eighth-grade students who perform at this level demonstrated <i>limited</i> knowledge of grade-level content. Students provide solutions to math problems that are <i>inadequate</i> and <i>lack</i> explanations. |

Note. Adapted from the Connecticut Mastery Test Interpretative Guide 2009.

Data Collection

Tables 5, 6, and 7 show the alignment between the research questions and the instrumentation used to guide data collection.

Table 5

Alignment of Research Question One to the Instrumentation

| Research Question 1: How do African American adolescents perceive their learning? | |
|---|--|
| Instrumentation | Subscales or Questions |
| Patterns of adaptive learning survey (PALS): | Subscales for personal achievement goal orientation scale: Mastery – Attention is focused on the task to demonstrate competence; Performance-approach – Attention is focused on self to demonstrate competence; and Performance-avoidance – Attention is focused self to avoid demonstration of incompetence. |
| Semi-structured interview questions: | Could you please describe what it means for you to do well in school? Could you describe a time you felt you did well on an assignment? What did you do well? Could you give me one example of how your learning has changed since you have been in middle school? How is your learning different from elementary school? Could you describe the steps you take to learn once you have entered the class? What do you do to stay focused on your school work? Can you explain how you prepare for your tests and what steps do you take to remember the information? Can you explain how you handle assignments that are difficult? What do you do when the work get hard? |
| Focus group questions: | Which student in the scenario is your learning most like? Which student is most like the students in your school and why? |

Note. Patterns of adaptive learning survey (PALS; Midgley, et al., 2000).

Table 6

Alignment of Research Question Two to the Instrumentation

| Research Question Two: How do African American adolescents perceive instructional factors? | |
|--|---|
| Instrumentation | Subscales or Questions |
| Patterns of adaptive learning survey (PALS): | Subscales for perceptions of teachers' goals scale: Teacher mastery – teacher emphasizes task engagement for learning; Teacher performance-approach – teacher emphasizes task engagement to demonstrate competence; and Teacher performance-avoidance – teacher emphasizes task engagement to avoid demonstration of incompetence. |
| Semi-structured interview questions: | What do your teachers do to help you learn? How do you learn best? Can you describe what type of teaching works best for you? What type of teaching does not work for you? Can you describe how often you receive homework, what kind of homework, and does homework help you to learn? Can you give me some examples of assignments that interest you and hold your attention? Can you share the most important things you have been taught in school? |
| Focus group questions: | Which teacher could help you learn to read the best? What teaching qualities do you like in your other teachers? |

Note. Patterns of adaptive learning survey (PALS; Midgley, et al., 2000).

Table 7

Alignment of Research Question Three to the Instrumentation

| Research Question Three: How do African American adolescents perceive relational factors? | |
|---|--|
| Instrumentation | Subscales or Questions |
| Patterns of adaptive learning survey (PALS): | Subscales for achievement-related perceptions, beliefs, and strategies scale: Academic press – teacher presses for understanding; Self-presentation of low-achievement – students’ preference to keep peers from knowing how well they are achieving. |
| Semi-structured interview questions: | Can you take a moment to think of your favorite teacher and describe what she/he did to become your favorite teacher? Can you describe what you think your teachers think of you as a student? Can you describe the behaviors students demonstrate in class? Do students behave differently in different classes? Can you think of one class and describe for me how you and the teacher work together? How does the teacher work with other students? How do you feel about how students and teachers work together in class? Can you give me an example of what types of conflict occurs in the class and how are they solved? What does fairness look like in your classroom? Can you explain how you feel about your relationships with your teachers and students? What happens in class or at school to make these feelings real? Can you share three important pieces of advice you would give to a brand-new teacher working with middle school students? |
| Focus group questions: | Which teacher in the math scenario is similar to your favorite teacher? What kind of relationship would you want with your teachers? |

Note. Patterns of adaptive learning survey (PALS; Midgley, et al., 2000).

Instrumentation. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended linking quantitative and qualitative data to make access and collection easier, to enrich the details of data analysis, and to confirm findings through triangulation. The researcher linked the use of quantitative data (i.e.,

Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales, demographic, academic, and achievement) and qualitative data (i.e., interview and focus group) for this study.

Patterns of adaptive learning scales (PALS). Three scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) were administered to students to measure the “relation between the learning environment and the students’ motivation, affect, and behavior” (Midgley, et al., 2000, p. 2). The three scales are (a) personal achievement goal orientations, (b) perceptions of teacher goals, and (c) perceptions of achievement-related beliefs, attitudes, and strategies. The subscales representing personal achievement goal orientations include (a) mastery – attention is focused on the task to demonstrate competence; (b) performance-approach – attention is focused on self to demonstrate competence; and (c) performance-avoidance – attention is focused on self to avoid demonstration of incompetence. The subscales representing perceptions of teacher goals include (a) teacher mastery – teacher emphasizes task engagement for learning; (b) teacher performance-approach – teacher emphasizes task engagement to demonstrate competence; and (c) teacher performance-avoidance – teacher emphasizes task engagement to avoid demonstration of incompetence. The subscales representing perceptions of achievement-related beliefs, attitudes and strategies include (a) academic press – teacher presses for understanding; and (b) self-presentation of low achievement – students’ preference to keep peers from knowing how well they are achieving.

A 5-point Likert scale was used to indicate each student’s response to each statement in a subscale. A total of 40 items were included in the survey, and they were mixed to measure a scale and subscale accurately. The items used in the study from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales appear in Appendix A.

The alpha coefficients were reported for each subscale: mastery goal orientation, .85; performance-approach orientation, .89; performance-avoid orientation, .74; teacher mastery goal,

.83; teacher performance-approach goal, .79; teacher performance-avoid goal, .71; academic press, .79; and self-presentation of low achievement, .78.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the 14 personal goal orientation items to examine the factor structure of the three subscales (mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance). Goodness of fit indices suggested that the model fits the data well (GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.95). Specifically, personal mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoid goals all loaded on different latent factors. Midgley, et. al, (2000) did not report the psychometric properties of the other two scales used in this study.

Semi-structured questions. The researcher used semi-structured questions to collect data from student participants. Twenty descriptive questions were asked to capture the participants' beliefs about learning, instruction, and relationships. The researcher asked descriptive questions in the categories of grand tour, mini tour, example, and experience. Grand tour questions opened up the interview and established rapport with the participant. Specific tour questions focused on the details of events within a particular experience. Mini tour questions narrowed the focus of a question. Example questions narrowed the focus of a question to a particular incident. The research questions were developed using taxonomy of ethnographic questions (Spradley, 1979) and were reviewed and revised using feedback from eighth grade African American students.

The content of the interview questions was related to the three research questions about learning, instruction, and relations. Six questions were asked about learning. The learning questions included the following concepts: what it meant to do well in school, a time that the student did well on an assignment, how the student learned had changed in middle school, the steps taken to learn in class, how the student prepared for tests, and how the student handled difficult assignments. Five questions were asked about instruction. The instructional question asked students to describe the following: how you learn best, what type of teaching is best, how

often homework is received, examples of assignments of interest, and the most important things learned in school. Eight questions were asked about relations. Some of the relational issues posed to students included the following: what your favorite teacher did to become your favorite, what your teachers think of you as a student, how you work with your teachers, and what advice you would give to a new middle school teacher. The validity of the questions was confirmed through the triangulation of data methods.

Focus group scenarios and questions. The researcher used focus group scenarios and questions to collect data from student participants. The scenarios and questions were developed with the assistance of a licensed professional counselor, who was also a professor at Western Connecticut State University. The scenarios were developed from the theoretical context of culturally relevant pedagogy and the research of Boykin, et al. (2005), Howard (2001b), and Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b). The scenarios were based on the themes of individualism, competition, communalism, and verve. Boykin, et al. (2005) used theme-based scenarios in several quantitative studies. The researcher decided to use similar theme-based scenarios as a qualitative tool for focus group interviews. The scenarios were developed around the concepts of learning, teaching, and relations. The learning scenarios were aligned to Boykin's research. The researcher used the qualitative descriptions from Howard and Ladson-Billings to craft the teaching and relational scenarios. Questions and probes were aligned to each scenario and to the research questions for the study. The focus group scenarios assisted with understanding students' preferences for learning, teaching, and relationships through the lens of mainstream and Afro-centric contexts. Validity and reliability of the focus group questions and scenarios were confirmed through the triangulation of methods. All scenarios and questions appear in Appendix C. Data from student focus group comments were transcribed and coded. When appropriate, codes were related to the theme-based scenarios of Boykin, et al. (2005).

Focus group moderator. The moderator for the focus groups had worked as a social worker in the public school system for over 21 years. He worked with adolescents both individually and in groups.

Documents. Information from eighth grade students' cumulative records was obtained from the schools. Students' Connecticut Mastery Test results, reading and mathematics grades at the end the year, and the number of years in the current school were obtained.

Methodological triangulation. Triangulation is collecting data from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods (Maxwell, 2005). Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple methods to study a phenomenon (Mathison, 1988). The researcher used methodological triangulation to ensure an accurate account of the information and to confirm findings. Mathison pointed out that triangulation is a technique which provides more and better data for the construction of meaningful propositions about a social phenomenon. She also stated that the researcher is responsible for making sense of research outcomes whether they converge, are inconsistent, or contradictory. According to Mathison, the value of triangulation lies in providing data for the researcher to create plausible explanations. The researcher used three methods to collect data from the students. Each student completed a survey, participated in an interview, and responded to questions while in a focus group. This information is located in Figure 2.

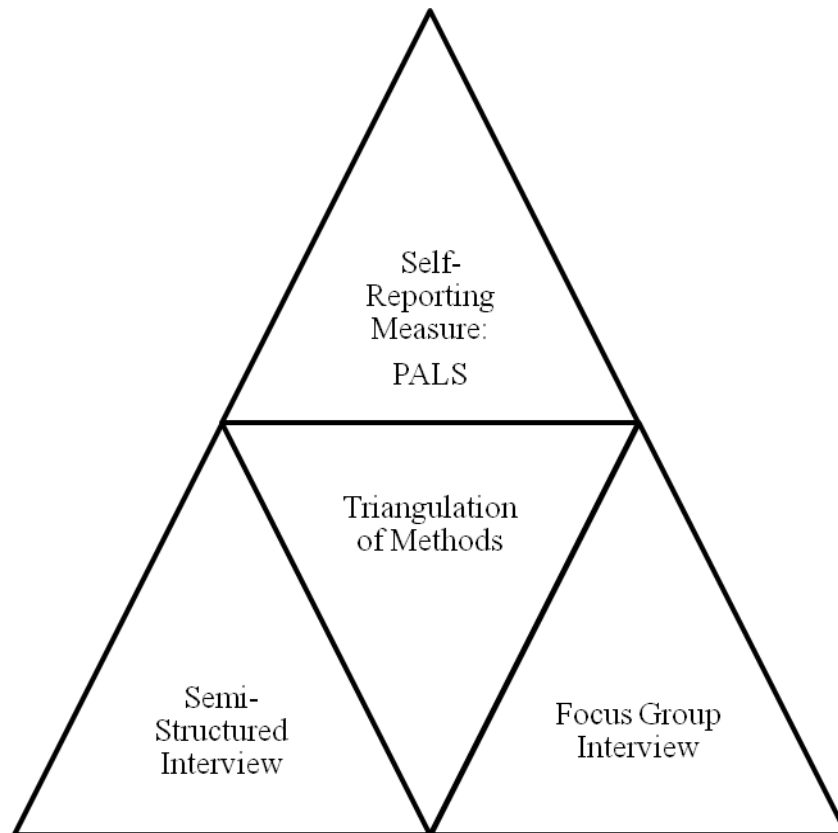


Figure 2. Triangulation of methods. Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods to study a phenomenon (Mathison, 1988).

Recording procedures. Creswell (2007) stated that the fundamental purpose of a protocol is to record information. The researcher recorded information using an interview protocol, focus group protocol, and a survey administration protocol. The researcher also recorded information using field notes, a reflectivity journal, and digital recordings. Krefting (1999) wrote that reporting the exact methods for gathering data assists with validating the consistency and neutrality in the study’s findings.

Survey administration protocol. The researcher used a quantitative instrument to collect data from the participants because “numbers and words are both needed if we are to understand the world” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 40). The statistics from the PALS assisted with understanding the meanings African American adolescents assign to school-level achievement

through the theoretical perspective of achievement goal theory. Students were presented with the opportunity to complete the survey or to complete the interview first. Nine students completed the survey before the interview, which was a matter of choice.

At the beginning of the survey administration, the researcher told each student that the survey was not a test, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the information collected would be kept confidential. The researcher asked the students to complete a cover sheet for the survey that asked for demographic data (i.e., gender, age, name of school, and the number of years in attendance at the school). The researcher reviewed the sample question at the beginning of the survey to introduce the use of a Likert scale and asked the student if she or he had questions. During the survey administration, the student participants read the survey independently and completed the 40-item survey in the presence of the researcher. They circled the Likert scale items with a pencil. The researcher remained present as the students completed the survey and observed the pace of completion. At the end of the survey administration, the researcher checked the students' survey to make certain a selection was made for each item.

Interview protocol. Gall, et al. (2007) stated that semi-structured interviews involve asking a series of structured questions that follow up with open-ended probing questions to gather additional information. The researcher used the interview process to collect data from the participants because “interviews uncover the meaning and structures the participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds” (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). The semi-structured interview assisted with understanding students' perceptions of the learning environment and their pedagogical experiences.

The researcher spoke informally to each participant before each interview to establish rapport. Most interviews were held in quiet areas away from distractions. The researcher then used a formal interview protocol to ensure consistency and neutrality in the data collection

process. Each interview began with an oral consent to participate in the study. The researcher read the consent to each participant. The consent was read to the participants and consisted of the purpose of the study, method of recording the interview, a review of confidentiality of information, and the offer to provide a copy of the final written document to the participant. The consent also described the types of questions that would be asked and informed the participant that it was acceptable to not answer a question if he or she was not comfortable; ask a question, if needed; and discontinue the interview at any time.

During the interview, the researcher asked participants 20 questions. The first six questions were about learning. The second six questions were related to teaching, and the last eight questions were related to relationships. The researcher tried to maintain eye contact during the interview, provide verbal and nonverbal feedback, ask follow up questions as needed, omit questions if they were answered at a different point during the interview, and take notes at different points throughout the session.

The researcher recorded each interview using a pen recorder and a digital voice recorder, with a personal computer connection. The researcher used two devices to prevent loss of data. The pen recorded everything the researcher wrote and heard and was used to make field notes. After the data were uploaded to a personal computer, they were emailed to a typing service for transcription. The researcher reread the transcribed interviews, while listening to the recordings, to validate the accuracy of the transcriptions.

Focus group protocol. Hatch (2002) stated that focus groups capture the interactions of the participants, support the exploration of participants' perspectives, and generate a great deal of data in a short period of time. Before each focus group, the researcher welcomed and thanked participants, reminded students of the purpose of the group, and introduced the moderator. After introducing the moderator and making certain the students were acquainted with each other, the

researcher provided informed consent regarding participation in the group. The researcher displayed the scenarios for discussion on poster board and reviewed the ground rules for the interaction. She encouraged the students to participate as much as possible and to talk to each other. She reminded the participants that the moderator would read the scenarios, ask questions, focus the discussion, and keep the conversation moving.

Hatch (2002) stated that less conversation is generated when the moderator exercises more control. During the focus group, the moderator read the scenario, asked the primary question for each group of scenarios, and used follow-up probes to generate conversation and to encourage students to talk. He also paraphrased student responses to validate their thinking, and he tried to create balance between his comments and student talk. The moderator facilitated three groups consisting of four, three, and four participants, respectively. The researcher administered the focus group scenarios to two students individually because they were not available for the other groups.

A pen recorder and a digital voice recorder were used to record the focus group sessions. The pen recorder was also used for field notes. The digital recordings were uploaded to personal computer storage and emailed to a typing service for transcription. Each participant received a \$50 gift card and a copy of the transcribed interview.

Collection timeline. The data collection began in July 2009 and ended in December 2009. In July, seven interviews and two focus groups were completed. In October, four interviews were completed, and in December, one interview and one focus group were completed, and two participants were given the focus group scenarios individually. The surveys were administered at the same time as the interviews.

Field issues. A few issues emerged during data collection. Firstly, numerous follow-up calls had to be made to secure participants. Through trial and error, the principals most likely to

support the study were identified. Obtaining grades was also a challenge since they were not accessible through a database. Thirdly, one of the devices failed; however, a second device was used simultaneously. Finally, the researcher was not aware that she could have been analyzing data from one participant while collecting it from another, and this slowed the research process. As a result, once all the data were collected the researcher proceeded to find survey means, and to analyze interview data, then analyze focus group data.

Trustworthiness. Numerous strategies were utilized during data collection to ensure the quality of the findings. Several strategies were selected to support credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Table 8 contains a summary of these strategies.

Table 8

Trustworthiness Strategies Used During Data Collection

| Criteria | Strategies |
|-----------------|--|
| Credibility | <p>A Reflexivity Journal includes a description of the researcher's behavior, thoughts and experiences within the research context, in which the researcher assesses her influence on the process.</p> <p>Triangulation of Methods is employed in which data are collected using different instruments or recording procedures.</p> <p>Interview techniques include the reframing of questions, repetition of questions, or the expansion of questions to support credibility.</p> <p>Authority of the researcher is assessed by the researcher's degree of familiarity with the phenomenon, strong interest in and conceptual knowledge of the topic, ability to look at subject for a number of theoretical perspectives, and good investigative skills.</p> |
| Transferability | A Dense Background Description of the research context, methodology, and results is provided for future researchers to make a comparison to other settings. |
| Dependability | A Dense Description of data collection methods and procedures is provided. |
| Confirmability | A Reflexivity Journal is used throughout the study. |

Note. Adapted from Krefting (1999).

Data Analysis

Corbin and Strauss (2008) described qualitative analysis as a process of examining and interpreting data to bring order, to construct meaning, to gain understanding, and to develop practical knowledge. Analysis began after data (i.e., survey, interview, and focus group) were collected and transcribed. Since the researcher employed a multiple-case design, it was anticipated that each case would be analyzed to understand each student (within-case analysis). The data across high, average, and low achievement cases would be analyzed (cross-case analysis) to identify similarities and difference (Creswell, 2007).

The process of developing a set of categories to describe, summarize, and explain phenomenon being studied, which is called interpretational analysis, was used for both within and cross-case analyses (Gall, et al., 2007). A variety of analytical procedures were used to create categories: managing data, coding, categorizing, and drawing and verifying conclusions. While the following description of data analysis appears to be linear, the researcher actually moved back and forth between procedures and strategies simultaneously as suggested by Maxwell (2005). Data collection ended December 2009, analysis began April 2010, and preliminary conclusions were drawn January 2011.

Within-case analysis. The researcher used within-case analysis to give voice to African American adolescents' perceptions of school-level processes (i.e., learning, instruction, and relations) and to create thick descriptions of their perceptions. Thick descriptions of each case, a trustworthiness strategy, enhanced the transferability of findings.

Managing data. To manage the data and prepare it for the within-case analysis, interview and focus group analysis were conducted and the means for the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (Midgley, et al., 2000) were calculated by hand. The analysis of individual cases began first with the segmentation of interview data by question and response. Each question and response represented a segment. For example, in item one, the student was asked to, "describe what it means to do well in school" and a response was coded, "Getting A's and B's, behaving correctly, and doing well on the CMTs." According to Gall, et al., (2007) it is common for researchers to make each question and response a separate segment, which is comprehensible if read outside the data context. This researcher used each segment to guide the coding of interview data.

Coding. The process of coding helped with the reduction of interview data into meaningful pieces of information. First, the researcher read and coded each segment of

interview data for three cases (i.e., a high, an average, and a low case). Segments were related to questions about learning, instruction, and relations. The codes came directly from the data and contained several of the students' own words, phrases, and sentences. These codes are called substantive codes because they described the data (Gall, et al., 2007; Maxwell, 2005).

Additionally, to improve the dependability of data analysis, the researcher coded and recoded the data after two weeks, and she participated in an external audit. A graduate from the Western Connecticut State University Instructional Leadership EdD program, who also completed a qualitative dissertation, completed the audit. The auditor recoded one case at the end of the data analysis process, and the inter-coder reliability was .91. She also audited the categorized interview data and focus group data. The inter-coder reliability is reported under the cross-case analysis section.

Categorizing. After reading and rereading across coded phrases and sentences within each case, the researcher used the following categories as “bins for sorting data for further analysis:” achievement beliefs, thoughts about learning, instructional experiences, and relational experiences (Maxwell, 2005). All coded phrases and sentences were sorted into the appropriate category, and this process was repeated for the remaining nine cases. Once all 12 cases were coded and categorized, the researcher proceeded to reread and revise individual profiles to bring order and meaning to each case. As suggested by Maxwell, the researcher looked for relationships that connected statements and events within the context of the category to make a coherent whole. For example, under the category “thoughts about learning,” the researcher connected students' general to specific thoughts about learning (e.g., middle school experience, classroom learning, assignments, study habits, and homework).

Drawing and verifying conclusions. Once all the interview data were coded and categorized for each case, background information, focus group data, and the *Patterns of*

Adaptive Learning Scales results were added to each category. The researcher had to read, reread, and revise information for each thick description to make sense. Revisions consisted of additions, deletions, and clarification of inconsistencies and contradictions between data sources. For example, the addition of focus group and survey data provided additional evidence to support case interview data. The convergence of data enhanced the credibility of individual student profiles. Inconsistencies and contradictions between data sources were reported as suggested by Gall, et al. (2007) and Mathison (1988).

Cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis was used to develop categories to describe African American adolescents' perceptions by subgroup, to summarize differences within and between subgroups (i.e., high, average, and low achievement cases), and to generate practical findings within and between subgroups. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that cross-case analysis helps to determine the extent of the applicability of findings to other cases or settings. In addition, the use of a stratified purposive sample in this study (i.e., high, average, and low achievement cases) will allow readers, to check if the selected cases are representative of the general phenomenon being investigated (Gall, et al, 2007).

Managing data. In preparation for cross-case analysis, interview files were converted to plain text and the data were stored in the HyperResearch 2.7 (2007) data analysis program. Interview and focus group data were segmented for analysis using the questions and responses from each interview. A segment represented a comprehensible piece of text outside the data context. HyperResearch 2.7, a code and retrieve program was used to manage interview and focus group data. The program was used to break interview data into smaller segments for initial coding. The means for each survey subscale were calculated and reported for each case and by subgroup.

Coding. Coding, which is the reduction of interview and focus group data into words and phrases to describe segments of data (i.e., the question and response), was completed using HyperResearch 2.7. Several codes represented the exact words of participants. These codes were generated using the organizational categories of learning, instruction, and relations, and the data were coded by case. To enhance the dependability of data analysis, the researcher also recoded interview data by hand. To support the neutrality of the data analysis, the master code list generated using HyperResearch 2.7 for interview and focus group data are included in Appendices E and F.

Categorizing. After the initial coding of the interview and focus group data using HyperResearch, the initial codes were imported to a spread sheet worksheet. The interview data were coded separately from the focus group data using the spread sheet. Each code was given a minor category that was related to the content of an interview question or a focus group question. For example, the initial codes for interview data – tests, do work, and extra effort – were related to the minor category school level achievement and emerged from an interview question about school level achievement. The initial codes for focus group data – note-taking, discussion groups, and memorization – were related to the minor category teaching method and emerged from a focus group question about instruction. Four minor categories for focus group data were developed from prior theory (e.g., Boykin, 1983) and all the minor categories for interview data were developed inductively.

The major categories for interview and focus group data emerged from the constructs of learning, instruction, and relations and they summarize the content of the interview and focus group questions for each construct. For example, the learning questions represented the following major categories: achievement goals, learning progress, learning strategies, and learning preferences. The definitions for minor and major categories are in Appendix G.

Interview and focus group data were audited to enhance consistency and neutrality of findings. Inter-coder reliability between the researcher and the auditor for the interview data were .89 for the high-achievement subgroup, .95 for the average-achievement subgroup, and .77 for the low-achievement subgroup. Inter-coder reliability for the focus group data were .89 for the high-achievement subgroup, .90 for the average-achievement subgroup, and 1.0 for the low-achievement subgroup.

Drawing and verifying conclusions. Tables were created to report code frequency by subgroup for major and minor categories. The tables were then used to describe similarities and differences within and between the subgroups. Table 9 summarizes the strategies used to enhance the trustworthiness of conclusions.

Table 9

Trustworthiness Strategies Used During Data Analysis

| Criteria | Strategies |
|-----------------|---|
| Credibility | <p>Triangulation of methods: (a) “Provides a rich, complex picture of social phenomenon being studied,” (b) “provides more and better data from which researchers can construct meaningful propositions about the social world” (Mathison, 1988, p. 15).</p> <p>Structural coherence: There are no unexplained inconsistencies between the data and the interpretations. Interpretation explains apparent contradictions, inconsistencies, and/or rival explanations.</p> <p>Peer examination: Discussing the research process and findings with impartial colleagues who have experience with qualitative methods. Colleague can look for disconfirming or negative cases.</p> |
| Transferability | Thick description of each case |
| Dependability | <p>Code-recode procedure: After coding a segment of data, wait two weeks, return and recode the data, and compare the results.</p> <p>External audit: An external auditor makes an effort to follow the data collection and analysis to arrive at similar conclusions.</p> |
| Confirmability | <p>Data reduction and analysis products such as coding of raw data, memos, and diagrams are available for an audit.</p> <p>Triangulation of methods</p> |

Note. Adapted from (Krefting, 1999).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of the findings guided by the following research questions:

1. How do African American adolescents perceive their learning?
2. How do African American adolescents perceive instructional factors?
3. How do African American adolescents perceive relational factors?

The questions are answered in three sections. Section one provides (a) background information, cumulative grades, and achievement test results; (b) student means from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales; (c) and 12 student profiles from within-case analyses. Data were transcribed, read, reread, coded, and categorized to make sense of interview and focus group data. The researchers wanted to capture the voices of four high, four average, and four low achievement students' perceptions of learning, instructional factors, and relational factors. Quantitative data and thick descriptions were included in each profile to support the transferability of findings. The tables and profiles contain pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Section two reports the findings for each research question by subgroup (i.e., high, average, low) and method (i.e., survey, interview, and focus group). Cross-case analyses involved coding, categorizing, and drawing conclusions to describe the results. Section three reports the findings from at least two methods, which is the triangulation of methods. Triangulation provides an explanation for convergence, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the evidence from data methods and it enhances the credibility of the findings as suggested by Krefting (1999).

Section One

Background Information, Cumulative Grades, and Achievement Results

Table 10 serves as a record of students' background information and academic performance as measured by cumulative grades and Connecticut Mastery Test results to support the transferability of findings from this study to other contexts, settings, and groups. The background information is used as an introduction for each student profile. Student pseudonyms are ordered based on their achievement levels (high to low).

Table 10

Students' Background Information, Cumulative Reading and Math Grades, and Achievement Test Results for Reading and Mathematics

| Student | Age | Gender | School | Number of years at the present school | Cumulative Grades | | Achievement Test | |
|----------------------------|-----|--------|-------------|--|-------------------|------|------------------|-------------|
| | | | | | Reading | Math | Reading | Mathematics |
| High Achievement | | | | | | | | |
| Jason | 14 | Male | (C) Madison | 2 | A- | A | Advanced | Advanced |
| Reggie | 12 | Male | (C) Madison | 3 | B | B | Advanced | Advanced |
| Kojo | 14 | Male | (A) Bailey | 2 | Not available | | Goal | Goal |
| Dana | 13 | Female | (B) Cox | 2 | B | B | Goal | Goal |
| Average Achievement | | | | | | | | |
| Michele | 13 | Female | (B) Cox | 3 | A | B | Goal | Proficient |
| Melanie | 14 | Female | (C) Madison | 6 | C | C | Proficient | Goal |
| Cam | 13 | Male | (C) Madison | 3 | B+ | C+ | Goal | Proficient |
| D'Shaun | 13 | Male | (B) Cox | 2 | C | C | Proficient | Basic |
| Low Achievement | | | | | | | | |
| Nigel | 13 | Male | (D) West | 1 | C | D- | Below Basic | Below Basic |
| Mia | 13 | Female | (D) West | 1 | C | D+ | Below Basic | Below Basic |
| Parker | 13 | Male | (B) Cox | 2 | D | D | Below Basic | Below Basic |
| Cheyenne | 13 | Female | (D) West | 3 | C | D- | Below Basic | Below Basic |

Note. The cumulative grades represent a final average for the year. Achievement test results represent categorical data from the Connecticut Mastery Test (2009). See Table 4 for a description of each performance level.

Perceptions of Achievement Goals, Teacher Goals, and Achievement Related Beliefs

The following table reports the findings from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, et. al., 2000). Survey scales assessed students' personal achievement goal orientation, their perception of teacher goals, and achievement related beliefs. A 5-point Likert scale indicated student responses to each statement in a subscale. The items on the scales are anchored at 1= "Not at all true," 3 = "Somewhat true," and 5 = "Very true." The subscales for personal achievement goal orientation are mastery, performance approach, and performance avoidance. The subscales for perceptions of teacher's goals are teacher mastery, teacher performance approach, and teacher performance avoidance, and the subscales for achievement related beliefs are academic press and self-presentation of low achievement.

Table 11 provides a summary of the results for each subscale for each student using his or her mean score. Survey sample means and standard deviations are reported for comparison. Students' means were used for within-case and cross-case analyses and were triangulated with focus group and interview data for cross-case analyses within and between subgroups.

Table 11

Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales Results

| Student | MST ^a | PAP ^b | PAV ^c | TM ^d | TPAP ^e | TPAV ^f | AP ^g | SPLA ^f |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| High Achievement | | | | | | | | |
| Jason | 5.00 | 1.40 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 3.00 | 2.00 | 4.71 | 1.28 |
| Reggie | 5.00 | 3.00 | 2.25 | 5.00 | 1.33 | 2.75 | 4.71 | 1.71 |
| Kojo | 4.80 | 1.80 | 3.00 | 4.80 | 3.30 | 3.00 | 4.57 | 2.00 |
| Dana | 5.00 | 3.20 | 3.25 | 4.00 | 2.60 | 2.00 | 2.85 | 1.42 |
| Mean | 4.95 | 2.35 | 2.62 | 4.70 | 2.55 | 2.43 | 4.21 | 1.60 |
| Average Achievement | | | | | | | | |
| Michele | 5.00 | 4.58 | 3.50 | 4.40 | 3.60 | 2.75 | 3.57 | 1.14 |
| Melanie | 5.00 | 3.00 | 2.50 | 5.00 | 4.67 | 3.75 | 4.43 | 1.29 |
| Cam | 4.20 | 1.20 | 2.25 | 4.80 | 1.00 | 1.50 | 4.14 | 1.28 |
| D'Shaun | 5.00 | 2.80 | 3.50 | 4.40 | 1.00 | 3.50 | 3.57 | 2.42 |
| Mean | 4.80 | 2.89 | 2.93 | 4.65 | 2.56 | 2.87 | 3.92 | 1.53 |

Note. Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, et. al., 2000).

Table 11

Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales Results (continued)

| Student | MST ^a | PAP ^b | PAV ^c | TM ^d | TPAP ^e | TPAV ^f | AP ^g | SPLA ^f |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Low Achievement | | | | | | | | |
| Nigel | 3.20 | 2.80 | 2.00 | 3.60 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 1.85 |
| Mia | 5.00 | 4.00 | 3.50 | 4.80 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.57 | 1.57 |
| Parker | 4.60 | 4.00 | 2.25 | 4.40 | 2.30 | 2.50 | 3.28 | 1.42 |
| Cheyenne | 5.00 | 1.00 | 1.50 | 5.00 | 2.00 | 2.75 | 4.71 | 1.00 |
| Mean | 4.45 | 2.95 | 2.31 | 4.45 | 2.32 | 2.81 | 3.89 | 1.46 |
| Grand Mean | 4.73 | 2.73 | 2.62 | 4.60 | 2.47 | 2.70 | 4.00 | 1.53 |
| Standard | | | | | | | | |
| Mean | 4.15 | 2.46 | 2.40 | 3.56 | 2.15 | 1.95 | 3.62 | 1.79 |

Note. Definitions of each subscale appear in Appendix H; Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, et. al., 2000).

^aMastery Goal Orientation; ^bPerformance Approach Goal Orientation; ^cPerformance Avoidance Goal Orientation; ^dTeacher Mastery Goal; ^eTeacher Performance Approach Goal; ^fTeacher Performance Avoidance Goal; ^gAcademic Press; ^hSelf-Presentation of Low Achievement

Description of Findings Using Student Profiles

Within-case analyses were used to create each student profile. The analyses used to construct the student profiles included managing data, coding, categorizing, drawing and verifying conclusions. Data were transcribed, read, reread, coded, and categorized under organizational categories. The organizational categories (background, achievement beliefs, thoughts about learning, instructional experiences, and relational experiences) acted as bins for segmenting and sorting survey, interview, and focus group data (Maxwell, 2005). Categorized phrases and comments from the participants' (emic perspective) and the researcher's descriptions (etic perspective) were used to compose each student profile. Clustering, revising, and connecting strategies were used interchangeably to capture the voice of the African American adolescents' experience of school. The researcher integrated data from several sources into a logical, holistic picture as suggested by Krefting (1999).

Student Profiles: High Achievers

Jason

Background. Jason was a 14-year-old male who attended Madison School, a K-8 elementary school/middle school, for two years. At the end of grade eight, Jason averaged an A- in reading and an A in a high school level algebra class. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, Jason scored advanced in both reading and math. A thoughtful and articulate young man, Jason had clearly defined achievement beliefs and articulated what it meant for him to do well in school.

Achievement beliefs. Jason noted, "I always try my best to get the best grades I can. I'm an A and B student, so if I get lower than that, I'll want to try harder but usually I am good at... I'm determined. I'm a determined student and if I put my mind to something, I think I could achieve it." To achieve at Madison, Jason took lots of notes and paid attention because

when a teacher said something, it would be on the next test or quiz. And he also believed if you respect your teachers, they would respect you.

Thoughts about learning. Jason felt that elementary school was easier than middle school. He did not receive that much work at his last school, but at Madison, he said, he worked hard to get good grades. If lessons were interesting, learning took no time but if dull, learning was difficult.

On the PALS survey, Jason identified himself as a mastery-oriented learner, which meant he focused on learning the task. This orientation was supported by his description of what he did when he entered class. Jason stated, “I take out my notebook to take notes, and I wait for the teacher to start. When they’re teaching, I don’t look around. I’m focused on what they’re saying so I don’t miss anything. I ask kids that are doing (well) in that class if I missed any notes to help me.” During class, Jason preferred group learning because it supported problem solving and hearing other points of view. Group work also made Jason push himself because he liked to compete for a good grade.

Jason described a summer assignment when asked to describe a time he did well. He had to read a book about Native Americans and write a report. He said he did well because it was something that interested him, it made him work harder to do his best, and he got an A on the assignment. Jason said he knew he had learned because he couldn’t put the book down, and he remembered it.

When asked what he did when the work gets hard, Jason said that he listened more and wrote everything down the teacher said especially in science. He also tried to keep the papers the teacher handed out. Jason pointed out, “If I miss a day, I go to a person who is good in science and ask them questions. I (also) check up on how I am doing in class before progress

reports come up, so if I'm getting a (progress report) ... if I have to do better on what's going on."

To prepare for a test, Jason did not need to study much. He said education came easy: "I only need to study when it is a challenging subject like science," and then he studied a week in advance. But for math or written expression, he studied before he goes to sleep so he would remember what he learned.

Jason believed homework helped his learning. He tried to finish as much as possible at school, so he did not have hours of homework at home. Homework helped because it is a review of what was learned and helped Jason to remember. Jason said all things that are taught have a purpose, so he just tried to remember as much as he can. Jason tried to learn all the necessary skills to get a good job.

Instructional experiences. Jason said the most important things he had been taught were math because it did not change, reading because he would need it to get a good job and to do things like read contracts to get a house, social studies because he would need to know his history, and science because most things around could be solved in a scientific way.

Jason perceived his teachers' goals as primarily mastery-oriented, which is focus on teaching for understanding, but he also perceived his teachers' goals as performance-approach goals, which are more focused on grades. Jason's teachers provided task-focused instruction such as the hands-on experiences of creating a commercial in reading. He shared, "I like hands-on learning because it's not like you just sit there and take notes. You take notes for like parts of it and then you have... you can actually do it with your own two hands so I find that interesting." In addition, teachers put students in groups to complete projects. Jason said he liked projects because "you can't do them overnight" and you could interpret and share with people in the group. For example, he had a group mathematics project, and the group had four days to

complete it. The project consisted of a series of questions and word problems. Jason said the project was not easy, and it was not too hard, but with four brains working on it, they got a 90.

Relational experiences. Jason's favorite teacher was Mr. McBroom. He said, "I respected him because he saw a lot in me. "When I started to slack, he pushed me because I was just getting by." On the PALS survey, Jason also reported that his teachers pressed him academically, and he liked teachers who pushed him because they saw something in him. He stated, "They want me to work hard to make something of myself in the future." On the PALS, Jason also reported that he presented himself as a hard worker and did not seek to hide high achievement from his peers. Jason's teachers also saw him as a hard worker and respectful. To get to know his teachers, Jason worked hard, and if he did not agree with the teacher, he would stand up for himself and would speak to the teacher.

When asked to describe a conflict at school, Jason shared an issue he had with an art grade. Jason noted that he had fractured his finger and had a cast. Although he worked to catch up, he earned a poor mark for effort. Jason approached the art teacher, and she shared that his work was good, but he needed to apply more effort. Jason decided he would push himself harder the next quarter because the art teacher supported his learning. She answered his questions and she helped with problems outside of their class. He admitted teachers are like "parent-guardian figures. They are role models, and they look out for what you are doing."

Three pieces of advice for a new teacher: earn students' respect, be understanding, and help them with their work if they need help.

Reggie

Background. Reggie was a 12-year-old male who attended Madison School, a K-8 elementary school/middle school, for three years. At the end of 8th grade, Reggie averaged a B in reading and B in high school level algebra. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test,

Reggie scored advanced in both reading and math. Reggie knew that grades, work habits, and conduct helped him to do well in school.

Achievement beliefs. Reggie pointed out, “When you do well in school, it means getting As and Bs, behaving correctly, and doing well on your CMTs.” To get an A or B, Reggie said, “I have to study when I know there’s a test, and I have to start projects when they are given, and I have to participate in class.” Reggie noted that behaving meant that when the teacher was talking, don’t talk, don’t talk back, sit down in class, and don’t get up. To do well on the CMTs, he pointed out that he had to pay attention all year so he knew the things for the test and was prepared well. A good score on the CMT is goal or advanced.

Thoughts about learning. Reggie recalled how middle and elementary school were different. He shared that middle school teachers pushed you harder and he received more work. It is also more important to get As and Bs in middle school to get into a good high school. Reggie pointed out that, “Sixth through eighth (grades) is what high schools are mainly going to look at...to consider ...accepting you.”

On the PALS survey, Reggie reported that he was primarily mastery-oriented; he was focused on the learning task, but he is also sometimes performance approach oriented; he was focused on getting good grades. As stated previously, it was important for Reggie to get into a good high school, and this supported his mastery-orientation as well as his description of what he did when he entered class. Reggie took out his notebook and prepared for the lesson because he knew that the teacher was going to say take out your notebook. He also made sure he had a pencil or a pen, and he was also ready to take notes because he never knew what was important or what was not. He also asked questions when he did not understand. However, during the focus group, Reggie said he preferred learning in groups with only some independent learning because he liked to hear others points of view.

When asked to describe a time when he had done well on an assignment, Reggie described a Latin American report. The teachers gave the assignment a month in advance, and Reggie worked on it daily. Reggie said, “I checked over it and got a 100 on that one” (the project). “I knew I had learned because I remembered most of the things about the person researched.” When Reggie had difficult math assignments (math is his favorite class), he sought help from the teacher, and then he went over it more than twice to make sure it was correct. In foreign language class, which was a hard class, Reggie paid more attention and studied more. He took notes on what the teacher is saying.

Reggie said that he studied at home for about an hour for a test, and then he went over the material on the bus and in homeroom to make sure he remembered the information. Then there were times when he studied in homeroom with a friend. However, he did not like to compete.

Reggie said he received science and math worksheets for homework every day, stories and vocabulary in reading, and projects and verbs in Portuguese. Reggie said homework helped his learning because if he wrote something, it helped him to learn, and he was ready for the test.

Instructional experiences. Reggie said that he preferred when teachers went over what they have said, and when they made sure he understood. He pointed out that “The type of teaching that works for me is when—if I don’t understand it, you go over it. But if I do understand it, like...because it’s a waste of to go over something that I (already) know. And the type of teaching I do not like is when you talk, and I don’t really understand you, and you really don’t go over it.” Reggie liked repetition and liked it when the teachers asked if anyone had questions and said, “this is the time to say it or see me after class.” Reggie said that he learned best in a quiet environment sitting in a chair at the table, and if he is at the computer, he liked the lights off.

Reggie liked writing assignments because they held his interest and focused his mind. One of the most engaging assignments was the stock market. He also liked the Getting to Know You project, the Latin American project, and the essay on the Pearl, which also involved writing. In addition, he found that group discussion supported his understanding of books. The repetition from worksheets helped the information to get stuck in his head. He did not like taking notes and videos as much.

Reggie said that the most important things he had been taught was how to listen in class, to write down what the teacher was saying, and how to write the correct way in preparation for high school. He also had been taught to do math and hoped that his math class prepared him for a business career.

Reggie described how math was taught. He said that the teacher explained a concept such as integers, and before the teacher finished the lesson, she asked if anyone needed help. If you raised your hand, she would put another problem on the board and explained the steps again.

Relational experiences. Reggie stated that students behaved the same in all classes because all the teachers were strict. He noted that the type of conflict that occurred in class was when a student might not do a project or what was supposed to be done. Then the student was sent to the guidance counselor, parents were called, or in-school suspension was given. Reggie said that fairness was treating students the same academically and all students needed an instructional explanation to understand for a test. Reggie liked his teachers because the teachers were nice and worked with you if you behaved, and he liked the students because there were not many new students at his school.

Reggie preferred a teacher who cared and who interacts with students in and out of class. If he had as strong relationship with a teacher, it helped him to pay attention. Reggie also liked a teacher with a sense of humor. This kept him awake in class. Reggie said that his teachers

thought he was smart because he did well on his tests, and he was well-behaved. Reggie's favorite teacher was Ms. Scrimel because she taught him to understand from his point of view. For example, if she was reading a story from the olden days, then she would explain it in a way he could understand. She also cracked jokes to make sure people were listening. In science class, the teacher worked with students to make sure they understood the concepts. "We sit in groups of four at lab tables, and the teacher goes around to each group to make sure that we have the correct things in our book." Reggie liked this type of interaction because he understood the concepts, and if he did not understand, it was good the teacher went around to each group. Reggie said he would give the following advice to a new teacher: "make sure your class is interesting because students will not listen if they think the class is boring, be strict...some of them take (things) too far...(students) have to work, and always explain what you're teaching...some people are very shy, and if they don't understand it, they will not ask for an explanation."

Kojo

Background. Kojo was a 14-year-old, male who has attended Bailey School, a K-8 elementary/middle school, for two years. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, Kojo scored goal in both reading and math. A soft spoken, polite young man, Kojo wanted to do well in school.

Achievement beliefs. Kojo tried to do his best at school. To do well in school, he listened to his teachers, takes notes to understand them, made sure he had necessary materials, prepares for tests, does his homework, and, if needed, asks for help. Kojo said that this helps him to comprehend, to achieve.

Thoughts about learning. Kojo said learning in middle school is "a lot tougher" than learning in elementary school. To support learning in middle school, Kojo stated that the

teachers “gave demonstrations so it’d be easier to comprehend,” so his performance is almost the same as elementary or “as close as it can get.”

On the PALS survey, Kojo self-reported that he is a mastery-oriented learner. This orientation was evident from his description of his classroom learning. When Kojo entered class, he took the following steps to stay focused on learning: (a) waited for the teacher to give the lesson or (b) used the time to get ahead, if it is a free period, so he is not stuck trying to comprehend the work at late hours. When reading or other assignments are difficult, he asked the teacher for help. He also would stay after school to work with his teachers or would work with his teachers during specials.

When asked to describe an assignment he did well on, Kojo described the Lewis and Clark assignment because he got an A. He said, “I put all my heart into it” because the assignment was important. Kojo’s teacher supported his work with the Lewis and Clark assignment by recommending websites and books he could use.

To prepare for tests, Kojo studied at night right before bed so the information stays in his head, and sometimes he asks his friends to pre-quiz him. To study for a test, he reads over his notes so he can comprehend. Kojo’s favorite class is math, and his least favorite class is reading.

Most of the time, homework was class work Kojo did not finish, but there have been times the teacher thought homework was needed for an important test or report. Kojo felt homework helped him to learn. When the teacher gave homework, Kojo wrote it down so he won’t forget. It helped him to remember his lessons, so he could get a good grade on a test.

Instructional experiences. Kojo said that he learned best by listening to the teacher and taking notes at the same time. Kojo stated that he prefers demonstrations from teachers rather than teachers just telling him what to do. He also preferred it when teachers help the students instead of going off and doing what they have to do. American history (e.g., Christopher

Columbus, Lewis and Clark, the Declaration of Independence, the presidents of the United States are interesting assignments because “it lets me know how our great nation started from the beginning” and why it is like it is now. Kojo stated that the most important things that he has been taught are math and reading. He pointed out that reading and math are important because most jobs today involve reading and math. Kojo shared that he wanted to be a brain surgeon.

Kojo perceived his teachers’ goals as primarily mastery-oriented. For example, Mr. Kelley focused on the content by giving speeches, using a map, and helping students who need help. He also writes the lesson on the board, talks about the lesson, shows the location on a map, states the person that needs to be looked up, uses a chart to give enough information to comprehend, and then gives questions to answer. Then Mr. Kelley says, “I’ll be over here if you need help.”

Relational experiences. Kojo believed that if teachers and students work together, the teachers would be satisfied that they are able to teach new minds and the students will get new information to help them achieve the goal they set. He noted that most conflicts are related to fights, and there are few fights. When there are fights, the security guard or the teacher handles the situation. When a fight breaks out, most people find it interesting, but Kojo thinks they are stupid. He said the students get suspended, and in a few days, they forget what they were fighting about. Fights occur when people are stressed out like at the end of the year or during the CMTs.

Kojo’s favorite teacher was Mr. Kelley, and he said he was ‘pretty cool.’ He knew when to give a break from work, and he told great stories about when he was in the military. He even shared the story about when he went out with his wife because of a bet. He advised the guys never get married but to coach a football or baseball team instead. Kojo said Mr. Kelley gave good advice, and he said that his teacher thinks he is “smart and civilized.” According to Kojo,

civilized means to behave, to act correctly, to have manners, to listen when someone is talking, and not talk back. During the interview, Kojo did not mention how his teachers pushed him, but he did report on the survey that his teachers pressed him academically, and during the focus group, he noted that he likes it when the teacher lets him know he can do better.

Relating with his teachers is important to Kojo, and he likes it when his teachers help him but is willing to wait if another person needs more support. Kojo feels “relieved and very refreshed” when he gets help from his teacher because he wants to get a good grade. If Kojo gets a bad grade, it does not get him down. He said he just changes his priorities. Advice to a new teacher: “work with the students, always help them (when needed), and always listen to a student” who says he does not understand. Demonstrate instead of telling students what to do.

Dana

Background. Dana was a 13-year-old female who has attended Oliver Cox, a K-8 elementary/middle school, for two years. At the end of eighth grade, Dana averaged a B in reading and a B in a high school algebra class. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, Dana scored goal in both reading and math. In a confident and self-assured manner, Dana shared what she believed about schooling and achievement.

Achievement beliefs. Dana believed that if she does a good job in school, then she will succeed in life. So, she approaches school with patience. She was attentive, listens to her teachers because they talk a lot, and uses the feedback from homework and tests to check her understanding of the material. These activities helped her to monitor her learning and “to stay on point.” When she did not understand the instruction, she asked a lot of questions and puts forth more effort to succeed.

Thoughts about learning. The major difference in Dana’s learning in middle school compared to elementary school was “math is a little harder,” but Dana affirmed that she

understands it. Enrolled in Algebra I, she reminisces about basic math – adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing and highlights “orders of operations,” one of the complexities of math.

Dana self-reported that she is definitely a mastery-oriented learner, and her achievement beliefs and classroom performance confirm this orientation. Dana emphasized that the classroom is for learning. She has learned from teachers that there’s a time for everything and knows when it’s time to play and talk and when it is time to listen. Dana explained that, “You shouldn’t play in class because that’s the time when you have to learn.” When she enters a classroom, she sits and gets ready to pay attention to the teacher so she can learn. To stay focused on the lesson, Dana ignores people and things around her, and she asks questions. Dana talks only after class has ended.

When asked to describe a time when she had done well on an assignment, Dana recalled a fourth-grade writing assignment. The essay was for practice, was not graded, and the teacher taught her how to form paragraphs, identify main ideas, create an introduction, and include specific examples; the teacher also provided opportunities for her to practice writing timed essays. Dana received an award.

To prepare for tests, Dana wrote notes, looks over previous homework, and if she has a big test and does not understand the subject well enough, she will go on the computer to look up the information. If she does not understand math very well, then she plays math games on the computer. Thus, Dana conveys a sense of self-sufficiency when preparing for tests. She enjoys competition and working independently supports her performance. If the work is hard, she prefers to work alone. If she only needs a little support, then she does not mind working with others.

The quantity and type of homework Dana receives varies from day to day and from subject to subject. When asked if homework supports her learning, Dana responded with

“sometimes it helps.” She then proceeded to explain that homework is not helpful if she does not understand what she is learning, and the teacher does not take time to explain how to do it.

There are times when the teacher just corrects the homework, puts the grade in the grade book, and that’s it. Dana said that when she fixes her mistakes or when someone corrects her, it helps her to learn better. She added, “It shows me my errors and how I’m supposed to do it.”

Instructional experiences. Dana described a variety of instructional methods teachers use to help her to learn. She said some teachers show videos, some like to talk, some let students copy notes that they have written on the board, and some teachers review stuff in the books. Additionally, teachers show examples, ask if students understand, and then give examples to try. The previous descriptions support Dana self-reported perception that her teachers’ goals are mastery-oriented.

Dana said she learns best when the teacher provides examples and from watching videos because she is a visual learner. But she does not like taking notes that much, especially when the teachers talk a lot. She only likes to take notes when she has to study; however, during the focus group, Dana affirmed that note-taking helps her to learn.

Cognizant of how she learns, Dana is also aware of what does not support her learning. She does not like a lot of work, or when teachers get off topic, or when they keep changing subjects, and then give a test afterwards. It becomes difficult for her to remember everything. Dana likes when one thing is explained and then is tested. This is how she recalls the information best.

Relational experiences. Dana feels that some students in her class are loud, and they argue over “crazy” stuff. They often yell out randomly and throw “stuff” around. Dana believes these students hide that they are smart, but she does not feel she has to hide her interest in achievement. Dana points out that the students like school but do not like the teachers, and their

rules. They actually do whatever they want, and Dana thinks it's unfair to disturb the class. The commotion stops the learning process and actually negatively affects her learning. While Dana chooses not to act like these students, she admits that sometimes she laughs at their behavior.

Dana also affirms that she gets along with these students. In fact, these students are her friends.

Dana admits that she gets along with most of her teachers and believes they have positive thoughts about her. She believes her teacher think she is respectful, organized, smart, and a leader. Dana likes a teacher with a sense of humor because it keeps class interesting, but when she doesn't like the teacher, she doesn't listen. Her favorite teacher, a first-grade teacher, not only taught for the first grade but taught information beyond the first grade. So, when Dana got to the next grade, she understood more. She and the students were ahead of the class and knew it. Dana still wants academic press as evident from her self-report on the PALS. She also emphasized that she is smart today because her first-grade teacher taught her well. When asked what advice she would give to a new teacher, Dana responded, "Be patient, don't yell, explain things, make sure everybody understands, and get to know the students."

Student Profiles: Average Achievers

Michele

Background. Michele is a 13-year-old female who has attended Oliver Cox School, a K-8 elementary/middle school, for three years. She averaged an A in reading and a B in math at the end of eighth grades. On the 7th grade Connecticut Mastery Test, Michele scored goal in reading and proficient in math. Michele thinks positively about school and has resolved that she will do well.

Achievement beliefs. Michele energetically connects doing well in school with achieving her goals. Two of her goals are to become a zoologist and a professional ballerina.

When asked what it takes to do well at Oliver Cross, Michele shared that it takes a lot of

concentration and determination. “You have to believe in yourself.” Michele knows she has achieved when the teacher says, “I am proud of you, excellent job, and you really put a lot of effort into this one.”

Thoughts about learning. Michele feels that learning in middle school is more serious than in elementary school because high schools will look at middle school grades. Michele believes that middle school grades count for the rest of her life, so she does not want to get written up, suspended, and she doesn’t want Cs or Ds. The most important things she has learned in school are “to put effort in everything you do, even if you do not understand and to strive for something higher than what you expect of yourself.” While Michele self-reported that it is “very true” she is mastery-oriented, i.e., focused on learning, she also self-reported that she is “very” performance-oriented, i.e., focused on getting good grades.

Michele likes to compete. She shared that winning the science fair at school and going to the national science fair “took the cake.” Even though she did not win at the state science fair, it was still fun, and she appreciated the experience. When I asked Michele what she had learned from the project, she shared that doing a science fair project takes a lot of time. She had to gather the information, and supplies. In addition, it requires a lot of concentration and willpower. “You can’t give up but keep on trying.” Michele said that she learned determination from studying insects during the winter. The teacher supported Michele with her science project by giving her ideas, choices, places to get supplies, support with writing the summary, and equations that would make her project better.

To prepare for the classroom, Michele makes sure she has all the necessary materials. When the teacher is talking, she writes down notes so when she does her homework, she fully understands the work. Michele studies every night. And if she does not understand a subject

such as math, then she will ask the teacher for extra help afterschool. Her parents provide support, too.

Homework definitely helps Michele to learn because she can do it at home in a quiet, peaceful place. Michele enjoys working alone. She affirmed during the focus group that she learns best when it is quiet with no interruptions. Michele gets homework every single night except Fridays. When she does get an assignment on Friday, it is due next week. Michele shared that homework consisted of writing essays and poems, math problems, science packets, and vocabulary.

Instructional experiences. Michele stated that teachers do their job to make sure she understands everything: “When I get a paper back and it says well done, I am motivated to do another paper because I have mastered what I needed to learn, and I feel I can do anything.” Michele believes that the feedback from teachers helps her to learn and makes her excited about learning. Even if she gets a problem wrong, and the teacher explains why she got it wrong, and this makes it easier for her to understand. This description supports Michele’s self-report that her teachers communicate goals that are mastery-oriented.

Michele learns best through visual and auditory methods but mostly by visual methods because she can picture it in her mind. But hands-on projects support Michele’s learning in science. She loves experiments. Hands on projects help Michele to understand the meaning of the book, the meaning of the experiment, and the meaning of the problem. Writing science essays also supports Michele’s learning. What does not help is when teachers speak without details. Michele states that the explanation needs to be complete.

Michele thinks that the reading teacher is fun. She shared that the teacher uses the Smart board to get students’ attention and to help them understand better. She shared that the teacher uses bright, flashy, colorful materials and games. “She puts games in our learning so we

understand better but we are still having fun.” The teacher also uses book discussion. And on tests, if the whole class doesn’t understand one question, she just won’t count it as a grade and then she’ll go over that question instead of counting it as a grade.

Relational experiences. Peers who talk and joke around interfere with Michele’s learning. Michele shared that her peers talk a lot especially in science because the teacher is new. She said that they are trying to play games with him but most teachers don’t play games. When talking and bad behavior occurs in class, privileges are taken away. The students won’t get to do the things they love like rock climbing on the adventure court outside. The students could also get a zero for the day and it would affect their grade. Therefore, when teachers are serious, they mean business. Michele feels that it is fair to take privileges away from students who are disruptive but not from the whole class. The class should not suffer because of disruptive students.

Michele likes to know her teachers and wants them to understand that she is a good student. However, she reported that teachers only sometimes press her until she understands. Michele believes her teachers think she is a hard worker and a good student. She said her teachers see that she takes pride in her work and is striving for her dreams. They believe that she will get into a top college because of how she is. Michele chuckles as she recalled, “they know that I beat myself up when I don’t get something right.” Michele recalled how connected she was to her favorite teacher who would treat her like a daughter and would explain things in a way that Michele could understand personally. Michele believes that personal communication is important even if it is for just one person. It makes her want to be better than she already is. If Michele is not close to her teacher, then she doesn’t pay attention and doesn’t “feel anything.”

Michele's advice to a new teacher is: "Don't punish the whole class... be fun with your teaching – create exciting games... and teach so everybody can understand you and look up to you...that would be the perfect teacher."

Melanie

Background. Melanie is a 14-year-old female. For six years, she has attended Madison School, a K-8 elementary/middle school. At the end of eighth grade, Melanie earned a C in reading and a C in math. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, she scored proficient in reading and goal in math. Soft spoken and mild mannered, Melanie described what it takes for her to do well in school and at Madison.

Achievement beliefs. Good grades, class participation, and listening to teachers helps Melanie to learn; then she will get into a good high school and good college. Melanie said she listens, studies a lot, and works to the "93rd level" at Madison because she takes tests frequently.

Thoughts about learning. Melanie stated that learning in middle school is different from elementary school. It is it is harder, and it prepares you for life. Learning algebraic equations, Melanie said that algebra is a part of everyday life and high school.

To focus in the classroom, Melanie said she purposely sits away from her friends, and this makes it easier for her to learn. Melanie stated that she wants to get into a good high school and not fall back in class, so she talks to her friends only after class. It also helps her learning when the teacher comes over to review work with her.

A mastery-oriented learner who is focused on learning and understanding tasks, Melanie noted that she does well on book reports when she works in a group. She reaffirmed this preference during the focus group. "It gives me a chance to share my thinking about different things." She noted that she is shy and when she works on group projects, she opens up. Melanie pointed out that she feels proud when her teacher tells her she has done well. With difficult

social studies assignments, Melanie will use worksheets and the textbook to support learning, but with science, she will keep asking the teacher until she gets it.

Melanie uses study strategies such as folding the vocabulary paper in half, looking at the word, recalling the definition, and checking for understanding to prepare for tests. She also uses worksheets and rewrites equations to study for math.

Homework is not a problem for Melanie. She noted that it is “kind of easy” because it is connected to what was taught in class. Melanie gets homework every day, and it consists of questions to answer from different books, equations, and worksheets with scientific words. She shared that homework helped her to learn because it is a review of what she did in class.

Instructional experiences. Melanie said in social studies, stories help her to understanding; in reading, worksheets about the book that reflect the theme; in math, worksheets and equations on the Smart board; and in science, the teacher goes around to explain, tells if you are right or wrong, and how to fix the problem. Melanie said that teachers communicate mastery-oriented goals for learning, but she believed that teachers’ communicated performance-approach goals as well. Melanie feels that teachers want her to learn and understand, but she also believes they want her to do well on tests and show she is competent.

During the interview and the focus group, Melanie said that she learns best with worksheets because she can see other problems and has a hint on how to solve them, but she also loves to read different books about what was done in the past to see how it is related to now. During the focus group, Melanie included a preference for visuals to support learning, too. Although she has learned a lot in school and learns in different ways, Melanie pointed out that the most important things she has learned in school were to follow directions and to pay attention.

Relational experiences. When asked about student relations, Melanie emphasized fairness, which she explained was treating other the way you want to be treated, not singling someone out, and group inclusion. Melanie pointed out that student behaviors are mixed and so are their emotions. Sometimes they find class boring and put their heads down, fall asleep, or fool around with their pencils. Or they find class interesting, like the learning, and are happy. While there are not many conflicts in class or at school in eighth grade, Melanie said from fifth to seventh grade, people use to talk about each other and bring the gossip to class and lunch. Then the guidance counselor helped students work out problems.

Respect is the foundation of Melanie's relationships with teachers and students, and if she has a problem, teachers respect her privacy. Melanie thinks her teachers see her as shy but respectful. She noted that she does not talk back. "If teachers tell me to do something, I am going to do it. I am also helpful to others." When asked about her favorite teacher, Melanie recalled Ms. Grand because she would take time to break down what things meant and on her best days at the end of class. She would have a student demonstrate a dance, and then she would do it herself. When asked to describe how teachers and students work together, Melanie said that there are times when the teacher invites her to work one to one to identify possible solutions. Melanie likes this type of interaction because the teacher is right there to help and she feels the teacher cares. It is important for a teacher to push Melanie and to pull her aside whether she is doing well or having difficulty. This perception also emerged from Melanie's self-report that her teachers press her to understand. When asked what advice she would give a new teacher, Melanie said, "Be strong because middle school students can be tough, provide interesting work, and make sure you enjoy what you are teaching."

Cam

Background. Cam is a 13-year-old male who has attended Madison, a K-8 elementary/middle school, for three years. At the end of eighth grade, Cam earned a B+ in reading and a C+ in math. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, he scored goal in reading and proficient in math. A cooperative and agreeable young man, Cam explained his experiences with teaching and learning.

Achievement beliefs. Cam said doing well in school means excelling in any subject and trying to get good grades. Cam tries to keep at least a B+ average, but to do well at Madison; Cam had to maintain a C+ or better.

Thoughts about learning. Cam said his elementary and middle school learning experiences were different. When he entered Madison Middle School in grade six, he learned how to take notes, which has been great because it helped him to memorize what he had written during class time.

In class, Cam blocks out everything to listen to the teacher, and he enters class with all materials. If he does not have a pen or pencil, he will ask for one. Cam prefers group work, but he also likes individual attention. Hands-on projects help his learning, too; and he wants more teacher support if he has a C average.

When asked to describe a time he did well with an assignment, Cam noted a reading assignment on why students should have cell phones in school. Cam said he did well because he got six, and the teacher said, "I did well." He also knew he had learned because of his new perspective on phones in school-when they should and should not be used. The teacher supported Cam with note-taking, bandwagon, and attribution exercises. When assignments are difficult, Cam tries to rethink the assignment, review more than once, and ask a lot of questions.

Cam self-reported that he was a mastery-oriented learner, and his description of how he approached the reading assignment supports his self-report.

Cam prepares for tests by studying at night, sometimes weeks before the test, and he studies on the bus and before class. He noted that he studies vocabulary in advance because he needs to know up to 60 words, so he studies 20 words a week.

Most of Cam's homework is little units like reading sentences or worksheets, and he believes it helps his learning.

Instructional experiences. Cam learns best with one-to-one attention, and the teacher supports his learning with one-to-one contact. He said teachers ask if he needs help, and if he does not get something, they will review it during or after class. The type of instruction that does not work for Cam is when teachers assign sections, and then they do not review the section until the test. They tell me to review, but they do not review in advance. In addition, he does not like loud noises and distractions. Cam's work with teachers supports his thought that they communicate mastery messages. Cam believes his teachers focus on learning for understanding.

Cam likes assignments in the form of groups because he gets to work with a new group of students and sometimes his friends. He also communicated his interest in group discussion during the focus group. In a group, Cam helps the other students, and they help him. Additionally, Cam pointed out that the most important things he has been taught are note-taking, to pay attention, and behave. He works to help not hurt the class. He believes that loud talking and distractions harm the class.

When asked how a teacher teaches, Cam said class begins with a "Good morning," and then the teacher says, "Take out your books and be prepared." The teacher reviews, and she uses the Smart board to write examples. The class ends with a review of a worksheet and a homework assignment.

Relational experiences. Most students behave like Cam – they try to pay attention. But there are students who seem to start trouble, but Cam does not pay attention to them. If students behave badly, Cam chooses not be with that crowd. During reading and math class, students behave, but during study hall; half the students talk and half study for the next period. But during Portuguese class, students and the teacher come together. Native speakers are like mini-teachers to non-native speakers. Most conflicts develop from classroom debates, which are solved through discussion and compromise. Cam noted that fairness in the classroom is letting everyone get the same attention, and everyone has access to the equipment needed to learn.

Cam feels his teachers are like friends and thinks they see him as a good student – a nice, polite, gentleman who tries to get good grades. He likes teachers who joke around, show that they care, and give constructive criticism. Cam pointed out that his favorite teacher was his kindergarten teacher named Ms. King. She was nice and shared her stash of gummy bears and crackers with him. Cam noted that he loved the special time he had with Ms. King after class because she would teach Cam how to read and to do math at an early age. He self-reported that his teachers press him for understanding. Cam said he struggle with reading until second grade.

When asked what advice he would give to a new teacher, Cam said, “Have respect for students, and they will respect you, always pay attention to student needs, some more than others, and keep going over lessons that you teach.”

D’Shaun

Background. D’Shaun is a 13-year-old male who has attended Oliver Cox, a K-8 elementary/middle school, for two years. At the end of eighth grade, D’Shaun earned a C in reading and a C in math. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, he scored proficient in reading and basic in math. Brief during the interview and quiet during the focus group, D’Shaun presented a clear-cut view of what it takes to do well in school.

Achievement beliefs. D'Shaun believes that if he listens to the teacher, he will do well in school. To do well at Oliver Cross, he pays attention in class.

Thoughts about learning. When asked to reflect on how elementary and middle school was different, D'Shaun noted that in elementary school, he learned one topic in each class, but in middle school; he learns different topics in the same class. He feels smarter in middle school because he has learned a lot more than he knew before.

Once D'Shaun has entered class, he strives to pay attention to the teacher and not let "kids rub him away from his learning." When a student talks to him, he tells the teacher. To show that he is learning in reading class, D'Shaun reads his book and answers questions about articles. There are opportunities for students to work in groups during reading, and the students help each other with the answers. Additionally, he likes a variety of learning activities. While D'Shaun self-reported that he is a mastery-oriented learner who is focused on understanding tasks; his description of assignments reflects an interest in demonstrating competence as well.

D'Shaun knows he has done well in school when he gets assignments back, and the teacher has written great job on the assignment. When asked to recall an assignment he had done well, D'Shaun shared that he did well on a Social Studies test. He studied hard, and as a result, he learned where states were. To support his learning, the teacher gave the students a paper to study on the states. When D'Shaun has difficult assignments, he asks the teacher for help at point of difficulty and does not employ other strategies. To prepare for a test, D'Shaun asks a relative to help him prepare and to quiz him two to three times.

Instructional experiences. D'Shaun learns best with practice. However, during the focus group, D'Shaun did not select a preferred instructional setting. He also shared that he rereads the answer until he figures it out. D'Shaun likes when the teacher helps and tells him to focus on his work, or it will affect his grades. While he perceives his teachers communicate

mastery goals – focus on the learning task, D’Shaun noted that his teachers emphasize the need to get good grades.

D’Shaun does not like when the teacher gives work and does not explain the questions. D’Shaun enjoys history assignments because he gets to learn about different people like the Indians. A quiet class supports D’Shaun’s learning, and students’ talking hinders it. During the focus group, D’Shaun said note-taking and memorizing facts tasks also support his learning.

D’Shaun believes the most important thing he has been taught is to do your work so you can get into a good college.

Relational experiences. When asked to describe student behavior in class, D’Shaun said students talk about each other, what they are wearing, movies, and games. Some students are good, and some are disrespectful. Student problems like fighting are solved by talking out the problem, and fairness is when the person who started the problem gets in trouble. Teachers promote fairness by speaking to witnesses when there is a problem.

D’Shaun said his teachers think he is a great student because he does his work and participates in class, but he stated that his teachers pressed him for understanding only sometimes. His favorite teacher was Mr. Cobb because he made teaching fun. D’Shaun said Mr. Cobb would play games but was not able to discuss how games support his learning. When asked how teachers and students work together, D’Shaun pointed out that his math teacher works with him and other students and she breaks down the problems. “Sometimes she stays in front of the class, and sometimes she checks if we did well.” D’Shaun likes getting rewards to acknowledge his work. While D’Shaun thinks favorably of his math teacher, there are teachers he does not like. D’Shaun likes teachers who teach well, and his advice to a new teacher is to “stay strong.”

Student Profiles: Low Achievers

Nigel

Background. Nigel is a 13-year-old male who has attended West, a K-8 elementary/middle school, for one year. He ended his eighth-grade year with a C in reading and a D- in math, and he scored below basic in both reading and math on the Connecticut Mastery Test at the end of seventh grade. Freely participating in the study, Nigel exercised his right to not respond to certain questions and was quite clear when an answer was complete.

Achievement beliefs. Nigel straightforwardly described what it means to do well in school. He stated that getting “the grades” and doing the work support his achievement. Nigel explained As and Bs as good grades, and he thinks the teacher influences learning. He suggested that if he receives instruction from teacher, and he reviews the work; then he will do well on assignments.

Thoughts about learning. Nigel feels that middle school assignments are similar to elementary school. He stated that his reading class is the same in middle school as in elementary school.

When Nigel enters any class, he sits down, takes out his textbook, and gets ready to write. To stay focused, Nigel ignores other students and focuses on the board. He stated that I “don’t pay attention anybody else.”

Nigel’s did not self-report a definite achievement goal. He reported that it is sometime true that he is mastery-oriented learner, but his described thoughts about learning do not support a mastery-orientation.

Instructional experiences. Nigel stated that teachers support learning by going over his work. Nigel learns in a variety of way. He shared that he learns best when the teacher corrects the work and shows him how to solve problems. He also likes group work, hands-on activities,

and hearing the instruction, too. If he still does not understand, then re-teaching the assignment supports his learning. Nigel's teachers assign homework every day, and Nigel asserts that he completes homework to prepare for what will be on a test. On the survey, Nigel self-reported that his teachers sometimes communicated a mastery-oriented message in class, which is learning to understand and master skills.

Nigel's favorite class is science because of the hands-on activities, and he considers science learning is interesting. He is most attentive during science class. When he described science instruction, he shared that the teacher "shows us how to do it and she gives us a little station work. If we do it right, we'll get a good grade." Nigel considers science class to be easy, but when learning is difficult, he asks the teacher for assistance.

Nigel's least favorite class is math. To prepare for a math test, Nigel stated that he "looks at it a couple of times," and then he remembers the information. When he enters math class, the teacher expects him to complete the "do now." Nigel explained that the "do now" consists of going over what he previously learned. When learning math, if Nigel experiences difficulty, he seeks support from his peers, or he asks the teacher for help. Nigel had to attend summer school for math because he did not understand the teacher. Nigel reported that Dr. Dunn, who was from Nigeria, did not speak English well.

Relational experiences. Nigel self-reported that his teachers pressed him for understanding sometimes, but he was clear about what matters in his relationships with teachers. Respect illustrates how Nigel comprehends his relations with students and teachers. The most important things Nigel has been taught since he has been in school are manners and respect. Nigel feels that the teachers taught him how to show respect because they respected him first. Nigel remembered that he liked his favorite teacher because she was nice, and he also asserted that it helps if the teacher is funny. A humorous teacher supports his learning because he does

not like when a teacher is boring. Nigel believes his current teachers think he is smart, and he is not afraid of conflict with his teachers or his peers. He stated that if there is respect in the class, he feels comfortable. When asked what advice he would give a new teacher, Nigel responded, “Give respect.”

Mia

Background. A 13-year-old female, Mia attended West School, an elementary/middle school, for only one year. She earned a C in reading and a D+ in math at the end of eighth grade, and on the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test; she scored below basic on both the reading and math sections. With several smiles and a few chuckles, Mia willingly described how she participated in the teaching and learning process.

Achievement beliefs. Mia believes that if she gets good grades and does not get into trouble, then she will do well in school. A good grade is an A, B, and sometimes a C. Good behavior is not getting into trouble with the principal or teachers and not getting suspended.

Thoughts about learning. Mia’s elementary school and middle school work were different. She pointed out that in middle school the work got harder, and then she started getting bad grades, and did not understand questions most of the time in math. Her best grades are in science because she understands science better than any other subject.

When Mia enters class, she sits in front and waves her hand at the teacher when she needs help. Mia likes doing the work instead of hearing the work in class. In class, she prefers to work by herself. The subject she is studying in class and how the teacher presents the information affect her learning. Mia reported that she is mastery and performance-oriented, which means she focuses on learning for understanding, and she wants to show she is competent through her grades.

When asked to describe an assignment she had done well, Mia noted that she had earned a 100 on a math test because she studied, tried her best, and received tutoring from the teacher. Mia said the teacher made sure she understood the math. When assignments are difficult in science, Mia's favorite class, she asks the teacher and her mom for help. The teacher rereads the problem and describes it, and her mom tells Mia what she remembered from school and helps her figure out the problem. When math was difficult, Mia said the teacher did not do anything, but the summer school teacher helps. The summer school teacher pulls Mia aside.

To prepare for a test, Mia reviews her notes, looks at the pre-test, and then practice.

Mia receives homework every day in every subject, and it helps her when she goes home and to do the work herself.

Instructional experiences. Mia learns best when the teacher teaches her one-to-one instead of with the whole class, and this works because the teacher can answer Mia's questions. She also likes work with the teacher when she tells her to take notes, and when she shows videos.

Mia said she prefers instruction when it looks easy rather than hard problem on the board. When teachers write the problems on the board and then solve problem, Mia learns. While strict teaching does not help learning. Mia thought that teacher goals were mastery-oriented, which focuses on teaching for understanding and developing new skills.

Mia thinks worksheets are interesting and engaging because it has a whole bunch of problems. If she does not understand a problem, she skips it and goes to the next.

The most important things Mia has been taught are math and reading, which you need to succeed in life. For Mia success is when she does well, and when people tell her she has done well.

Relational experiences. Mia noted that students talk loud and were rude in math and specialists'(e.g., art, music) classes, and they behaved in reading and Social Studies because the

teachers are strict. She also stated that students fight and argue, and then they are sent to the office, and their parents are called. Mia said students can be suspended for fighting and arguing, and this interferes with Mia's learning because the teacher has to stop teaching and she does not learn. When asked to describe how fairness looks in the classroom, Mia shared that when students cheat, they get the same punishment.

Mr. H is Mia's favorite teacher because he taught her well, and she understood everything he did. While Mia reported that she believes her teachers press her for understanding and to do good work on the survey, she did not mention this during the interview or focus group. Mia says her teachers think she is talkative, and sometimes she has an attitude, but she is good when she wants to be, and she is smart. Mia described that teachers and students in reading class work in groups and independently, but she prefers to work independently with the teacher. Mia also prefers a teacher with a sense of humor and who provides one-to-one instruction. Mia said she gets along with all students but not all teachers. The teachers yell at her when she gets mad and talks back. Mia's advice for a new teacher is "sometimes students are hard to deal with." Furthermore," reward students, and get to know them."

Parker

Background. A 13-year-old male Parker has attended Oliver Cox Elementary/Middle School for two years. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, Parker scored below basic on both the reading and math sections, and at the end of eighth grade, Parker earned a D in reading and a D in math. He self-reported that he is mastery/performance-oriented learner, which means improving his skills and getting good grades are his goals.

Achievement beliefs. Parker believes getting good grades and listening is what it takes to do well in school. Parker thinks As, Bs, and Cs represents good grades, and to do well at Oliver Cross, Parker listens and completes his work.

Thoughts about learning. Parker sees the difference between elementary and middle school. He states that assignments are harder. In elementary school, Parker got Ds and Cs, but now in middle school, he gets Cs, As, and Bs.

Parker shared that when he is learning in class, he is in his own world. He ignores distractions and people talking to him. When he enters the class, he pulls out a notebook and pencil, listens to the teacher, and takes notes to study at home. Parker feels he learns best when he takes notes and what gets in the way is noise from other students.

When asked to describe an assignment he felt he had done well, Parker shared the time when he got a B+ in science because he was paying attention, not talking in class, and I made corrections. Parker believes the corrections and examples from the teacher help his learning. When Parker has a difficult reading assignment, he will stop a minute and think what the word is and if needed, ask the teacher for help to make sure he understands. When math is difficult, he will get a piece of scrap paper and try to solve the problem.

To prepare for a test, Parker said that when he gets free time, he studies instead of playing video games and watching TV. He currently studies his notes about an hour a day.

Homework helps Parker remember what was taught during the day. Parker gets a lot of writing, science, and math homework but does not get much reading homework.

Instructional experiences. Parker identified the following things teachers do to help him learn: give examples, tell us to write notes, put notes on the board, give the answer to the first one, and then show us how to do it. Parker said he learns best taking notes, and the type of teaching he prefers is going straight to the work instead of joking around. He stated that his teachers communicate learning for understanding.

The assignments that interest Parker are taxonomies and defining words, which are strategies related to vocabulary learning. Parker likes to write down the words he does not understand. He uses the dictionary and computer to look up definitions.

The most important thing Parker has been taught is how to pay attention, which is easier than talking in class. Parker stated that “A class may be hard but the only thing I have to do is pay attention.”

Relational experiences. Some students in Parker’s classes talk a lot, and they interrupt the teacher, while other students listen all the time and get As. If a substitute is in the class, the students act like they do not care. Some of the problems among students are arguing and instigating. Some students argue about shoes. Sometimes teachers help to solve the problems, but there are times when students try to solve the problems themselves. Parker thinks that fairness is when students share stuff, and it is given back at the end of the day. For example, “the teacher lets us use his stuff, like sharpeners, pencils, pens, and paper to write on.” Parker gets along with his teachers and the students. He goes to the movies and does homework with friends at his house.

Parker’s favorite teacher knew his mom. He enjoyed hearing about how his teacher and his mom went to school together. Parker said that his teachers probably think he is generous, a worker not a talker, and proper because he is organized. Parker shared that the teachers and students work in groups, and the teacher helps the students. Parker said in reading class, the teacher will read the stories to the class, and then they have to write a paper. Parker listens, and it helps him to understand, but the work with the teachers could be better, if students showed more effort. Parker prefers a teacher who tells him what to do, and then checks to make sure he is learning, but he self-reported that his teachers do not press him for understanding. Parker’s

advice to a new teacher is “learn the student, see what he does best, and show the student respect.”

Cheyanne

Background. Cheyanne is 13 years old, and she attended West Elementary/Middle School for three years. On the seventh grade Connecticut Mastery Test, Cheyanne scored below basic on both the reading and math sections. At the end of eighth grade, she had earned a C in reading and a D- in math. Cheyanne was mature and appeared to be self-reliant with her learning during the interview.

Achievement beliefs. Cheyanne believes if she stays focused, knows when to joke, and is respectful, then she will do well in school.

Thoughts about learning. The difference between elementary and middle school is Cheyanne does more independent work. She said that you have to do it on your own to be prepared for life.

School is for learning and in class; Cheyanne stays away from her friends and stays focused. She said friends will always be there. When asked to describe an assignment she had done well, Cheyanne described a science assignment. She said I did a good job, it was organized, and I got a good grade. She also thought she did a well. The teacher supported Cheyanne with the assignment by providing websites, and then directing her to read for information. With difficult assignments, Cheyanne rereads the questions, or she will ask her friends for help if they understand and can help. Cheyanne elaborated on her challenges with reading. She is not good with reading and telling about the book, so she rereads and focuses to understand. However, she shared that she prefers group work for learning and that the teacher makes a difference in her learning if the teacher breaks the learning down. Cheyanne reported

that she is a mastery-oriented learner. She is focused on getting better with her skills and understanding.

To prepare for tests, Cheyanne tests herself at home and school to check her learning. With homework, she completes it because she wants to remember school work, and then she gets to try the work on her own. Cheyanne gets homework every night and receives a lot of math homework.

Instructional experiences. Teachers give Cheyanne worksheets, problems to solve, and homework to help her learning. She learns best by listening and prefers when teachers provide the steps to solve a problem and then gives a more challenging problem to solve. Additionally, group discussion is a preferred instructional method. Cheyanne does not like when a teacher just gives problems without guidance.

Cheyanne enjoys social studies assignments because she learns about Black History and her culture. In school for nine years, Cheyanne said the most important thing she has been taught is to focus on your work because she would be able to do the work in high school or college. In addition, she would be able to have a career and not a job. Cheyanne said a job is “just over broke” but with a career, you make more money, and people enjoy doing it.

When asked to describe what happens in class from beginning to end, Cheyanne stated that first, she enters and sits down. Next, she copies the objective on the board into her notebook. Then, the teacher asks for answers to questions from the textbook after reading some passage. Last, the teacher provides an assignment, we take notes, and on Friday, we have a test. Cheyanne perceived that her teachers communicated a mastery-goal orientation in class – focus on the work and focus on improving your skills.

Relational experiences. Students are different at Cheyanne’s school. Some are rude, disrespectful, and do not care about anything, but some students get their work done and try to

focus. When there is conflict, the guidance counselor gives advice, and the principal lets you know that acting up a school is not right. But in math class, students behave because the teacher is strict and would write the student up. In class, teachers work with students in groups and moves from group to group to see how each group is doing. Cheyanne likes this form of instruction because if you do not understand, there are people to share answers with you. Cheyanne also shared that fairness is when the teacher goes around helping everyone. Cheyanne has a good relationship with students because she is friendly and a nice relationship with teachers because she does her work.

Cheyanne's favorite teacher was Ms. Good because she listened when she had a problem, took time to get to know her, and she taught. She also likes a teacher with a sense of humor and who cares. She does not like whole group instruction and prefers small group and/or one-to-one. When teachers are strict – want people to do it their way – instruction goes in one ear and out the other. Cheyanne said her teachers think she is a hard worker, serious, and comes to school to get her work done. She also perceived that her teachers pressed her for understanding. If Cheyanne could give advice to a new teacher, she would say, “be patient, don't pick favorites – focus on the whole class, and go through steps for people to understand, and make sure the whole class understands, not just one person.”

Summary of Findings for Student Profiles

The profiles were written to capture the students' voices and to summarize their school-level experiences. The researcher described students' perceptions of their learning, instructional, and relational factors. Each perspective is unique and highlights the variations of pedagogical experiences. The next section – a description of findings guided by the research questions – will outline the similarities and differences across high, average, and low subgroups to further understanding African American adolescents' achievement.

A Description of Findings Guided by the Research Questions

The description of the findings in this section is guided by the research questions (learning, instruction, relations). The findings are organized by achievement subgroup: high, average, and low. Data analysis consisted of coding, categorizing, drawing and verifying conclusions.

Findings are reported in tables organized by major and minor categories that emerged from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales, interview responses, and focus group data. The major and minor categories were developed both inductively and deductively in response to the research questions. Definitions of the major and minor categories are provided in the description of the findings.

Findings for Research Question One: How do African American Adolescents Perceive Their Learning?

The following tables summarize the findings related to research question one. Data were provided from each data collection method to complete each table. Table 12 summarizes the data from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales for learning. The scale of personal achievement goal orientations includes: (a) mastery – attention is focused on the task to demonstrate competence; (b) performance-approach – attention is focused on self to demonstrate competence; and (c) performance-avoidance – attention is focused on self to avoid demonstration of incompetence. Tables 13-15 provide a summary of the findings from the interview data for learning. Tables 16-18 provide details from the focus group data for learning. A description of the findings for each table is provided and is organized by achievement subgroups (high, average, and low).

Table 12

Findings for Research Question One: Mean Scores from the PALS subscale of Personal Achievement Goal Orientation by Achievement Subgroup

| Personal Achievement Goal Orientation Subscales | Achievement Subgroup | | |
|---|----------------------|---------|------|
| | High | Average | Low |
| Mastery Goal Orientation | 4.95 | 4.80 | 4.45 |
| Performance-Approach Goal Orientation | 2.35 | 2.89 | 2.95 |
| Performance-Avoidance Goal Orientation | 2.62 | 3.94 | 2.31 |

Note. Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, et. al., 2000). This instrument implements a Likert response scale of 1-5.

Table 13

Findings for Research Question One: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for High Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Achievement | Learning | Learning | | | | |
|---------|--------------|-------------|----------------|--------|-----------|--------|--------|
| | Goals | Progression | Strategies | | | | |
| | School Level | Middle vs. | Do Well/ Self- | | Homework/ | vs. | Study |
| | Achievement | Elementary | Attentiveness | Assess | Recall | Appeal | Skills |
| Jason | 8 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Reggie | 4 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 |
| Kojo | 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Dana | 7 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 3 |
| Total | 24 | 7 | 16 | 14 | 9 | 14 | 15 |

Table 14

Findings for Research Question One: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for Average Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Achievement | Learning | Learning | | | | |
|---------|--------------|-------------|----------------|--------|-----------|--------|--------|
| | Goals | Progression | Strategies | | | | |
| | School Level | Middle vs. | Do Well/ Self- | | Homework/ | vs. | Study |
| | Achievement | Elementary | Attentiveness | Assess | Recall | Appeal | Skills |
| Michele | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Melanie | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Cam | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| D'Shaun | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 7 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 7 | 12 |

Table 15

Findings for Research Question One: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for Low Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Achievement | Learning | Learning | | | | |
|----------|--------------|-------------|----------------|--------|-----------|--------|--------|
| | Goals | Progression | Strategies | | | | |
| | School Level | Middle vs. | Do Well/ Self- | | Homework/ | vs. | Study |
| | Achievement | Elementary | Attentiveness | Assess | Recall | Appeal | Skills |
| Nigel | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Mia | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Parker | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Cheyenne | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 7 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 7 |

Table 16

Findings for Research Question One: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for High Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Learning Preference | | | | Learning Strategies | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|---------------------|-------|--------------|----------------|
| | Independence | Communalism | Competition | Verve | Focus | Style | Interference | Meta-cognition |
| Jason | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Reggie | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Kojo | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Dana | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |

Table 17

Findings for Research Question One: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for Average Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Learning Preference | | | | Learning Strategies | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|---------------------|-------|--------------|----------------|
| | Independence | Communalism | Competition | Verve | Focus | Style | Interference | Meta-cognition |
| Michele | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Melanie | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Cam | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| D'Shaun | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |

Table 18

Findings for Research Question One: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for Low Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Learning Preference | | | | Learning Strategies | | | |
|----------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| | Independence | Communalism | Competition | Verve | Focus | Learning Style | Interference | Meta-cognition |
| Nigel | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Mia | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Parker | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Cheyenne | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 3 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |

High achievers. All four students in the high-achievement subgroup self-reported a mastery goal orientation on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. Three of the four students' responses were a five on a one to five Likert scale, with a five signifying a statement, such as "One of my goals in class is to learn as much as I can," is "very true." This orientation implies that students' purposes or goals in an achievement setting (e.g., school or the classroom) are to develop competence and to extend their understanding. Students focus their attention on a task. Mastery goal orientation is associated with adaptive patterns of learning, such as developing new skills, trying to understand the work, and evaluating mastery based on self-assessment standards (Ames, 1992; Midgley, et al., 2000).

Three of the four students in the high achievers identified a preference for communalism (i.e., group learning) when presented with the focus group scenarios. One student did not identify a preference for learning during the focus group options; one student had a preference for group learning and competition; and one student communicated a preference for individualism and competition in conjunction with group work. The following statements relate to the students' learning preferences:

Group learning is best because it helps with problem solving and I get another point of view. It makes me push myself harder. In addition, competition is good. (Jason)

I like group work to hear other students' points of view, but I do not like to compete because it can affect self-esteem. In most cases, teachers assign group work. (Reggie)

I learn best with others and by myself. It depends on the work. If the work is hard, I learn best by myself. If I need only a little assistance, I can learn with others. In addition, I like to compete. (Dana)

During the interviews, high achievers gave responses that reflected a variety of learning patterns, such as effort, harder assignments, attentiveness, and self-assessment, strategies versus appeal, study skills, and recall. All high achievers mentioned effort as a learning pattern related to school-level achievement, but each student reported exerting effort differently.

“I always try my best to get the best grades. I am an A/B student, and if I get anything less, I try harder. I am determined and if I put my mind to something, I think I could achieve it.” (Jason)

To do well in school, I try my best to listen and take notes to be prepared for tests.
(Kojo)

To get As and Bs, I study for tests, start projects on time, and participate in class.
(Reggie)

When I do not understand the instruction, I ask a lot of questions and put forth more effort to succeed. (Dana)

High achievers also perceived his or her school assignments as harder as they transitioned from elementary to middle school. For example:

The work is harder in middle school... you do more work...and you work to get the grades. (Jason)

Math is a little harder, but I understand it. In elementary school, we had basic math - adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing but now we have Algebra and orders of operations. (Dana)

Teachers push harder, and you get a lot more work. (Reggie)

Middle school is tougher, but teacher demonstrate for understanding. (Kojo)

All four high achievers shared perceptions of attentiveness as a learning pattern but reported attending to classroom learning differently. Some of the examples of attending were taking notes, focusing, not talking to friends, asking questions, and ignoring people. In addition, each student shared their perceptions of assignments. These students displayed self-assessment as a learning behavior, i.e., they identified information about their performance based on their own standards and/or normative standards.

I did well on the summer book report because it was something that interested me, and it made me work harder to do my best. (Jason)

The teacher gave the Latin American assignment a month in advance, and I worked on it daily. I checked over it and got a 100. I knew I learned because I remembered most things about the person I researched. (Reggie)

I did well with the Lewis and Clark assignment because I got an A. I also put all my heart into the assignment because it was necessary and important. (Kojo)

I wrote a timed essay in fourth grade, and I got an award for it because the teachers thought it was good and because I practices paragraphs, bandwagon sentences, and introductions. (Dana)

When asked during the interview to explain how they dealt with difficult assignments, high achievers provided the strategies they used or said that they appealed to an adult for help. Strategies versus appeal emerged as a learning pattern when students stated their perceptions of learning a difficult assignment. At point of difficulty, two students had a repertoire of strategies they could use before they appealed for help from the teacher. The strategies included listening more, writing everything down, saving papers, going to a person good in science, asking questions, and going over it twice. The other two students stated that they appealed to the teacher and/or classmates at point of difficulty.

When asked during the interview to explain how they prepared for a test, each student described how they studied. Thus, study skills emerged as a learning pattern from the data.

Education comes easy to me, so I only study a week in advance for a challenging subject like science. For math or written expression, I study before I go to sleep, so I remember what I learned. (Jason)

I study at home for about an hour for tests, and then I go over the material on the bus and in homeroom to make sure I remember. At times, I study with a friend. (Reggie)

I have a good memory, so I study the night before, and when I finish my work, I ask my friends to pre-quiz me at school and home. (Kojo)

To prepare for tests, I write notes, look over previous homework, and if needed, I will look up information on the computer. If I do not understand math that well, I play math games on the computer. (Dana)

Recall emerged as a learning pattern when students were asked to explain whether or not homework helps them to learn. Three of the four high achievers said homework helped them to remember what they had learned. Only one student noted that homework helped her to self-monitor and self-correct her performance.

Homework is not helpful if it does not help me to understand what I am learning. There are times the teacher just corrects the homework, puts it in the grade book, and that is it. When I fix my mistakes or when someone corrects me, it helps me to learn better. "It shows me my errors and how I'm supposed to do it." (Dana)

Summary. High achievers perceived their learning as mastery oriented. They self-reported mastery goal orientations, and the learning patterns that emerged from interview data supported the proposition that these high achievers are motivated to engage and perform in school and the classroom. The students demonstrated patterns of adaptive learning (e.g., effort-based learning, attentiveness to classroom learning processes, self-assessment of tasks, strategies at point of difficulty, study skills, and recall).

Data from the focus groups supported the proposition that high achievers preferred communalism for learning; however, these data were not present in the interviews. One student said that group work supported problem solving, and the other student said that group work revealed other students' points of view. Both students' goals for group work focused on the learning.

Average achievers. All four students in the average-achievement category self-reported a mastery goal orientation on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. These students achieved means of 5, 5, 5, and 4.2, all of which were higher than the sample mean of 4.15 for mastery. Two students also self-reported a performance-approach orientation: these students achieved means of 4.58 and 3, which were higher than the sample mean of 2.46. The performance-approach orientation implies that students' purposes or goals are in school or class is to demonstrate competence in comparison to others. A mastery orientation did not predominate for the average achiever during the focus groups and interviews.

Two of four average achievers identified a preference for group learning when responding to the focus group scenarios. Group learning represented the theoretical category of communalism, which is social interdependence to promote understanding. One student preferred

verve, a variety of activities, and one student preferred competition and individualism. The following statements were related to the identification learning preferences:

I prefer working in groups. I like when the teacher comes over to ask if we need help, and it is better when the teacher reviews with me. (Melanie)

I prefer group learning with some individual attention. I like hands on projects, and if I am getting a C, I want the teacher to help. (Cam)

Shanice (competing for grades) and Naomi (working independently) represent my learning preference. I learn best when it is quiet, and when I am by myself with no interruptions. Note-taking also helps. (Michele)

James (interest in variety of activities) represents my learning preference and a quiet class supports my learning. (D'Shaun)

During the interviews, average achievers described a variety of learning patterns. Most of the learning patterns were similar to those of the high achievers, and only two learning patterns are distinctive to average-achievement students – good grades and content. Learning patterns such as good grades, content, attentiveness, self-assessment, strategies and appeal, study skills, and recall emerged from the coding, recoding, categorizing of interview responses.

Good grades emerged as a learning pattern when average achievers stated their perceptions of school-level achievement. Two students identified good grades as evidence of

doing well in school. For one student, doing well in school was connected to her goals; the other students described doing well in school as listening and paying attention.

Good grades, class participation, and listening to teachers helps me to do well in school. (Melanie)

Doing well in school means excelling in any subject and trying to get good grades. (Cam)

Michele connects doing well in school with achieving her goals. Two of her goals are to become a zoologist and a professional ballerina.

D'Shaun believes that if he listens to the teacher, he will do well in school.

While “good grades” summarized what it meant for two average achievers to do well in school, all high achievers related effort to school-level achievement.

When asked about the differences between middle school and elementary school, average achievers referred to lesson content. Two students said they were learning different topics. One student highlighted that he learned to take notes, and one student mentioned learning Algebraic equations for real life use. High achiever cited harder assignments to describe the difference between elementary and middle school.

Attentiveness emerged as a pattern of learning when average achievers were asked to describe how they succeed in class. Students in the average-achievement subgroup thought of

attending as ignoring people in class, while for high achievers, attentiveness involved more than ignoring distractions (e.g., taking notes, asking questions). Average achievers commented:

I sit away from friends to get into a good high school. (Melanie)

I block everything out and listen to the teacher. (Cam)

“Don’t let the kids rub you away from your learning.” (D’Shaun)

Only one average achiever comment was similar to the high achievers:

Make sure you have the necessary materials take notes and stay after class if you do not understand. (Michele)

Self-assessment emerged as a learning pattern when average achievers were asked about doing well on an assignment, which were the same learning pattern high achievers reported for doing well on an assignment.

Winning the science fair at school and going to the state “took the cake.” I learned that a science fair project takes a lot of time, concentration, and willpower. “You can’t give up. Keep on trying.” (Michele)

I did well on the book report because I worked in group. I am shy, and I opened up. (Melanie)

I got six out of six on the writing assignment, and I learned a new perspective on phones in school. (Cam)

I did well on the Social Studies test. I studied hard, and as a result, I learned where the states were that I did not know. (D'Shaun)

Strategies versus appeal emerged as a learning pattern during the interview when average achievers were asked about doing a difficult assignment. This category also emerged for high achievers. Two average achievers used strategies at point of difficulty, and two students appealed for help from the teacher. The strategies included rereading the question, trying on my own, moving on to the next problem, reviewing, and trying to rethink. Two students reported that they would only ask the teacher for help.

During the interview, average achievers cited study skills as a pattern of learning when asked how they prepared for a test. Each student presented at least one study skill method:

I would ask a relative to quiz me two to three times. (D'Shaun)

I study at night and sometimes weeks before. I also study on the bus and in advance especially when I need to know 60 words. (Cam)

To study vocabulary, I fold the paper in half, look at the word, recall the definition, check for my understanding, use worksheets, and rewrite equations.

(Melanie)

I pretest myself, ask my mom for help, and I break what I am studying in chunks.

(Michele)

Recall emerged as a learning pattern when average achievers were asked if homework helped their learning. Two students said homework served as a review of learning. One student mentioned that if she had trouble with homework, then she would ask to her mom and dad for help, and the other student did not respond to this question.

Summary. The average achievers self-reported mastery goal orientations, and some interview data supported this proposition. The learning patterns related to mastery were self-assessment, attentiveness, and strategies at point of difficulty, study skills, and recall. However, two students' self-assessments referred to grades versus their own opinion of what it means to do well. In addition, only two students mentioned strategies to be used at point of difficulty. The other two students only mentioned appealing to the teacher. All average achievers mentioned at least one study skill method, and they identified homework as a way of recalling what happened in class.

While the primary goal orientation was mastery for average achievers, the group also displayed some learning patterns associated with the performance-approach goal. The performance approach orientation was evident in two students. These two students used grades to measure learning, attended to self rather than to the task, and appealed for help rather than using strategies. Therefore, the average achievers in this study perceived learning as both mastery and performance oriented.

Average achievers articulated that group work supported their learning and focus group responses about the influence of group work on learning were evident. Two students identified

how group work helped them to focus on the task, and one student identified how group work gave her access to the teacher. For two students, group work was related to the accomplishment of a task. Only one average achiever learning preference was competition and individualism. This student mentioned that she enjoyed competing during the interview in reference to winning the science fair.

Low achievers. Three of the four low-achievement students self-reported a mastery goal orientation on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. Two students' scores were 5 on a 5-point Likert scale. One student's score was 4.6, and the other student's score was 3.2, which was below the sample mean of 4.15. Two low achievers showed a performance-approach goal orientation. They achieved means of 4, which was higher than the sample performance-approach mean of 2.46.

Three of the four low achievers identified group work as a learning preference but did not elaborate on how group work influenced their learning. They pointed out how the teacher supported their learning during the focus group. One student preferred working independently, and the following comments during the focus group highlight their learning preferences:

Learning is the same for all subjects. In math class, the teacher did not speak English, and I could not understand him. (Nigel)

The subject and the teacher could affect my learning if I do not understand them. (Mia)

I learn best when the teacher asks me to take notes and what gets in my way is when other students ask you questions, bother you, or make noise.

(Parker)

The teacher makes a difference in learning. The teacher needs to break down information to help learning. (Cheyanne)

During the interviews, low achievers reported a variety of learning patterns. Two of the learning patterns were similar to those reported in the high and average-achievement groups (self-assessment and strategy and appeal). Low achievers reported the some of the same learning patters as high and average achievers: grades, attentiveness, and study skills; however, their responses were not as detailed.

Grades emerged as a learning pattern when low achievers were asked to describe what it means to do well in school. Three students identified good grades as evidence of doing well in school. For one student, doing well was related to attentiveness and conduct.

The grades and doing the work supports doing well in school. (Nigel)

Getting good grades and not getting in trouble supports doing well in school.

(Mia)

Getting good grades and listening represents doing well in school. (Parker)

Staying focused, knowing when to joke, and being respectful supports doing well in school. (Cheyanne)

While good grades summarized what it meant for three low achievers to do well in school, two average achievers also reported doing well means getting good grades. In comparison, all high achievers attributed school-level achievement to effort.

Two low achievers perceived their transition from elementary to middle school as involving harder assignments, and two perceived middle school as no different from elementary school. One student responded that middle school required more independence and was preparation for life.

Attentiveness emerged as a learning pattern when low achievers were asked to describe how they focused in the classroom. They focused attention on ignoring other people. This perception is similar to the report from average achievers; whereas, high achievers attended to the task. Low achievers commented:

I am in my own world. I ignore distractions, listen to the teacher, and take notes.
(Parker)

I stay away from my friends, and I focus. (Cheyanne)

I sit down, take out the book, get ready to write, and ignore other students. (Nigel)

Self-assessment emerged as a learning pattern when students were asked to describe what it means to do well on an assignment. This category also emerged for high and average

achievers in response to the same question. The low achievers used only grades to evaluate their performance, while the average and high achievers used a variety of self-assessment methods.

I got a B+ in science because I pay attention, do not talk, made corrections, and followed what the teacher told me. (Parker)

I got a 100 on the math test because I studied. (Mia)

I did well with a science project because my work was organized and I got a good grade. (Cheyanne)

Strategies versus appeal emerged as a learning pattern when low achievers were asked what they did when learning a difficult assignment. Most of the low achievers appealed to the teacher at point of difficulty with learning instead of using strategies. When asked how they handle difficult assignments, low achievers said:

Science is easy, but when the assignment is hard, I ask the teacher for help. (Nigel)

When science is hard, I ask the teacher or my mom. (Mia)

When reading is difficult, I stop a minute and think what the word is, and if needed, I ask the teacher for help to make sure I understand. When math is hard, I get a piece of scrap paper and try to solve the problem. (Parker)

When assignments are hard, I reread the question, or I ask my friends for help.

(Cheyanne)

Study skills emerged as a learning pattern when low achievers were asked how they prepared for a test. Each student presented at least one study skill yet their methods were not comprehensive as the average and high achievers:

I look at it a couple of times, and I remember. (Nigel)

I review my notes, look at the pre-test, and then practice. (Mia)

When I get free time, I study instead of playing video games and watching TV. I study my notes for about an hour a day. (Parker)

I test myself at home and school. (Cheyanne)

Recall emerged as a learning pattern when low achievers were asked if homework supported their learning. Two student completed homework to remember information. All four students perceived homework to help learning. However, in comparison to high achievers, low achievers did not communicate a purpose for remembering.

Summary. The low achievers in this study self-reported a mastery goal orientation, but the learning patterns that emerged from interview data did not support a mastery goal orientation. Their perceptions of learning were more aligned to a performance-approach orientation. For example, students communicated that assignments were harder but did not describe effort or the

rigor needed to complete harder assignments. Students' descriptions of attentiveness focused more themselves than on the task. For example, students focused on ignoring other people in class. Students' descriptions of self-assessment were more aligned to grades than to their own standards of what it meant to do well. Most low achievers appealed to the teacher at point of difficult to appear competent rather than using a variety of strategies. Study skills for this achievement groups were evident, but their methods were not comprehensive. Finally, low achievers completed homework but did not communicate a purpose for remembering the information.

Low achievers also articulated a preference for group learning but did not communicate a purpose or goal for this type of learning. They also did not communicate the types of behaviors they would use during group learning. Low achievers did communicate during the focus group that they wanted teacher support for their learning during group work. While low achievers, when presented with a choice, choose group work as the preferred learning context, they also identified that they preferred a learning context where the teacher is available to support their learning.

Findings for Research Questions Two: How do African American Adolescents Perceive Instructional Factors?

The following tables summarize the findings related to research question two. Data were provided from each data collection method to complete each table. Table 19 summarizes the data from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales for learning. The subscales representing perceptions of teacher goals include (a) teacher mastery – teacher emphasizes task engagement for learning; (b) teacher performance-approach – teacher emphasizes task engagement to demonstrate competence; and (c) teacher performance-avoidance – teacher emphasizes task engagement to avoid demonstration of incompetence. Teacher goal orientation refers to the goal

structure that the teacher communicates in the classroom, which is mastery or performance. The organizational categories are teacher goal orientation, preferred instructional context, and instructional methods. Preferred instructional context refers to the type of instructional setting a student prefers, which could be communalism (group work), verve (variety), competition, and/or individualism. Instructional methods refer to the “teaching methods that assist in student understanding” (Darby, 2005, p. 428). Tables 20-22 provide a summary of the findings from the interview data for learning. Tables 23-25 provide details from the focus group data for learning. A description of the findings for each table is provided and organized by achievement subgroups (high, average, and low). All definitions of theoretical categories included in the table are defined in Appendix H.

Table 19

Findings for Research Question Two: Mean Scores from the PALS subscale of Perceptions of Teacher Goals by Achievement Subgroup

| | Achievement Subgroup | | |
|--|----------------------|---------|------|
| | <i>M</i> | | |
| Perceptions of Teacher Goals Subscales | High | Average | Low |
| Teacher Mastery Goal | 4.70 | 4.65 | 4.45 |
| Teacher Performance Approach Goal | 2.55 | 2.56 | 2.32 |
| Teacher Performance Avoidance Goal | 2.43 | 2.87 | 2.81 |

Note. Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, et. al., 2000). This instrument implements a Likert response scale of 1-5.

Table 20

Findings for Research Question Two: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for High Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Content | | Instructional Preference | |
|---------|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| | Most Important Things Taught | Differentiation | Learning Style | Teaching Method |
| Jason | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Reggie | 14 | 7 | 2 | 2 |
| Kojo | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Dana | 8 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 27 | 14 | 5 | 5 |

Table 21

Findings for Research Question Two: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for Average Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Content | | Instructional Preference | |
|---------|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| | Most Important Things Taught | Differentiation | Learning Style | Teaching Method |
| Michele | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Melanie | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Cam | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| D'Shaun | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 5 | 5 | 8 | 6 |

Table 22

Findings for Research Question Two: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for Low Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Content | | Instructional Preference | |
|----------|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| | Most Important Things Taught | Differentiation | Learning Style | Teaching Method |
| Nigel | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Mia | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Parker | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Cheyenne | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 7 | 1 | 4 | 8 |

Table 23

Findings for Research Question Two: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for High Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Instructional Preference | | | |
|---------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Differentiation | Learning Style | Teaching Method | Teacher Quality |
| Jason | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Reggie | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Kojo | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| Dana | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 1 | 13 | 7 | 5 |

Table 24

Findings for Research Question Two: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for Average Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Instructional Preference | | | |
|---------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Differentiation | Learning Style | Teaching Method | Teacher Quality |
| Michele | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Melanie | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Cam | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| D'Shaun | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Total | 3 | 7 | 7 | 0 |

Table 25

Findings for Research Question Two: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for Low Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Instructional Preference | | | |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Differentiation | Learning Style | Teaching Method | Teacher Quality |
| Nigel | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Mia | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Parker | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Cheyenne | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 5 | 6 | 5 | 2 |

High achievers. All four students in the high-achievement subgroup self-reported a teacher mastery goal orientation on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. Two of four students' responses were a five on a one to five-point Likert scale, with a five signifying a statement such as "My teacher thinks mistakes are okay as long as we are learning," is "very true." Teacher mastery goal orientation implies that students perceived that their teachers wanted them to enjoy learning, recognized their effort, and gave them time to understand new ideas.

During the focus group, high achievers shared their preferred instructional context. Two students shared a preference for discussions groups (communalism), but their reasons were different. One student said discussion group supported better understanding, and the other student said discussion groups helped him to do better on tests. One student preferred videos and worksheets, and the other student shared that she learned best with note-taking and memorization. The following examples represent students' preferred instructional contexts:

I like Mrs. Pathway's discussion groups. I can interpret and share information with people in my group. (Jason)

Mrs. Pathway's teaching is best for me because the discussion of ideas in groups helps me on the test and to understand the book better. (Reggie)

I like Mr. Jones because of the visual idea, and I like Mrs. Smith because she uses worksheets. (Kojo)

Mr. Planas helps learning to read best – memorization and taking notes. (Dana)

During the interviews, high achievers' responses reflected a variety of instructional methods such as learning style, checking for understanding, show and tell clearly, differentiation, math and reading content, and explanation. The learning style method, which is a type of instruction and learning model that promotes understanding and is best for the student, emerged as an instructional method during the interview in response to the question, "How do you learn best?"

I learn best with hands-on experience such as creating a commercial in class. (Jason)

I learn best by listening to the teacher and taking notes at the same time. (Kojo)

Some teachers show videos, some like to talk, and some let you copy notes. I learn best when the teacher provides examples and from watching videos. (Dana)

I learn best in a quiet environment: sitting at a table on a chair with the lights off and the computer on. (Reggie)

Checking for understanding emerged as an instructional method when high achievers were asked during the interview, "what do your teachers do to help you learn?"

I prefer when teachers show examples, ask if we understand, and then give examples for us to try. (Dana)

Mr. Kelly demonstrates what we need to do, sit at his desk, but he always stops to see who needs help. (Kojo)

I prefer when teachers go over what they have said, and they make sure I understand. They also offer space for questions. (Reggie)

I ask them questions, and they help with problems like parent-guardian figures. They look out for you and help you to improve. (Jason)

When asked during the interview to explain what type of teaching worked best, high achievers described an instructional method that involved explaining and providing examples which led to the creation of the category “show and tell clearly.”

If I do not understand, go over it. I like the repetition. (Reggie)

Show me what to do instead of telling me what to do. (Kojo)

Teachers need to stay on topic instead of changing subjects. They should explain one thing at a time. This helps me to remember. (Dana)

When asked what types of assignments were engaging, high achievers shared a variety of responses, which led to the creation of the category “differentiation.” It thought that differentiation helps to promote engagement and occurs when a teacher provides a variety of

instructional opportunities to work with different content, processes, and products (Tomlinson, 2001).

I like projects because you cannot do them overnight. The math project took time, but it was worth the grade. Four brains worked together. (Jason)

Writing assignments hold my interest and focus my mind such as the stock market project, Getting to Know You writing assignment, Latin American project, and the essay on the Pearl. (Reggie)

American history class provides interesting assignments because it lets me know how our great nation started from the beginning and why it is like it is now. (Kojo)

I like math. It is my favorite subject. I like the questions. I also like crossword puzzles. (Dana)

Math and reading emerged as an instructional method, and these content areas represented what high achievers thought were the most important things taught. They reported that math and reading are important for real life. Comments, such as math does not change, math is needed for business, reading is needed to read contracts when you buy a house, and reading and math are related to most job, summarized their thoughts about the most important things taught.

Explanation emerged as a method to promote understanding. High achievers, when asked to describe instruction from beginning to end, perceived their teachers' explanations as

promoting understanding. Students reported that teachers explained problems on the board and explained what was in books, and one student described that the teacher explained a problem at the end of the lesson.

Summary. High achievers in this study perceived that teachers communicated mastery goals in the classroom. Teacher mastery goals emphasized the enjoyment of learning, recognition of effort, and the provision of time to understand new ideas. For example, the students believed that their teachers communicated that mistakes were acceptable if they were learning. During the interviews, high achievers mentioned instructional methods that communicated mastery, such as checking for understanding and differentiation. Additionally, high achievers reported during the focus groups that discussion groups supported their understanding of a task and performance on tests.

High achievers also preferred instructional methods that promoted understanding. High achievers reported on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales that their teachers communicated mastery goals. They believed that their teachers wanted them to understand their work, not just memorize it. During the interviews, high achievers reported that teachers checked for understanding, and this instructional method helped their learning. They also noted that when teachers demonstrated content clearly and differentiated instruction, these instructional methods promoted understanding. During the focus groups, high achievers reported that they preferred discussion groups, videos, and worksheets, and they thought these instructional contexts supported their understanding.

High achievers preferred diverse instructional methods. On the surveys, they reported that their teachers communicated mastery goals in the classroom. During the interviews, they stated that instruction was best when it address how they learned through a variety of modes: hands-on, quiet environment, listening, and with videos. During the focus group, high achievers

reported preferred instructional contexts such as discussion groups, videos, and worksheets.

Average achievers. All four students in the average-achievement subgroup self-reported teacher mastery orientation on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. These students achieved means were 5, 4.8, and 4.4, all which were higher than the sample mean of 3.56 for teacher mastery orientation.

During the focus groups, average achievers identified their preferred instructional context. Two students shared their preference for discussion groups for two different reasons: (a) to catch up on things missed, and (b) to support reading learning. One student preferred worksheets because problems supported understanding, and the other student preferred note-taking. The following examples are related to preferred instructional contexts:

Book discussion groups help me with reading. (Michele)

I like when teachers give out worksheets. The problems help you to understand.
(Melanie).

Discussion groups help me to catch up on things I missed. (Cal)

I prefer taking notes and memorizing facts. (D'Shaun)

During the interviews, average achievers' perceptions of instructional methods were similar to high achievers'. Methods, such as check for understanding, show and tell clearly, differentiation, paying attention, do work, and effort, are described. Average achievers perceived how teachers help learning and the most important things taught differently from high

achievers. They only mentioned one instructional method (check for understanding) when asked how the teacher could help learning. In contrast, high achievers mentioned learning style and checking for understanding. Average achievers perceived paying attention, doing work, and effort as the most important things taught, while high achievers mentioned reading and math.

Comments related to the instructional method checking for understanding were:

Feedback from the teacher supports my learning. The teacher says, "Well done."

If I get it wrong, I like when the teacher explains how I got it wrong. (Michele)

Stories help me understand. Give me worksheets and then go around and check.

Explain and let me know if I am right or wrong. (Melanie)

I prefer hand to hand contact. Come up and ask me a question and go over the work in and out of class. (Cal)

Comments related to the instructional method show and tell clearly were:

When teacher give work, they need to explain it. (Melanie)

Give sections, then review sections and if needed, explain a little more. (Cam)

Provide hands-on projects and when teachers speak (they should provide) details.
(Michele)

When asked about the types of projects that interested them, average achievers shared a variety of responses that led to the category of differentiation.

I enjoy vocabulary assignments because I learn new words, experiments, and writing essays of my choice. (Michele)

I like reading different books. (Melanie)

Craft and group assignments interest me because I work with different students. (Cal)

I prefer history assignment because I get to learn about different people. (D'Shaun)

Summary. Average achievers perceived that teachers communicated mastery goals in the classroom. Teacher mastery goals emphasized the enjoyment of learning, recognition of effort, and time to understand new ideas. During the interviews, average achievers reported that their teachers checked for understanding, which also supported the finding that teachers communicated mastery goals. And finally, from the focus groups, average achievers reported instructional preferences that promoted understanding such as worksheets and discussion groups. However, two students communicated instructional contexts that would be related to teachers communicating performance-approach, which would be learning for memory and test taking purposes. Overall, most average achievers reported that teachers communicated a mastery orientation in classrooms.

Average achievers preferred instructional methods that promote understanding. This is evident from their survey responses. They perceived that their teachers wanted them to

understand work, not just memorize it. During the interviews, average achievers stated that their teachers checked for understanding and explained lessons from beginning to end, and during the focus groups, average achievers described how worksheets, videos, and book discussions supported understanding in the classroom.

Average achievers also preferred diverse instructional methods. This was evident during interviews and focus groups. During the interviews, average achievers mentioned a variety of assignments that interested them such as vocabulary, reading books, craft and group projects, and history assignments. During the focus groups, average achievers stated that videos, note-taking, and discussion groups were a few of their instructional preferences.

Low achievers. Three of the four students in the low-achievement subgroup self-reported teacher mastery orientation on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. These students achieved means of 5, 4.8, 4.4, and 3.6, all of which were higher than the sample mean of 3.56. Teacher mastery goal orientation implies that students thought that the teacher wanted them to enjoy learning, recognized their effort, and gave them time to understand new ideas.

During the focus groups, low achievers preferred instructional context often matched the learning activities in their classrooms. One student shared that he preferred videos to learn and noted that the teacher used videos to teach. Another student said she preferred taking notes and watching video and that the teacher used these instructional methods. A third student noted that he preferred taking notes but did not report that his teacher used this method in class, and another student preferred working within discussion groups. She pointed out that her teacher only sometimes used this method.

During the interviews, low achievers perceived the following instructional methods: model and review, show and tell clearly, differentiation, and focus and attend as the most important things taught. The methods are described in the following section.

Model and review, which is showing students how to solve and complete assignment for understanding, emerged as an instructional method, and it represented how teachers helped students to learn:

Pull me aside and teach me. Make sure I understand. Teach me one-on-one. (Mia)

Show us how to do it and tell us how to write notes. (Parker)

Teachers should go over the work, show how to solved problems, correct it, and teach it. (Nigel)

Show and tell clearly emerged as an instructional method, and it represented the type of teaching that worked best:

Go over the work and show us how to do it. Give us a little work station. If I do it right, give me a good grade. (Nigel)

Make the work look easy instead of hard and write (fewer) problems on the board. (Mia).

Give us the steps for the problem and help us solve the problem. Give us challenging problems to see understanding. Sometimes the teacher does not go through the problems and expects us to understand. (Cheyanne)

Differentiation emerged as an instructional method in response to the interview question about engagement. Low achievers perceived the following instructional methods as engaging: Science, problems, vocabulary taxonomies, and Black History.

Low achievers perceived paying attention, focusing on work, respect and manners, and math and reading as the most important things taught in school.

Summary. The low achievers self-reported that their teachers emphasized mastery goal structures, but their responses during the interviews did not always support their survey selections. While some students mentioned that instructional methods supported their understanding, one student said the teacher should make work look easy and write fewer problems on the board. Another student said that he did not want to be challenged. These types of comments reflected a teacher performance-avoidance orientation, which occurs when the teacher communicates that the purpose of work is to avoid failure and looking like you cannot do the work.

Low achievers preferred diverse instructional methods. This was evident during interviews and focus groups. During the interviews, low achievers stated that science, problems, vocabulary taxonomies, and Black History promoted engagement. During the focus groups, low achievers reported that they preferred videos, note-taking, and discussion groups as instructional methods. They also reported that, for the most part, that their teachers used these methods.

Findings for Research Question Three: How do African American Adolescents Perceive Relational Factors?

The following tables summarize the findings related to research question three. Data were provided from each data collection method to complete each table. Table 26 summarizes the data from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales for learning. The subscales representing perceptions of achievement-related beliefs, attitudes and strategies included (a) academic press –

teacher presses for understanding; and (b) self-presentation of low achievement – students’ preference to keep peers from knowing how well they are achieving. The organizational categories are academic related perceptions, preferred relational context, and relational methods. Academic related perceptions refer to the teacher’s push for understanding, and/or the students’ willingness to show achievement publicly. Preferred relational context refers to the type of teacher-student interaction the student values or likes, and relational methods describe “how the teacher nurtures a relationship with the students” (Darby, 2005, p. 428). Tables 27-29 provide a summary of the findings from the interview data for learning. Tables 30-32 provide details from the focus group data for learning. A description of the findings for each table is provided and organized by achievement subgroups (high, average, and low). All definitions of theoretical categories included in the table are defined in Appendix H.

Table 26

Findings for Research Question Three: Mean Scores from the PALS subscale of Achievement-related Beliefs, Attitudes and Strategies by Achievement Subgroup

| Achievement-related Beliefs, Attitudes and Strategies Subscales | Achievement Subgroup | | |
|--|----------------------|---------|------|
| | <i>M</i> | | |
| | High | Average | Low |
| Academic Press | 4.21 | 3.92 | 3.89 |
| Self-Presentation of Low Achievement | 1.60 | 1.53 | 1.46 |

Note. Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley, et. al., 2000); This instrument implements a Likert response scale of 1-5.

Table 27

Findings for Research Question Three: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for High Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| | Advice | Classroom Climate | | | Relating to Others | | | Self-Perception | | Teacher Characteristics |
|---------|--------|-------------------|----------|-------|--------------------|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-------------------------|
| | | Description of | | | | | | Good | | |
| Student | Advice | Behavior | Fairness | Humor | Collaboration | Conflict | Rapport | Student | Scholar | Care |
| Jason | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Reggie | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Kojo | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Dana | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 1 |

Table 28

Findings for Research Question Three: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for Average Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Advice | Classroom Climate | | | Relating to Others | | | Self-Perception | | Teacher Characteristics |
|--------------|----------|-------------------------|----------|----------|--------------------|----------|----------|-----------------|----------|-------------------------|
| | Advice | Description of Behavior | Fairness | Humor | Collaboration | Conflict | Rapport | Good Student | Scholar | Care |
| Michele | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Melanie | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Cam | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| D'Shaun | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 3 |

Table 29

Findings for Research Question Three: Interview Data Coding Frequencies for Low Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Advice | Classroom Climate | | | Relating to Others | | | Self-Perception | | Teacher Characteristics |
|---------|--------|-------------------------|----------|-------|--------------------|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-------------------------|
| | Advice | Description of Behavior | Fairness | Humor | Collaboration | Conflict | Rapport | Good Student | Scholar | Care |
| Michele | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Melanie | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cam | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| D'Shaun | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 0 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 30

Findings for Research Question Three: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for High Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Relating with others | | |
|---------|----------------------|---------|-------------------------|
| | Collaboration | Rapport | Teacher Characteristics |
| Jason | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Reggie | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Kojo | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Dana | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 3 | 4 | 6 |

Table 31

Findings for Research Question Three: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for Average Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Relating with others | | |
|---------|----------------------|---------|-------------------------|
| | Collaboration | Rapport | Teacher Characteristics |
| Michele | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Melanie | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Cam | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| D'Shaun | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 4 | 2 | 4 |

Table 32

Findings for Research Question Three: Focus Group Data Coding Frequencies for Low Achievers by Major and Minor Categories

| Student | Relating with others | | |
|----------|----------------------|---------|-------------------------|
| | Collaboration | Rapport | Teacher Characteristics |
| Nigel | | | 1 |
| Mia | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Parker | 1 | | 1 |
| Cheyenne | 1 | | 2 |
| Total | 3 | 1 | 5 |

High achievers. Three of the four students in the high-achievement subgroup self-reported that teachers pressed them academically on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. Academic press included giving challenging problems, requiring thoughtful work, and accepting only full effort. These three students achieved means of 4.7, 4.7, and 4.5. Only one student mean score (2.85) was lower than the sample mean of 3.6 for academic press. On the self-presentation subscale, the four mean scores were 2, 1.7, 1.4, and 1.2. Three students' means were lower than the sample mean of 1.7. This means that these students did not mind if their peers knew they were achieving and sought academic success.

During the focus groups, high achievers identified their preferred relational context. All four students shared their preference for relationships demonstrating care. Three students also noted that they preferred relations that included humor, and one student shared her preference for relations that included reward and top scores for good work. The following examples represent students' preferred relational contexts:

I can relate to all the contexts (which include teaching to the whole class), but I like Mr. Seymour the most because his humor would keep things interesting. In addition, if I do not like a teacher, I do not listen, but if I like the teacher, I listen and understand. (Dana)

I like Brown (care), Seymour (humor), and Coble (top scores). I also like a teacher who jokes but pushes until the best comes out. I want a role model who wants the best for you. In addition, when a teacher communicates, grades won't suffer because they tell you before it is too late. (Jason)

I like Brown (care) and Seymour (humor). I also like when a teacher let me know I can do better. (Kojo)

I like Brown (care) because she interacts with students inside and outside the class. When I have a strong relationship with a teacher, it helps me to pay attention. Jokes in class also keep me awake. Games also help me to pay attention. I want a challenge to learn new things. I want humor, play, someone who expects work, and challenge. (Reggie)

During the interviews, high achievers mentioned relational methods of care, scholar, and collaboration for understanding, academic equity, rapport, and teach for understanding.

Care emerged as a relational method when high achievers described their favorite teacher:

My favorite teacher pushed me. He also took me off the honor roll and shot me back to reality. (Jason)

My favorite teacher is the literature teacher, and she teaches for you to understand your personal point of view. She is also cracks jokes to keep students alert and listening. (Reggie)

My favorite teacher shared military stories and gave advice. He also coached kids. (Kojo)

My first-grade teacher taught stuff for the other grade. I understood more and was ahead of the class. (Dana)

During the interviews, scholar emerged as a relational method when high achievers were asked to describe what the teacher thinks of you. A scholar is a student who is smart and performs well on tests.

They think I work hard, try my best, know my teachers, respect teachers, and I am a self-advocate. (Jason)

They think I am smart because I do well on my tests. (Reggie)

They think I am smart and civilized. (Kojo)

They think I am respectful, organized, do well on tests and homework, smart, a leader, and I help people out. (Dana)

During the interviews, Collaboration for understanding, which is work in groups and/or with the teacher to understand content or designated learning, emerged as a relational method when high achievers described how the teacher and students work together. For one student recalled that the teacher broke down a math problem when he asked for help. Another student recalled the teacher circulating the room during science as he worked in a group. Another student said that teachers and students work together to achieve, and another student mentioned

working in a group with students to understand the book better. She noted that she heard other students' opinions during the book discussion groups.

Academic equity, which is students getting what they need academically within the classroom setting, emerged as a relational method when high achievers were asked to describe fairness during the interview.

Fairness is calling on more than one kid to answer, effort based grading, and extra credit. (Jason)

Fairness is treating people the same. Explain information to all for the test. (Reggie)

Fairness is treating people the same way, which is getting as much as the other person does with teacher time. (Kojo)

During the interview, rapport, which is to getting along with the teacher, emerged as a relational method when high achievers were asked to describe their relationship with students and teachers.

I get along with others because I stay quiet and out of trouble. I do not talk a lot. (Jason)

I feel good about my relationship. Students are familiar because there are not too many new kids. Teachers are nice and cooperate, if you behave. (Reggie)

I like to receive help for a test to get a good grade. (Kojo)

We all get along. No one is mean. I like the people I met this year. (Dana)

Teach for understanding, which is the teacher explaining the learning opportunity to students to promote understanding, emerged as a relational method for high achievers when asked during the interview to give advice to a new teacher.

Earn respect, be understanding, and help with work when needed. (Jason)

Work with students and always help when needed. Listen to how to improve teaching.
Show; do not tell. (Kojo)

Be patient, don't yell, and explain things. Get to know students and how they feel.
(Dana)

Summary. High achievers perceived that their teachers press them for understanding, and they reported that they do not mind if their peers know that they are achieving at school and in class. These two findings are supported by data from the focus groups and interviews. During the focus groups, students mentioned that they wanted their teachers to push them, but they also wanted their teachers to care. While students reported that they did not mind if other students know that they succeed (self-presentation of low achievement), the only additional information to support this perception was provided during the interviews. Students perceived themselves as smart when asked what they thought their teachers thought of them.

High achievers perceived their relations as caring during the interviews. Students perceived teachers cared because they pushed, promoted understanding, gave advice, were funny, and helped them to get ahead.

High achievers perceived humor and collaboration for understanding as relational factors. Humor was supported by focus group data only. Three of the four students mentioned that they valued humor in their relations with teachers. Only one student mentioned the need for reward. High achievers also preferred to collaborate with teachers to understand content. Evidence of students and teachers working together was communicated in both interviews and focus groups, and this supported the high achievers' understanding.

Average achievers. Two students in the average-achievement subgroup self-reported that teachers pressed them for understanding on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. Academic press included giving challenging problems requiring thoughtful work and accepting only full effort. Two students achieved mean scores of 4.4 and 4.1., and two students achieved a mean of 3.57. These means were lower than the sample mean for academic press (3.62). For the subscale self-presentation of low achievement, three average achievers' mean scores were 1.29, 1.28, and 1.14, which is lower than the sample mean for the subscale (1.79). These three students did not mind if their peers knew that were achieving and sought academic success. Only one student's mean of 1.85 was higher than the sample mean for the subscale.

During the focus groups, average achievers identified their preferred relational context. Three of the four students preferred a relationship demonstrating care. Three students also noted that they preferred relations that included humor. One student shared a preference for a relation based on reward for good work. The following examples represent students' preferred relational contexts:

I like Seymour. He jokes around like my science teacher, but I also like Brown because she communicates care. For example, my reading teacher provides constructive criticism. (Cam)

I prefer Brown because she is willing to help and cares, and I like Seymour because he jokes around. I like to know my teachers a friendly level because it is easy to talk to them. My social studies teacher is my favorite because she knows I can do it, pushes me, and she will pull me aside when I am doing bad. (Melanie)

I like Brown (care), Coble (reward), and Seymour (humor), but I like Brown the best because I learn best with the teacher sitting next to me. I like Ramirez the least because he explains once and expects you to get it without questions. In addition, I like to know a teacher. When they understand I am a good student, sit with me to help me improve. If I am not close to the teacher, I do not pay attention, and I don't feel anything. (Michele)

I prefer Coble because if I do good (well), I will get a reward. (D'Shaun)

During the interviews, average achievers mentioned the following relational methods: care, good student, collaboration for understanding, disciplinary equity, rapport, and student-centered.

During the interviews, care emerged as a relational method from average achievers' descriptions of their favorite teacher during the interview.

My favorite teacher treated me like a daughter. (Michele)

She took time to break things down, and she also showed us different dances.

(Melanie)

My kindergarten teacher was nice. She would share her stash of gummy bears with me. She also helped me to learn math and taught me to read after class.

(Cam)

“Good student,” which is a student, who does their work and is obedient to the teacher, emerged as a relational method for average achievers’ descriptions of what their teachers think of them.

The teacher thinks I am hard working, take pride in my work, and I am a good student. (Michele)

My teacher thinks I am shy and respectful. (Melanie)

The teachers think I am a good student who gets good grades. I am also a nice, polite gentleman. (Cam)

They think I am a great student, who does my work, and participates. (D’Shaun)

Collaboration for understanding emerged as a relational method from average achievers' descriptions of the teacher and student working together. One student mentioned working with the teacher on projects and using games to understand. Another student mentioned that the teacher did not count a question if the class did not understand. A third student mentioned working with the teacher to develop understanding of a problem. One student recalled non-Native Portuguese students working with the teacher to learn the language, and another student shared how his teacher went around the class to check for students understanding.

Disciplinary equity, which is students get what they need in regards to conduct in the classroom, emerged during the interview as a relational method from average achievers' descriptions of fairness.

Don't punish the whole class. Take away privileges from the one person. (Michele)

Treat others the way you want to be treated and don't single people out. (Melanie)

Do not blame the person if they did not see what happen because it is not fair. The person who starts the problem should get into trouble. Ask people who are around to know for sure. (Cheyanne)

Rapport emerged during the interview as a relational method from average achievers' descriptions of their relationship with students and teachers.

I answer questions kinda... jokeful and teachers laugh along. When I ask questions, the teacher doesn't say it is silly or stupid. (Michele)

My relationship with teachers is good. I show them respect, and when I have a problem, I can turn to them for assistance and it is confidential. (Melanie)

Student-centered, which is collaboration between the teacher and the student, emerged during the interview as a relational method from average achievers' advice to a new teacher:

Don't punish the whole class, be fun with teaching, create exciting games, and teach so everybody can understand and look up to you. (Michele)

Be strong because middle school students can be tough, provide interesting work, and make sure you enjoy teaching. (Melanie)

Have respect for students, always pay attention to student needs, some more than others, and keep going over lessons that you teach. (Cam)

Summary. Average achievers perceived their teachers press them for understanding, and they reported that they do not mind if their peers know that they are achieving. This finding related to academic press was less evident focus group and interview data. During the focus groups, only two students mentioned how they wanted to receive constructive criticism and to be pushed. The other two students emphasized the importance of the relationship with their teacher and acknowledgement from them. In addition, average achievers only mentioned a press for understanding during the interviews twice, both times when describing how teachers and students worked together. In general, average achievers perceived the teacher pressed them for

understanding. While students reported that they did not mind if students knew if they succeed (self-presentation of low achievement), the only additional information to support this would be the descriptions students provided in the interview. Students perceived themselves as good students when asked what they thought their teachers thought of them.

Average achievers also reported that they perceived their relations with teachers as caring. During the interviews, students perceived care when teachers connected with them personally, took time to break things down, showed dances in class, shared gummy bears, and played games. During the focus groups, three of the four students communicated a relational preference for a teacher who cared. For one student, a caring teacher helped her to learn.

Average achievers also preferred a relational context with humor. This relational method only emerged from the focus group data, and three of the four students communicated an interest in working with a humorous teacher. Additionally, average achievers preferred to collaborate with teachers to understand content. This was evident in both interview and focus group data. Students reported during the focus groups the various ways they preferred to collaborate: constructive criticism from the teacher and sitting on the side with the teacher at point of difficulty. During interviews, average achievers reported the teacher not counting a question if the class did not understand and going around the class to check for students' understanding.

Low achievers. Two students in the low-achievement subgroup self-reported teacher academic press on the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. Academic press included giving challenging problems, requiring thoughtful work, and accepting only full effort. These two students achieved means of 4.7 and 4.5. Two other students achieved means of 3.2 and 3, which were lower than the sample mean of 3.62. For the subscale self-presentation of low achievement, three students' means (1.5, 1.4, and 1) were lower than the sample mean of 1.79,

and one student's mean was 1.85, which was higher than the sample mean. Thus, three students do not mind if their peers knew that they were achieving, and they sought academic success.

During the focus group, low achievers identified their preferred relational context. Three of the four students identified a preference for relations that included humor. One student shared a preferred working independently. The following examples represent students' preferred relational contexts:

I like a teacher with a sense of humor. I do not like Ramirez because I do not understand when a teacher teaches the whole class. I need a small group or one-to-one. (Cheyanne)

I like a teacher with humor. I like a teacher who is not always serious. In addition, teaching the whole class does not work. I need one-to-one. (Mia)

Humor helps learning. It helps to be funny. (Nigel)

Mr. Ramirez is best for me because he tells me what to do, and he checks to make sure I am learning. (Parker)

During the interviews, low achievers perceived relational methods in the following categories: collaboration, rapport, and student-centered.

Collaboration emerged as a relational method when low achievers described how the teacher and students worked together. One student mentioned reading in a small group with the teacher. A second student felt that students could show more effort when working with the

teacher, and another student described how the teacher moves from group to group to provide help.

Rapport emerged as a relational method when low achievers described their relationship with students and teachers.

I am respectful. I am only disrespectful when they say stupid stuff. (Nigel)

I get along with students but not the teachers. Teachers yell at me when I get mad and talk back. I go to the guidance office when I have problems with friends. (Mia)

The teachers are ok. They share their stories about school. (Parker)

The teachers help with problems. I do my work, so I have a nice relationship with teachers. (Cheyanne)

Student-centered emerged as a relational method when low achievers described their advice to a new teacher.

Give respect. (Nigel)

Students are sometimes hard to deal with. (Mia)

Watch kids. Learn students and see what they do best and show respect. (Parker)

Be patient. Have no favorites and focus on the whole class. Teach with steps and make sure the whole class understands. (Cheyanne)

Summary. Low achievers perceived that their teachers pressed them for understanding, and they reported that they do not mind if their peers know that they are achieving. However, additional data about academic press did not emerge in the focus groups or interviews. In addition, while students reported that they did not mind if their peers knew if they were succeeding, additional data supporting this finding about self-presentation of low achievement did not emerge in the focus groups or interviews.

Low achievers reported their preference for humor in the classroom, small group/one-to-one interactions with teachers, and student-centered learning opportunities. During the focus groups, low achievers preferred a relational context based on humor, and in this context, and small group and one-to-one interactions. During interviews, students reported that they collaborated with their teachers in groups during interviews.

Low achievers perceived relations as student-centered. During the focus groups, students stated that small groups or one-to-one was their preferred relational context. During the interviews, students mentioned that respect and learning who the student is important. A student also reported that teachers need to have patience, have no favorites, and focus on the whole class. They also perceived relations as student-centered: they mentioned that they get along with their teachers based on respect, stories that are shared, or support with work and students' perceptions based on advice to a new teacher. The student-centered category was corroborated by the interview and focus group data.

Summary of Major Findings for the Study

As shown in Table 33, a summary of major findings for this study is organized under the following categories: achievement goals, instructional factors, academic press, affect: care and humor, and collaboration with the methods of verification. These major categories served as headings for the major findings. The table, which lists the categories and findings, was developed using methodological triangulation. Data from three methods (survey, focus groups, and interviews) were used to generate the findings. Once the data from the three methods were coded and categorized, the theoretical categories (evidence) were used to draw and verify conclusions. The findings listed in Table 33 were generated using evidence from two or more data methods or sources to increase the validity of the findings.

Table 33

Matrix of Findings and Sources for methodological triangulation

| Major Findings | Data Methods | | |
|---|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| | Survey | Interview | Focus Group |
| Category 1: Achievement Goals | | | |
| 1. High achievers perceive their learning as mastery-oriented. | X | X | X |
| 2. Average achievers perceive their learning as mastery and performance oriented. | X | X | X |
| 3. Low achievers perceive their learning as performance-oriented. | X | X | |
| 4. High, average, and low achievers prefer group work (communalism) for learning. | | | X (H, A, L) |
| Category 2: Instructional Preferences | | | |
| 5. High and average achievers perceive teachers communicate mastery goals. | X | X | X |
| 6. High and average achievers prefer instructional methods that promote understanding. | X | X | X |
| 7. High, average, and low achievers prefer diverse instructional methods. | | X | X |
| Category 3: Academic Press | | | |
| 8. High and average achievers report their teachers press them for understanding. | X | X | X |
| Category 4: Affect: Care & Humor | | | |
| 9. High and average achievers perceive their teachers care. | | X | X |
| 10. High, average, and low achievers prefer humor in the classroom. | | | X (H, A, L) |
| Category 5: Collaboration | | | |
| 11. High and average achievers prefer to collaborate with teachers to understand content. | | X | X |
| 12. Low achievers prefer small group and one-to-one interactions with teachers. | | X | X |
| 13. Low achievers prefer student-centered learning opportunities. | | X | X |

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY

This chapter presents a summary of the major findings in relation to following research questions:

1. How do African American adolescents perceive their learning?
2. How do African American adolescents perceive instructional factors?
3. How do African American adolescents perceive relational factors?

The chapter also includes a discussion of the major findings in relation to the literature, the limitations and implications of the study, and suggestions for additional research.

Summary of the Study

This study examined high, average, and low achieving African American adolescents' perceptions of school-level achievement. The theories of pedagogical content knowledge, culturally relevant pedagogy, and achievement goal theory informed this study which used a multi-case research design. Methodological triangulation (self-report, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups) was used to collect data from a stratified purposive sample of 12 students in eighth grade (four high, four average, and four low achievers based on standardized test data) from a culturally diverse urban school district in the northeast. Instrumentation consisted of the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS), semi-structured interview questions, and focus group scenarios.

Interpretational analysis was used to find categories to describe and explain students' perceptions. Within and cross-case analyses involved the following analytical procedures: managing data, coding, categorizing, and drawing and verifying conclusions; and a variety of strategies were used to generate meaning. The researcher moved back and forth between procedures and strategies simultaneously to interpret the data. Within-case analyses were used to capture students' voice. These profiles also reported thick descriptions of each case, which

supported the transferability of the data. Cross-case analyses were used to identify categories to describe and explain the perceptions of high, average, and low achievement students.

Similarities and differences between the subgroups were evident and supported the applicability of findings to other cases and/or settings. Dependability and confirmability of the findings were enhanced when the researcher coded and recoded the data, and she included samples of data analysis products in the appendices (e.g., master code list, categorized data displays).

To establish confidence in the credibility of the findings, several trustworthiness strategies were used. Triangulation of methods was utilized to provide evidence to validate or invalidate the findings. An external auditor was used to check category development, and the researcher created structural coherence by explaining the convergence, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the finding, as suggested by Krefting (1999). Major findings were developed in relation to the research questions using the theoretical frameworks, methodological triangulation, interpretational analysis, and the application of trustworthiness strategies

Major Findings in Relation to Research Question One

The results of this study suggested that African American adolescents' achievement goals are related to their achievement levels. High achievers perceive their learning as mastery oriented, average achievers perceived their learning goals as mastery and performance oriented, and low achievers perceived their learning as performance oriented. Data from the Patterns of the Adaptive Learning Scales, the focus groups, and the interviews supported these findings for high and average learners. However, low achievers reported on the PALS that they were mastery oriented, but interview data revealed that they were performance oriented. Low achievers' achievement goals did not emerge from the focus group data.

Additionally, data from the focus group revealed that all but four African American adolescents preferred communalism (group work), which is social interdependence to promote

understanding. However, some of the students in the high and average subgroups also preferred competition and individualism. Most of the students in the low achievement subgroup preferred group work but communicated a desire to work closely with the teacher.

Major Findings in Relation to Research Question Two

In this study, high and average achievers perceived that their teachers communicated mastery goals in the classroom, implying that students perceive that the teacher wants them to enjoy learning, recognize their effort, and give them time to understand new ideas.

Data from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales, focus groups, and interviews supported this finding for high and average achievers. Interestingly, low achievers perceived teacher mastery goals on the PALS, but data did not emerge from the interviews or focus groups to support this perception.

High and average achievers also preferred instructional methods that promote understanding, a finding that was supported by all three data sources. High and average achievers reported that when teachers check for understanding, *show and tell* instruction clearly, and provide explanations during instruction, then understanding is created. They also reported that discussion groups, worksheets, and videos helped to communicate an understanding of information. While low achievers perceived teacher mastery goals, which relates to teaching for understanding, data from interviews and focus group did not emerged to support this perception.

All African American adolescents (high, average, and low achievers) preferred diverse instructional methods, including those that are described as culturally relevant (e.g., communalism, verve). Data from focus groups and interviews supported this finding.

Major Findings in Relation to Research Question Three

In this study, relational factors described “how the teacher nurtures a relationship with the students (Darby, 2005, p. 428). Students reported perceptions of relations with teachers that fell

into three categories: (a) academic press, (b) affect: care and humor, and (c) collaboration. Results of the PALS, interviews, and focus groups revealed that high and average achievers' teachers press them for understanding, in other words, provide challenging work and accept only full effort. In the focus groups, students mentioned that they wanted a teacher to push until the best comes out, to challenge them to learn new things, and to pull them aside when they are doing badly. In the interviews, students reported that they wanted the teacher to work with them when needed, to explain things, and to help them develop understanding. Low achievers reported academic press on the PALS but did not mention press during the focus groups or interviews.

Affect is the ability to move somebody emotionally, and African American adolescents' perceived affect as a relational factor. The feelings of care and humor were perceived as a relational factor for African American adolescents in this study.

Both high and average achievers perceived that their teachers cared, and all three subgroups preferred humor in the classroom. From the focus group, five students noted that they preferred a teacher who cared. Care also emerged as a relational category when students were asked to describe their favorite teacher. Students described how teachers demonstrated care. Examples included having a good relationship, dancing in class, and sharing gummy bears. Humor emerged as a category across all subgroup. Nine of 12 students communicated a preference for humor in their relations.

Finally, in this study, the category of collaboration emerged as important to all three subgroups. Focus group and interview data provided examples of how students preferred to work with their teachers. High and average achievers preferred to collaborate with teachers to understand content. They said that teachers should teach for understanding, provide constructive

criticism, and sit with them when they experience difficulty. Low achievers preferred small group and one-to-one interactions with teachers and student-centered opportunities to learn.

Relationship of Results to the Literature

This study contributed to a small body of literature on African American students' achievement by focusing on the African American students themselves instead of comparing them to White students. In addition, this study contributed to the literature on African American students' achievement goals utilizing focus group and interview data in addition to the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS). Other researchers (Ames & Archer, 1988; Freeman, et al., 2002) used only the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales and other quantitative instruments. Unlike other studies that have concluded that African American students demonstrate an attitude-achievement paradox, i.e., a positive attitude about education with poor academic achievement (Downey, Ainsworth, & Qian, 2009; Freeman et. al, 2002; Mickelson, 1990), this study found that this was only true for low achieving students. This study also extended the literature on African American students' motivation by examining within-group differences. While Freeman (2002) investigated within-group difference in achievement, she used grade point averages to define her groups: this study used standardized test data to define achievement categories. A review of the major findings in relation to the literature is organized using the five major categories that emerged from data analysis: achievement goals, instructional factors, academic press, affect: care and humor, and collaboration.

Achievement Goals

Freeman, et al. (2002) investigated the achievement goals of African American and White adolescents by examining mean differences by race using the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales. Data were collected from students in grades 5-9 for six years. Four districts in southeastern Michigan were selected to participate and, in three of the four districts, over 50% of

the students were African American. The researchers found that African American students selected mastery and extrinsic goals more often than White students. Freeman, et al. stated that their mean-level difference pointed to the attitude-achievement paradox (Mickelson, 1990): while African American communicated positive beliefs about achievement, these beliefs are not related to high levels of academic achievement.

In the present study, the attitude-achievement paradox was not applicable to the high and average subgroup. That is, high achievers perceived their learning as mastery oriented, and average achievers perceived their learning as mastery and performance oriented, and their actual performance as measured by grades and standardized testing were aligned to their achievement goal perceptions. Low achievers reported on the survey that they mastery oriented but data did not triangulate to produce a mastery orientation as a major finding. Therefore, the results of this study showed that the attitude-achievement paradox cannot be universally applied to African American students.

Freeman (2002) examined the goals African American adolescents pursued and perceived in their learning context using interviews and participant observations. Fourteen boys and 10 girls participated. Freeman sorted his students into groups by grade point averages (not by standardized testing as done in this study). Fifteen students had cumulative GPAs between 2.0 and 3.0; four students had GPAs greater than 3.0; and five students held GPAs below 2.0. Freeman found that students held multiple goals (mastery, performance, and extrinsic), but a large number of students reported doing their work for extrinsic reasons. Mastery goals were reported less, and performance goals were reported sparingly. Only four high achievers mentioned performance goals. The results of this study contradicted the results of the Freeman study. High achievers reported mastery goals, and average achievers had a combination of mastery and performance goals. Only low achievers had just performance goals.

Marryshow, et al., (2005) challenged the widely accepted thesis of Fordham and Ogbu (1988) that African Americans reject high achievement as a result of negative attitudes toward schooling. Marryshow, et al. argued that they may not be rejecting high achievement but may be rejecting the mainstream model of success based on competition and individualism. Students in their study were asked assess their attitudes and to predict their teachers' attitudes toward four cultural orientations (e.g., communalism, verve, individualism, competition) of high achieving students. Ninety African American students ages 10-12 participated in the study. Researchers used the Learning Context Scenarios (LCS) to measure students' attitudes about high achievers and their beliefs about their teachers' attitudes. The results of the study indicated that cooperatively oriented high achievers were most favored by students, and students predicted that their teachers favored high achievers who were communal. Additionally, correlations revealed individualistic and competitive learners were positively correlated, and both were negatively correlated to communal and vervistic learners.

The results of this study add to and extend the research on students' preference for communal learning opportunities. The finding that high, average, and low achievers in this study preferred a communal (group work) learning context aligned to the Marryshow, et al. results. During the focus groups, students in the present study were presented with four scenarios of high achievers in each of the cultural modes, and eight out of 12 students identified a preference for learning in a group. The use of scenarios in this study was similar to the use of scenarios in the Marryshow, et al., study. Additionally, the eight students perceived achieving in a communal context and did not reject academic achievement, which also supported the Marryshow, et al. outcome.

Instructional Preferences

Freeman (2002) also examined African American students' perceptions of teacher instructional practices using the same sample referenced above. Students' perceptions revealed that they were often assigned low level work, were often preparing for standardized tests, and were not given choice with tasks. Feedback to students came in the form of graded work. A similarity between the two studies was that the samples consisted of African American adolescents with diverse achievement levels. Two differences existed between the two studies. In the present study, high and average achievers perceived that their teachers communicated mastery goals in the classroom. Teachers checked for understanding and provided a variety of tasks that interested them. Another difference was that this study used the PALS, interviews, and focus groups to generate findings, whereas, Freeman used only interviews and observations. These findings also demonstrated the differences in classroom instruction available to African American students.

Patrick and Ryan (2008) investigated teacher instructional practices that middle school students perceived when evaluating their classroom goal structure. One hundred and ninety-seven students in grades six-through-eight (57% female, 43% male, 94% White, 4% Hispanic, and 1% African American; 85 sixth graders, 69 seventh graders, 43 eighth graders) from a rural middle school in the Midwest participated in the study. Data were collected from the teacher mastery goal subscales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) using a 5-point Likert scale. After students responded to each survey item, they wrote an explanation for their response, reporting why they circled the chosen response and providing examples of what the teacher says or does to make them think as they responded. Findings showed that students who perceived teacher mastery goals attended to the affective characteristics (27%), teacher-student pedagogical interactions (24.8%) and teacher recognition of effort and achievement (19.7%).

The results of the present study added to the research on teacher goals by: (a) using an African American, urban sample versus a predominately White, rural sample, (b) using the PALS survey with interview and focus group versus the PALS and open-ended responses, and (c) supporting the findings that students' perceptions of how teachers communicate pedagogically influence their evaluation of teachers' communication of mastery goals. In the Patrick and Ryan (2008) study, students stated that teachers explained material, supported understanding, and used a variety of approaches. In the present study, high and average achievers reported that teachers checked for understanding, provided explanations, and differentiated instruction. This finding supported how teachers' pedagogical content knowledge influences African American students' perceptions of their teachers' motivational practices.

Darby (2005) examined students' perceptions of teacher pedagogy in science using student voice. Students from Australia in years seven and eight participated in the study. Data were collected using participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Darby found that students liked it when teachers used their prior knowledge to create understanding of new topics. Students also reported that they valued clear explanations, class discussions, and clarification of information. In comparison, the present study an African American student sample in contrast to a White student sample, but students were of similar age group. Also, in comparison, this study used a survey, interviews, and focus groups, while the Darby study employed participant observations instead of a survey. The findings of the present study supported and extended the findings of the Darby study. High and average achievers preferred instructional methods that promote understanding. Similar to the results of the Darby study, high and average achievers perceived that their teachers' communicated mastery goals, which emphasized learning for understanding. Additionally, high and average achievers

perceived that discussion groups, teachers' checking for understanding, and teachers' explaining problems enhanced their understanding.

Corbett and Wilson (1998) collected data from 247 sixth-graders and 114 eighth graders over two years using interviews. Students came from five middle schools within a district that was 98-100% minority and primarily African American. They were asked to describe the teacher characteristics they valued and preferred instructional activities across the classes they attended. Corbett and Wilson found that students valued teachers (a) who were willing to help, (b) who were strict but nice, and (c) who were able to explain information clearly. They also found that students preferred the following instructional experiences: (a) projects and experiments, (b) working in small groups, and (c) fun. In the present study, high, average, and low achievers preferred diverse instructional methods, that is, they preferred discussion groups, videos, worksheets, taking notes, projects, essays, crossword puzzles, experiments, taking notes, vocabulary, and Black history. The findings of the present extended the findings of the Corbett and Wilson study. Additionally, the African American sample in this study was similar to the sample in the Corbett and Wilson study, which also included African American. However, this study used a survey and focus groups with interviews for the purpose of triangulation, while the Corbett and Wilson study used only interviews to collect and analysis data.

Academic Press

Academic press refers to students' perceptions that their teachers press them for understanding (Midgley, et al., 2000). One of the findings from the Wilson and Corbett (2007) study exemplifies academic press. Students in the study reported that good teachers pushed them to complete their assignments, and they admitted that they would not complete their assignments if the teacher did not push. Teachers "nagged" students in many ways such as checking homework, calling parents, and offering individual reminders. One student stated, "He keeps

pressing me until I get it right” (p. 290). In the present study, high and average African American adolescents perceived academic press as described in the Wilson and Corbett (2007), and this perception aligned to the perceptions of the low-income, low-achieving urban students of color in the Wilson and Corbett.

Howard (2002) examined African American students’ perceptions of their teachers’ instructional and relations practices and the concept of teacher press emerged in the findings. Thirty students (17 girls and 13 boys) from second to eighth grade, representing a cross-section of academic and behavioral standards, participated in the study. Students were interviewed individually and observed two to three times a week. Data were triangulated to cross-check themes and patterns. Three themes emerged from the study to describe their perceptions: (a) the presence of family and community, (b) culturally connected care, and (c) verbal communication and affirmation. Students felt that teachers communicated high expectations for their performance and balance care with firmness. The teachers were described as “warm demanders” (p. 438). The results of the present study extended Howard’s research results by capturing the voice of African American adolescents’ relational experiences with teachers. High and average achievers in the present study perceived that their teachers pressed them for understanding. This press included challenging problems, requiring thoughtful work, and accepting only full effort. The present study also used an African American sample, but the sample was stratified by achievement. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a survey to collect data, while the Howard study used only interviews and observations. The integration of a survey and focus group for data collection added to this body of research on African American adolescents’ perceptions of relational experiences.

Affect: Care and Humor

The results of the present study revealed that high and average achievers perceived that their teachers care, and high, average and low achievers preferred humor in the classroom. Several researchers (Darby, 2005; Howard, 2002; Patrick & Ryan, 2008; Wilson & Corbett, 2007) have highlighted the social relationship between the student and the teacher. Darby found that a sense of humor was a common element that students wanted in a friendly teacher. Howard found that students valued caring teachers, and Wilson and Corbett found that students perceived being strict, trying to understand students, and maintaining order in class as caring. Patrick and Ryan found that students perceived teacher goals as mastery when the teacher showed concern for their understanding and provided help when needed, and they also found that the affective aspects of instruction supported mastery. Results of the present study supported these previous findings. The present study extended this research by using a stratified sample of African American adolescents. The Darby, Patrick and Ryan, and Wilson and Corbett studies did not use a stratified sample, and the Patrick and Ryan and Darby study used only White students. Additionally, the present study, which utilized focus groups, interviews, and the PALS, was the only study to use this combination of data collection procedures.

Collaboration

Schmakel (2008) investigated seventh-grade students' perceptions of instructional practices and how the classroom affected motivation and achievement. Data were collected from 67 high and low achieving students from four diverse parochial schools in a Midwestern urban setting. Both high and low achievers completed an essay describing how they would improve learning and the school environment if they were teachers, and they participated in a focus group and interview. Schmakel reported that both high and low achievers wanted more individual time with teachers, wanted teachers to solicit their input about school rules and academic needs, and

wanted to do school work in groups to increase their understanding. In the Schmakel study, high achievers seemed to be challenged by their middle school curriculum, whereas low achievers did not speak of being challenged. Schmakel found that low achievers explained the social benefits of group work and their need for empathy from classroom teachers. The results of the present study revealed that high and average achievers preferred to collaborate with teachers for understanding, and low achievers preferred small groups, one-to-one interactions, and student-centered opportunities. In the Schmakel study, high and low achievers had similar needs – both wanted more group work, but in the present study, low achievers did not communicate a desire for understanding in their collaboration with teachers. Low achievers in both studies asserted a need for collaboration for social reasons. The present study also had three subgroups (high, average, and low), and the Schmakel study only had high and low subgroups; the present study used a survey to collect data with focus groups and interviews, while the Schmakel study used an essay, focus groups, and interviews. The present study supported the Schmakel research results in regards to student-teacher relations.

Limitations to the Study

In this study, a stratified (high, average, low) purposive sample of 12 African American adolescents and methodological triangulation (i.e., self-reports, interviews, and focus groups) were subject to the assessment of trustworthiness during data collection and analysis. While numerous strategies were used to establish trustworthiness, limitations were also evident. These limitations are discussed through the Lincoln and Guba (1995) model of trustworthiness (i.e., truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality) to inform similar and future studies.

Truth value in the findings, that is, an accurate description and interpretation of the African American adolescents' experiences, was enhanced using a variety of credibility strategies (e.g., triangulation of methods, peer examination, reflexivity journal). However,

prolonged engagement and member checking strategies could also have been used to strengthen the credibility of findings. Prolonged engagement involves spending an extended period of time with students to identify and verify recurrent patterns of behaviors, and these observations could serve as an additional data method for triangulation. Member checking involves students' review of descriptions and interpretations to provide feedback on the accuracy of translation of viewpoints. While students in this study received copies of the interview transcripts, the data were not reviewed formally with students so this was not included as a credibility strategy.

To support the applicability of the findings to other contexts or groups, the researcher provided descriptive data and thick descriptions about each case and descriptive data about the research context. Readers could use the thick descriptions and findings from cross-case analyses to make naturalistic generalizations (i.e., to learn from the case or its application to other cases; Stake, 1995). Using a stratified purposive sample of 12 African American students supported the transferability of findings to similar situations. However, this was also a limitation because the average subgroup shared characteristics with the high and low subgroups. Due to an overlap within the average subgroup: some of the students in the average subgroup had goal level achievement in one subject or basic in one subject. Thus, therefore was an overlap between the average and high and average and low categories. As with all qualitative research, a limitation is that the findings are not generalizable to a larger population, which is ultimately not the purpose of qualitative research.

The present study created consistency by describing the researcher as an instrument, the sample, and data collection and analysis processes. The following dependability strategies were used (e.g., reflexivity journal, code-recode, an audit of categorized data, and a dense description of research methods). Methodological problems caused limitations: (a) focus group data were collected one-to-one by the researcher for two students who could participate in the scheduled

focus groups, (b) interview and focus group questions did not generate as much data for low achievers in comparison to high and average, and (c) the survey was not read to participants; therefore, some low achievers may not have been able to read the entire survey accurately.

Implications of the Study

The present study contributed to the body of literature on African American students' achievement by examining the within-group perceptions of high, average, and low achieving African American adolescents. The literature on African American students' achievement underscored the need to eradicate achievement differences between African American and White students (Darling-Hammond, 2001, 2007; Graham, 1994; Hilliard, 2003; Kozol, 2005), but rather than continually comparing African American students to White students as has been done in most previous research, the present study examined how African American adolescents' learning, instructional, and relational experiences were similar and/or different across achievement categories. In the present study, high and average achievers were not substantially different from White students described in the literature. They were mastery oriented, felt academic press, and preferred instructional methods that promoted understanding. The low achievers were different: they did not mention learning for understanding, teachers' care, and academic press in the classroom. They focused ignoring distractions, staying out of trouble, and trying not to fail. This raises questions about what their actual experiences in the classroom are really like and highlights the need to be attentive to the manner in which low achievers experience the classroom as suggested by Van Manen (1999).

Only a handful of studies (Corbett & Wilson, 1998; Garcia, et al., 2006; Howard, 2002; Wilson & Corbett, 2007) have used student voice to capture African American adolescents' perceptions of teaching and learning. Within educational reform, a call has been made for the relationship between the student and the teacher to be open to the presence and the power of the

student (Cook-Sather, 2006, Giroux, 1988; Nieto, 1994; Waxman & Huang, 1997). The present study responded to this call by capturing the individual and collective voices of African American adolescents. The findings in the present study have uncovered the thoughts and feelings of high, average, and low achievers, and these findings could be used by policymakers and teachers to inform educational reform.

A frequently mentioned explanation for the underachievement of African American students is the attitude-achievement paradox. Data from the present study's findings contradicted this idea for high and average achievers who reported motivational beliefs about their learning that matched their actual achievement levels. The attitude-achievement paradox was only found to be true for low achievers in the present study. The present study highlighted the diversity of thought and practice among African American students, and practitioners could learn from the diversity of perceptions, attitudes, and achievement beliefs among African American students to enhance their capacity to choose academic excellence.

In the present study, high and average African American achievers preferred instructional methods that promoted understanding. Students' preference for understanding content was related to Shulman's (1986, 2007) concept of pedagogical content knowledge, which is knowledge of how to represent and express a subject so that it is comprehensible to others. The teachers of high and average achievers used teaching methods that supported their understanding. This was not evident for low achievers in the present study; therefore, teachers may want to learn instructional practices that would promote understanding for African American students from the low achievement subgroup.

The finding that high and average achievers perceived that their teachers pressed them for understanding, and that the low achievers did not perceive that their teachers pressed them for understanding implied that students perceived differential teacher treatment, and this may affect

their achievement, self-image, and motivation as suggested by Brattesani, Weinstein, & Marshall (1984).

The present study added to the literature by looking at the culture of African American adolescents through a positive lens. High, average, and low achievers preferred communalism (group work) to support their learning. In addition, high and average achievers perceived that their teachers cared, and high, average, and low achievers preferred humor in their classrooms. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that culturally relevant pedagogy empowered students not just intellectually but socially and emotionally. She also pointed out that the way teachers taught affected the way students perceived content and the social relations between teachers. Boykin (1983) used cultural antecedents to increase students' engagement, motivation, and achievement. The findings in the present study revealed that African American adolescents viewed communalism, the social interdependence to promote understanding, as supportive of their learning. As suggested by Vygotsky (1962), students learn cognitive tasks as a result of social and cultural contexts; therefore, African American students could potentially benefit from the integration of culturally relevant teaching practices and antecedents. Professional development on the role of culture and cognition may be advantageous to school and classroom practitioners.

Suggestions for Additional Research

Additional research is needed to understand low-achieving African American adolescents and their classroom experiences, and the attitude-achievement paradox was evident only for the low achievers in the present study; additional research is needed to understand what contributes to the attitude-achievement paradox and how it can be minimized among African American students. In the present study, the low achievement subgroup reported an acceptance of high achievement through a communal learning context. Additional studies on the preferred cultural contexts of African American low achievers are needed to promote their task engagement and

motivation to learn for understanding. Additional studies of low achievers instructional and relational experiences are needed to understand how teachers attend to the needs of low-achieving African American students.

Researchers utilizing qualitative methodology to study African American adolescents' achievement might consider the following strategies to enhance trustworthiness and rigor. To accurately capture, describe, and interpret African American students' school experiences, the use of observations and prolonged engagement in conjunction with survey and interview data collection are viable credibility strategies. In addition, engaging participants in the process of member checking and the review of the researcher's descriptions and interpretations would also improve truth value in the findings. To advance the naturalistic generalizations of qualitative research, future researches should consider levels of purposive sampling – “site level, process or event level, and at the participant level” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Levels of purposive sampling could support the creation of variation across participants, grade levels, achievement levels, and gender.

Finally, additional research using student voice as a methodology might consist of African American students as participants in research and school change. Additional studies could begin with consultation but evolve with a cohort of students, capturing their experiences over time and facilitating their participation. African American students are often silenced and marginalized by the sociopolitical context of schools (Giroux, 1988). The use of student voice as a methodology to engage students as researchers could help to reposition them in research and reform (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Conclusion

The educational reform movement has focused on all students meeting and/or exceeding rigorous academic standards. Unfortunately, African American students as a race have not met

or exceeded the standards of excellence. The present study sought to understand how African American students perceived school-level achievement in an effort to advance their learning and to minimize different instructional and relational experiences in schools and classrooms. The findings from this study have provided insight on practices that may help to alleviate the gap, but these findings also suggest that additional research is needed. The potential exists through empirical research to maximize African American students' educational, social, and economic opportunities. Using student voice, researchers may be able to provide African American students with an opportunity to improve their educational futures.

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Appendix A: Student Demographic Form

Cover sheet – Demographic Data

Please complete:

Gender: ____ Male ____ Female

Age: ____ 13 ____ 14 ____ 15 ____ Other: _____

(List age)

Name of school: _____

Number of year you have attended this school: _____

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-Structured Interview

Introduction

I thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am interested in learning more about how African American middle school students learn. I am also interested in knowing what type of teaching helps you to learn and how your relationships in class support your learning.

I will be recording our conversation today but everything you share with me will be kept confidential. I will not use your name and I will not share the information with your school. At the end of the study, I will send you a copy of my paper, if you are interested in reading what I have written.

Today, I will ask you questions about your learning, your experiences with different teaching, and your relationships with teachers and students. If you do not understand a question, please let me know and I will ask the question differently. If you are not comfortable with a question, let me know as well, and I will move to the next question. You can also let me know if you want to stop the interview at anytime. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

RQ = Research Question

1. **Grand Tour-Specific: RQ#1** - I Middle school students have many ideas about what it means to do well in school. Could you please describe what it means for you do well in school? What does it take to do well at this school?
2. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#1** - Middle school students are assigned class work to complete. Could you describe a time you felt you did well with an assignment? What did you do well? How did you know that you had learned? What did the teacher do to help you do well in class or with the assignment?
3. **Example: RQ#1** - Since you have been in middle school, you have probably learned many things. For this question, could you give me one example of how your learning has changed since you have been in middle school? How is your learning different from elementary school?
4. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#1** – When you are at school, many students go to their lockers, get books, talk to friends, stop at the bathroom, and then go to class. Could you describe the steps you take to learn once you have entered class? What you do to stay focused on your school work?
5. **Example: RQ#1** - Some students need to study for hours to prepare for a test and some can study on the bus on the way to school. Can you explain how you prepare for your tests and what steps do you take to remember the information?

6. **Experience: RQ#1** - Let's talk a little about learning in your favorite class. Can you explain how you handle assignments that are difficult? What do you do when the work get hard? In you least favorite class, how to you handle assignments that are difficult?
7. **Grand Tour-Specific: RQ#2** - I know most students have several teachers. What do your teachers do to help you learn? How do you learn best?
8. **Experience: RQ#2** - When I began the interview, I shared my interest in knowing your experience with teaching. Can you describe what type of teaching works best for you? What type of teaching does not work you?
9. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#2** – Students receive different amounts of homework. Can you describe how often you receive homework, what kind of homework, and does homework help you to learn?
10. **Example: RQ#2** – Middle school students are given assignments to complete daily. Can you give me some examples of assignments that interest you and hold your attention?
11. **Grand Tour-Specific: RQ#2** - You have been in school for the last eight to nine years. Can you share the most important things you have been taught in school?
12. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#3** – You've probably have had a variety of experiences with teachers. Can you take a moment to think of your favorite teacher and describe what she/he did to become your favorite teacher?
13. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#3** - On a day to day basis, your teachers see you in class, in the halls, during lunch. Can you describe what you think your teachers think of you as a student?
14. **Experience: RQ#3** – Students do different things in classes during the day. Can you describe the behaviors students demonstrate in class? Do students behave differently in different classes?
15. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#3** – In class, teachers and students work together in different ways. Sometimes students work in group and sometimes they work alone. Can you think of one class and describe for me how you and the teacher work together? How does the teacher work with other students? How do you feel about how students and teachers work together in class?
16. **Example: RQ#3** - Conflict exists in every school and is a part of every classroom. Can you give me an example of what types of conflicts occur in the class and how are they solved?

17. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#3** – Students and adults discuss fairness at school. What does fairness look like in your classroom?
18. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#3** - Can you explain how you feel about your relationships with your teachers and students? What happens in class or at school to make these feelings real?

Extra Questions:

19. **Mini Tour-Specific: RQ#2** - Each teacher has his or her own way of presenting instruction depending on the subject and since I am not able to visit your classes, could you choose one class and describe from beginning to end, how one of your teachers teaches a class? What does she/he do to help you to understand the lesson?
20. **Example: RQ#3** - Imagine you were a teacher who has been teaching for many years. Can you share three important pieces of advice you would give to a brand new teacher working with middle schools students?

Appendix C: Focus Group Scenarios

Focus Group

Background Information

AGENDA

Welcome & Meeting Objective: Welcome to High Horizons Magnet School. I thank you again for participating in this research study. Your thoughts about your learning, teaching and relationships in the classroom are needed to complete my study and to add to teachers and school administrators understanding of what is best for African American students.

Overview : Before we begin, it is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Aslanian. He is one of my professors from Western Connecticut State University and he will guide your discussion today. Because it is hard for me to talk and listen carefully at the same time, I have asked Dr. Aslanian to help me with the collection of your ideas and I will listen. I will also videotape the discussion and take notes today as well. If you are uncomfortable with a question, do not want to participate anymore, or need to use the restroom please signal Dr. Aslanian and we will stop the videotape.

Materials: Today, Dr. Aslanian will share the three scenarios displayed on the poster boards with you. The scenarios are snapshots of what learning, teaching, and relationships may look like in some classrooms. As you feel comfortable, share what you think about these scenarios after each question and what the scenarios may make you think about how your learning, the teaching you receive, and your relationships with teachers in the classroom.

Review of Ground Rules: Please participate as much as possible. Of course you will be talking to Dr. Aslanian during the discussion but you are most welcome to talk to each other. You can comment each other experiences and you can ask questions. If the discussion gets off track, Dr. Aslanian is here to help bring focus back to the discussion and to keep us moving and talking.

Introductions: When you first arrived, I asked you to choose or make up a pseudonym, a pretend name for the discussion. Before we begin the discussion and once I start videotaping, please introduce yourself to the group. You can say your pseudo name, the school you attended, and the high school you will attend in the fall.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Focus Group Questions

Research Question #1: *How do African American adolescents' perceive their learning?*

1a. Which student in the scenario is your learning most like? Probes: *How is learning different from the scenario example?*

Describe how you learn best? How often do you get to learn the way you want to? What do you do in a class that does not support the way you learn best?

1b. Which student is most like the students in your school and why? Probes: *Do those students do well at your school and what makes you say that? Which student is least likely to be at your school? At your school, could each student described get As and Bs?*

Research Questions #2: *How do African American adolescents' perceive instructional factors?*

2a. Which teacher could help you to learn to read the best? Probe: *Does your reading teacher teach in a similar or different way? Describe what type of teaching would be better to help you to understand reading is it is not listed. Order the teaching qualities from the best to least and tell why you have given them that order.*

2b. What teaching qualities do you like in your other teachers? Probes: *How do these qualities help you to understand information presented in class? Which teaching qualities do you like the best and the least and why?*

Research Question #3: *How do African American adolescents' perceive relational factors?*

3a. Which teacher in the math scenario is most like your favorite teacher? Probes: *Describe your favorite teacher and what he/she did to become your favorite? Order which class you prefer from the most to the least and tell why?*

3b. What kind of relationship do you want with your teachers? Probes: *Strict? Flexible? Structured? Serious? Describe the type of relationship you want and why?*

Learning

Shanice gets very high grades. She likes competing for the highest grades and takes pride in being the first to answer in class. Shanice believes competing with others is the best way to learn.

James gets very high grades. He likes when a lot of different activities happen at the same time. He feels the best way to learn is to mix things up.

Naomi gets very high grades. She enjoys doing assignments on her own. Naomi feels that people learn more when they work independent of other students. She takes pride in solving difficult problems without help.

Peter gets very high grades. He likes to share ideas and materials with other students. He also prefers to work in groups. Peter feels students can learn the most by working with other students.

Teaching

Mrs. Smith is a reading teacher. She uses worksheets to teach. She asks students to complete assignments over and over to learn.

Mr. Planas is a reading teacher. He gives students facts and information to memorize for reading tests. He also expects students to take notes during class.

Mrs. Pathway is a reading teacher. She uses book discussion groups to teach. She wants students to talk about stories.

Mr. Jones is a reading teacher. He uses plays, videos, and poetry to teach. He wants students to choose how to share their ideas.

Relationships

Mrs. Brown is a math teacher. She likes to help student with their math in groups. She tells her class she cares everyday. She allow students to eat lunch in her class.

Mr. Seymour is a math teacher. He likes to tell funny stories and jokes as he teaches math. He uses games to teach math lessons.

Ms. Coble is a math teacher. She likes to reward students for their hard work with good grades. She announces the top math scores weekly.

Mr. Ramirez is a math teacher. He likes to teach the whole class the lesson, then he assigns independent work. Mr. Ramirez prefers to watch students complete their work.

Appendix D: IRB Application and Consent Letters

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Application

Title: AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING, INSTRUCTIONAL, AND RELATIONAL FACTORS

Abstract: This study will examine African American adolescents' perceptions of learning, instructional, and relational factors in the classroom and at school. African American students nationally have not met achievement standards as measured through standardized tests and grades. An achievement gap between African American and White students exists but most importantly, an achievement gap between standards of excellence and African American students' current performance exists. To eradicate the achievement gap, there is a need to understand more deeply the individual perceptions of African American students' learning and achievement. Students' perceptions of learning, instructional, and relational factors will be assessed through a self-reporting measure, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews.

Rationale: Additional studies that determine African American students' perceptions of the quality of instruction they receive are needed due to the increasing diversity of African American student thought and behavior (Wiggan, 2007).

Protocol: The following research questions will be answered:

- How do African American adolescents perceive their learning?
- How do African American adolescents perceive instructional factors?
- How do African American adolescents perceive relational factors?

The research methodology is qualitative case study approach. A case study is an in-depth study of one or more examples of a phenomenon in its real-life context that represents the perspectives

of the participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). African American students, ages 13-14 years-old in the eighth grade, perceptions of teaching and learning will be examined. Students will complete the *Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scale*, participate in a semi-structured interview, and will also participate in focus group interview. The Student Demographic Survey is included in Appendix A. Information from subjects' cumulative records will be obtained as a part of the data collection process. Subjects' Connecticut Mastery Test scores for the seventh grade, grade point average in reading and math for the end of the year in eighth grade, and the number of years in the current school will be collected. **Human subjects:** (a) *Recruitment*. Letters of invitation are attached to the application as Appendix B.

(b) *Initial contact*. Initial contact with subjects will be made through the principals of the K-8 schools in an urban district in Connecticut. Five schools will be selected as contexts for the study. 45 students will initially be invited to participate in the study. The principal and/or the assistant principal will be asked distribute letters of invitation to 9 African American students in the eighth grade. Four to five males and/or females will be invited to participate. Three students in the goal/advanced performance category of the Connecticut Mastery Test for reading and math will be invited to participate. Three students in the proficient performance category in reading and math will be invited to participate and three students in the basic/below basic performance category in reading and math will be invited to participate. The administration at the school level will initially review student records to help to identify a stratified purposeful sample.

(c) *Inducements*. At the end of the study in July 2009, each participant will receive a \$50 gift card to the xxx. This will provide each student and family with a financial reward that could be use to deferred costs for back-to-school items for the 2009-10 school year.

(d) Descriptions. Nine African American eighth grade students, ages 13-14 years old would participate in a general education program, will be invited to participate in the study. Four to five males and females will be included. Students with no known medical conditions that would infer with their participation will also be invited to participate in the study.

(e) Length of involvement. Participants will be involved in the study for approximately four months. The data will be collected between the months of April to July 2009.

(f) Special Classes of Subjects. Participants in the research study will not be from a special class of subjects.

Risks and Benefits: The potential risks factor to the participants will be in the collection of personal information and through the probing for personal information in a survey and interview. Participants' learning orientation will be reported through the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scale. Participants' perceptions of teaching and learning will be reported through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews.

Procedures to protect the safety of human subjects in the research: The following safeguards will be put in place to assure the voluntary participation of subjects, how data will be handled to protect privacy, and the debriefing of procedures used.

To assure voluntary participation, the researcher will seek written permission to invite schools and subjects to participate from Superintendent of Schools for the district. Written permission will be sought from the principal for subjects at their school to participate. Letters of invitations will be sent home by an administrator at the school to parents and potential subjects. Letters of consent from the parent and the student will be returned to the administrator at the school.

Data collected in the study will be coded with numbers to protect the privacy and identity of each subject and to maintain the confidentiality of data. Each completed survey, tape-recorded

and transcribed interview will receive a numerical code. The numerical code will be maintained in a secured location. Tape-recorded interviews will be locked in a closet or file cabinet when not in use during the data collection and analysis process, which will occur between the months of April 2009 and April 2010. A numerical code will be assigned to field notes written during interviews. Subjects will use a pseudonym when participating in the videotaped focus group. The videotape will also be locked in a closet or file cabinet when not in use.

The informed consent letter and at the beginning of each data collection procedure, subjects will be provided with and read disclosure statement acknowledging their right to withdraw from the study at any point during the study and that withdrawal from the study will not affect their grade or academic standing with their school. At the end of the study, all information will be discarded once the dissertation is written.

Reports: The results of the research will potentially be reported at a conference presentation and through a journal article. It is anticipated that the results could be presented at an achievement gap conference in the state of Connecticut and a journal article could be written and submitted to journals such as *Urban Education*, *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, and *Urban Review*.

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
Parent Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Melissa Jenkins, and I am the principal of xxx School. Currently, I am enrolled in the doctoral program for Instructional Leadership at Western Connecticut State University. This program requires that I design and implement a dissertation research study. This study will occur over the course of eight-week period from May to July 2009 and is fully supported by the Bridgeport Public School district.

The purpose of this study is to examine what African American middle school students think about their learning, instruction, and relationships at school. Only a few studies have addressed African American middle school students' views of teaching and learning. This study will give African American middle school students a voice in describing their learning and school experiences. More research on the learning and teaching of African American students is needed.

The *Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales* survey will be administered to your child to measure his/her perceived learning goals in the classroom; his/her perceptions of teacher's learning goals in the classroom, and his/her perceptions of relations between the teacher and students in the classroom. An interview will also be conducted. I would ask your child approximately 18-20 questions, and your child's responses will be tape recorded. Your child will also participate in a focus group with 6 students from different schools in the district. Five to six questions will be asked during the focus group session. A professor from Western Connecticut State University will facilitate the focus group discussion, and I will listen to the group discussion. The focus group session will be videotaped. I will go to your child's school to administer the survey. The interview and focus group sessions will be held at xxx School. I will also collect information about your child's 7th grade CMT results and their end of the year reading and math average for 8th grade. The information collected will not impact your child's academic advancement or grades. Students names will be numerically coded, changed in the write up, and remain confidential throughout the study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board. It is hoped that the results of this study will help teachers, school administrators, and educational policy makers understand how to better meet the learning and instructional needs of African American youth.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your child from the study at any time. All information is completely confidential. A \$50 gift card to the xxx will be given to your child at the end of the data collection process in July 2009 to deferred costs for back-to-school items for the 2009-10 school year.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me via telephone at xxx.

If you agree to have your child participate in this pilot study, please sign the attached statement and return it to your child's principal _____ by

_____ (Date)

Sincerely,
Melissa Jenkins

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

Parent Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

I, _____, the parent/legal guardian of the student minor
(Printed name of parent or guardian)

Below, acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research study, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I voluntarily consent to my child's participation. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential.

Student/Minor's Name:

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____ Date: _____

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
Student Information Form to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Student,

My name is Mrs. Jenkins. I am the principal at xxx School. I am also a student, too. I go to school at Western Connecticut State University. I am going to school to become a Doctor of Education, but I must first complete a research project called a dissertation. I am excited about my research study, and I am writing to invite you to be a part of the research study.

The title of my research project is *African American Adolescents' Perceptions of Their Learning, Instructional, and Relational Experiences*. You are being asked to participate in this research study because schools are most often created without the voice of students, and I want to hear students' thoughts about their school experience. It is hoped that this research study will help teachers, school administrators, and lawmakers understand how we can continue to advance the education African American youth in our communities.

If you agree to participate in my study, I will need you to participate in the following activities.

- I will need you to complete the *Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales* survey
- Participate in one interview with me
- Participate in one focus group discussion with five other students from Bridgeport Public Schools
- I will collect information about your 7th grade CMT results and your end of the year reading and math average for 8th grade.

I will use the survey, an interview, and the focus group discussion to collect your thoughts about your learning, teaching, and relationships in the classroom. I will come to your school to administer the learning survey. We would complete the interview together at my school, xxx. The focus group session will also be conducted at xxx. One of my professors from Western Connecticut State University will guide the group discussion, and I will listen to your conversations with the other students. The interview will be tape recorded and the focus group discussion will be videotaped. I will stop all recorders at any time upon your request. All of your responses and your identity will be kept confidential. A pseudonym (not your real name) will be used in the write up of this project.

You will be a volunteer for this study. I would collect information from you from May to July 2009. At the end of the data collection process in July 2009, a \$50 gift card to the xxx will be given to you to deferred costs for back-to-school items.

If you would like to be in my study, please write your name here.

X _____

If you have questions at any point during the study, please ask.

Sincerely,
Melissa Jenkins
WCSU Student and xxx

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
Doctoral Dissertation Research Study

April 2009

Dear School Administrator:

As a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University, I am contacting you regarding a dissertation study I am conducting. The title of my dissertation proposal is AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING, INSTRUCTIONAL, AND RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

To collect data for my study, I will need to administer a survey, conduct interviews, and hold two focus groups with 12 African American eighth grade students from different schools in the Bridgeport Public School district. I will also need to collect information about the students' 7th grade CMT results and the students' end of the year average for reading and math in 8th grade. This letter serves as informed consent to invite administrators from the school district to participate. As a participant in the study, you will assist me in identification of potential students that I could invite to participate in the study.

All information collected during the project will remain confidential and will be used only for research purposes. All subjects will be identified by code numbers only. No information will be provided for local school district use. The parents of students who participate will sign an informed consent letter. The students will also sign a letter agreeing to participate. This research study has been reviewed and approved by Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board. It is hoped that the results of this study will help teachers, school administrators, and educational policy makers understand how to better meet the learning and instructional needs of African American youth.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me via telephone at xxx (c) or via email at xxxx. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below and return this letter in the self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed.

I agree to participate in the dissertation study of Melissa Jenkins.

(Name of administrator)

(Date)

Sincerely,
Melissa Jenkins
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E: Master Code List

| Code | Frequency of Code | Maximum Number of Times the Code is Used in 1 Case | Mean Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases | The Standard Deviation for the Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--|---|---|
| ACHIEVEMENT | | | | |
| BELIEFS | 30 | 5 | 2.308 | 1.251 |
| ADVOCATE | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| ARGUING | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| ASK FOR HELP | 6 | 3 | 0.462 | 0.967 |
| ATTENTIVE | 21 | 4 | 1.615 | 1.85 |
| ATTITUDE | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| AUDITORY | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| BLOCKING | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| BORING | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| BYSTANDER | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| CAREER | 3 | 2 | 0.231 | 0.599 |
| CARING CONNECTION | 8 | 3 | 0.615 | 1.121 |
| CHEATING | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING | 21 | 5 | 1.615 | 1.502 |
| CHOICE | 3 | 1 | 0.231 | 0.439 |
| CLASSROOM CLIMATE | 3 | 1 | 0.231 | 0.439 |
| COGNITIVE SUPPORT | 18 | 4 | 1.385 | 1.71 |
| COMPARE AND CONTRAST | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| COMPREHENSION | 7 | 4 | 0.538 | 1.198 |
| COOL | 4 | 1 | 0.308 | 0.48 |
| CORRECTIONS | 4 | 2 | 0.308 | 0.751 |
| CULTURE | 16 | 4 | 1.231 | 1.301 |
| DEBATE | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| DIFFICULT | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| DISCUSSION | 4 | 2 | 0.308 | 0.63 |
| DISLIKE | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| DISORDERLY | 11 | 5 | 0.846 | 1.519 |
| DISRESPECT | 7 | 3 | 0.538 | 0.967 |
| DISTRACTED | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| DO WORK | 3 | 2 | 0.231 | 0.599 |
| EASY | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| ENGAGING ASSIGNMENTS | 14 | 3 | 1.077 | 0.954 |
| ENVIRONMENT | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| EQUALITY | 6 | 2 | 0.462 | 0.776 |

| Code | Frequency of Code | Maximum Number of Times the Code is Used in 1 Case | Mean Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases | The Standard Deviation for the Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--|---|---|
| EQUITY | 6 | 2 | 0.462 | 0.776 |
| EVERYDAY | 3 | 1 | 0.231 | 0.439 |
| EXAMPLES | 3 | 1 | 0.231 | 0.439 |
| EXPECTATIONS | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| EXPLANATION | 13 | 4 | 1 | 1.354 |
| EXTRA EFFORT | 10 | 3 | 0.769 | 0.927 |
| FEEDBACK | 12 | 2 | 0.923 | 0.862 |
| FIGHTING | 4 | 2 | 0.308 | 0.751 |
| FOCUS | 11 | 4 | 0.846 | 1.345 |
| FRIENDSHIP | 3 | 2 | 0.231 | 0.599 |
| FRUSTRATION | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| FUN | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| GAMES | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| GET ALONG | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| GOAL SETTING | 3 | 3 | 0.231 | 0.832 |
| GRADE | 16 | 5 | 1.231 | 1.739 |
| GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| GROUP WORK | 14 | 3 | 1.077 | 1.256 |
| HANDS-ON | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| HARD WORKER | 5 | 1 | 0.385 | 0.506 |
| HELP SEEKING | 13 | 4 | 1 | 1.155 |
| HELPFUL | 9 | 3 | 0.692 | 0.947 |
| HIGH EXPECTATIONS | 10 | 3 | 0.769 | 1.301 |
| HOMEWORK | 9 | 3 | 0.692 | 0.947 |
| HUMOR | 8 | 2 | 0.615 | 0.87 |
| IGNORE | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| INCLUSION | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| INCOMPLETE WORK | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| INDEPENDENCE | 8 | 5 | 0.615 | 1.557 |
| INQUIRY | 4 | 3 | 0.308 | 0.855 |
| INTERRUPTION | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| KNOWLEDGE | 5 | 3 | 0.385 | 0.87 |
| LEADERSHIP | 3 | 2 | 0.231 | 0.599 |
| LEARN BY DOING | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| LEARNING CHALLENGES | 9 | 2 | 0.692 | 0.63 |
| LEARNING IN CLASS | 4 | 2 | 0.308 | 0.63 |

| Code | Frequency of Code | Maximum Number of Times the Code is Used in 1 Case | Mean Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases | The Standard Deviation for the Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases |
|------------------------|-------------------|--|---|---|
| LEARNING | | | | |
| RESOURCES | 12 | 3 | 0.923 | 0.954 |
| LEARNING STYLE | 11 | 2 | 0.846 | 0.689 |
| LISTEN | 11 | 3 | 0.846 | 1.144 |
| MANNERS | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| MATH | 27 | 7 | 2.077 | 2.29 |
| MEMORY | 5 | 2 | 0.385 | 0.65 |
| METACOGNITION | 9 | 4 | 0.692 | 1.182 |
| MODELING | 5 | 2 | 0.385 | 0.65 |
| MOTIVATION TO LEARN | 10 | 3 | 0.769 | 1.013 |
| MUTUAL RESPECT | 4 | 2 | 0.308 | 0.63 |
| NICE | 3 | 1 | 0.231 | 0.439 |
| NOTE-TAKING | 13 | 3 | 1 | 1.155 |
| ONE-TO-ONE | 13 | 6 | 1 | 1.826 |
| OPPOSITIONAL | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| PARENTAL GUIDANCE | 7 | 3 | 0.538 | 0.877 |
| PARTICIPATE | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| PASSION | 3 | 2 | 0.231 | 0.599 |
| PATIENCE | 7 | 3 | 0.538 | 0.877 |
| PEER SUPPORT | 9 | 3 | 0.692 | 0.947 |
| PLANNING | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| PRACTICE | 6 | 3 | 0.462 | 0.967 |
| PREPARATION | 6 | 2 | 0.462 | 0.877 |
| PRESS | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| PROBLEM SOLVING | 8 | 3 | 0.615 | 1.121 |
| PROCESS | 5 | 2 | 0.385 | 0.65 |
| PROJECT BASED LEARNING | 5 | 2 | 0.385 | 0.768 |
| QUESTION | 11 | 4 | 0.846 | 1.281 |
| RAPPORT | 10 | 6 | 0.769 | 1.691 |
| READING | 21 | 7 | 1.615 | 2.063 |
| RECALL | 8 | 3 | 0.615 | 0.87 |
| RECOGNITION | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| RELATE-COMMUNICATE | 8 | 2 | 0.615 | 0.768 |
| RELATIONSHIP | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| REREADING | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |

| Code | Frequency of Code | Maximum Number of Times the Code is Used in 1 Case | Mean Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases | The Standard Deviation for the Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--|---|---|
| RESEARCH | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| RESPECT | 17 | 5 | 1.308 | 1.702 |
| RESPONSIBLE | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| REVIEW WORK | 21 | 7 | 1.615 | 2.103 |
| SCIENCE | 16 | 4 | 1.231 | 1.423 |
| SEATING | 4 | 2 | 0.308 | 0.63 |
| SELF-ADVOCACY | 4 | 3 | 0.308 | 0.855 |
| SELF-ASSESSMENT | 23 | 4 | 1.769 | 1.641 |
| SELF-PRESENTATION | 8 | 4 | 0.615 | 1.193 |
| SELF-WORTH | 6 | 2 | 0.462 | 0.776 |
| SHOW NOT TELL | 7 | 2 | 0.538 | 0.776 |
| SMART | 4 | 1 | 0.308 | 0.48 |
| SOCIAL STUDIES | 17 | 5 | 1.308 | 1.653 |
| STAY STRONG | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |
| STORIES | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| STRATEGIES | 8 | 2 | 0.615 | 0.87 |
| STRICT | 3 | 2 | 0.231 | 0.599 |
| STUDENT RELATIONS | 4 | 3 | 0.308 | 0.855 |
| STUDY SKILLS | 15 | 3 | 1.154 | 0.899 |
| STUDYING | 5 | 1 | 0.385 | 0.506 |
| TALKING | 12 | 7 | 0.923 | 1.935 |
| TASKS | 5 | 3 | 0.385 | 0.961 |
| TEACH FOR UNDERSTANDING | 15 | 4 | 1.154 | 1.281 |
| TEACHER REDIRECTION | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| TECHNOLOGY | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| TELL TEACHER | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| TESTS | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| TEXTBOOK | 6 | 2 | 0.462 | 0.776 |
| TRUST | 2 | 2 | 0.154 | 0.555 |
| UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS | 8 | 3 | 0.615 | 0.961 |
| UNSUPPORTIVE | 5 | 2 | 0.385 | 0.65 |
| VISUAL | 3 | 2 | 0.231 | 0.599 |
| WELL BEHAVED | 12 | 3 | 0.923 | 1.32 |
| WHOLE GROUP | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |
| WORK LOAD | 1 | 1 | 0.077 | 0.277 |

| Code | Frequency of Code | Maximum Number of Times the Code is Used in 1 Case | Mean Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases | The Standard Deviation for the Number of Times the Code is Used Across All 12 Cases |
|------------|-------------------|--|---|---|
| WORKSHEETS | 10 | 5 | 0.769 | 1.423 |
| WRITING | 6 | 3 | 0.462 | 0.967 |
| YELLING | 2 | 1 | 0.154 | 0.376 |

Appendix F: Coded Focus Group Data

Focus Group Information – High

| | Dana | Jason (A) | Kojo (A) | Reggie (D) |
|----------|---|--|---|--|
| Learning | Learns best with other and by herself; it depends on the work; hard work – by herself best; Needs a little assistance – with others; Learns best when the teacher provides examples Shanice and Naomi represents her best (likes to compete and work by herself) What affects her learning is when students yell out. | Group learning is best; helps with problem solving, get other p.o.v., call on others, makes me push self harder; competition is good. Likes a little talking not dead silence, Go to the teacher in math because I am good at math; I go see her privately, if lessons are interesting, learning takes no time, If lessons are dull, hard to pay attention, difficult learning. | Social studies teacher helped when someone has a problem, ask them to stay after, tutor, Hard to learn when people talk loud. | Likes Peter, likes group work for p.o.v.; Does not like to compete for the highest grade, can affect self-esteem; Most of learning in groups, most cases teachers assigns group work. Only a few people compete but there is a mix of students at school; All students could get As/Bs at school; they do group and independent work mostly. |
| Teaching | Mr. Planas helps learning to read best, (memorizing & taking notes) Go over vocabulary words helps. | I like Mrs. Pathway because of discussion groups, can interpret info and share with people in group, notes help me, I can go back and check what I did previously, study for a test Our reading teacher uses worksheets, have us take notes, have discussions and videos. Pathway, Planas, Smith, Jones Quality teacher balances between work and fun; | I like Jones because of the visual idea Smith, Jones, Pathway, Planas More hands on, more interesting Pay attention Teacher helps to bring jokester into the group. | Mrs. Pathway – discuss ideas in groups; better on test and to understand the book. Reading teacher uses repetition to get information stuck in head. Pathway, Smith, Jones, Planas |

| | Dana | Jason (A) | Kojo (A) | Reggie (D) |
|-----------|---|--|---|--|
| | | crack a joke, notes and projects but sometimes take a break like commercial assignment. Push me harder when I am not doing my best is a quality teacher | | |
| Relations | All of them but Mr. Seymour the most because keeps things interesting. Rewards don't help Don't like the teacher – don't listen Like the teacher – listen and understand | Brown, Seymour, Coble – top scores Likes teacher who joke, push until best comes out, role model, wants best for you Teacher impacts learning when there is communication, grades won't suffer, tell before too late | Brown (care) and Seymour (humor) Likes when teacher lets him know he can do better Fav. Teacher do what can be done to help | Brown (care) fav. – interacts with students inside and outside of class. Want teacher to want to be with you, build strong relationship to help pay attention Preference- Brown, Seymour, Coble, Ramirez Jokes keep you awake Games help you to pay attention and to use as a strategy, Wants challenge to learn new things and to make sure you know, Kind of teacher-in/outside class relations, humor, plays, expects work, challenge |

Appendix G: Interview Data Display

How do African American adolescents perceive their learning?
High Achievers Responses – Interview Data

| Question/ Topic | Jason | Reggie | Kojo | Dana | Similarities/ Differences Theoretical Categories |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| Q1/School Level Achievement | Effort, A/Bs, determined, notes, pay attention, respect | A/Bs, behaving, CMT, study for tests, start projects on time, participate in class, respect | Effort, do best, listen, notes, prepare for tests | To succeed in life, @ Cox patience, effort, attentive, check for understanding, notes, questions | Effort, how they exert effort is different |
| Q3/Middle v. Elementary Learning | Work harder, more work, work to get grades | Teachers push harder, lot more work, important to get A/Bs | Tougher but teachers demonstrate understanding | Math harder but I understand; doing Algebra, more complex- less simple | Harder assignments, for different reasons |
| Q4/ Classroom Learning Process | Take out notebook, take notes, focus, do not look around, ask kids doing well for help, ask teacher for help if do not understand, do not talk to friends. | Take out notebook, pen & pencil, ready to take notes, know what is important & what is not, ask questions | Wait for teacher to give lesson, can give free period, then try to get ahead, want to comprehend, avoid late hours | Sit & get ready, know when to play and when to listen, pay attention to learn, sits and get ready to attend, ignore people, ask questions | Attentiveness, all are, note-taking, questions, ignore friends, wait for teachers, attend differently |
| Q2/ Assignments- Done Well | Wrote summer book report, did well because interested me, made me work harder, to do best, got an A, took notes, remembered book | Latin American report, worked on project daily, paced, checked it over, got 100 | Lewis & Clark, knew did good when given back, got an A, put all heart in it; assignment important, necessary websites, demo to retrieve info | 4 th grade, timed essay, got an award, practiced paragraphs, bandwagon sentences, intros, examples | Self-assessment; discipline, activity, exercise to develop & improve a skill, Kojo did not describe discipline. |
| Q6/ Assignments- Difficult | Science-listen more, write everything down, save papers; miss a day, go to person that is good in science & ask questions, check in w/ teacher before progress report | Go to teacher, ask about assignment, then she explains, makes sure I understand before I say anything, go over it more than twice to make sure I have it | Ask teacher to receive help or little advice how to do properly (math-fav; reading-least fav) go to teacher for help | If classmate knows better, ask for help (fav); Ask teacher or read over textbooks (least fav) | Strategies versus appeal; seeking assistance, teacher only, teacher & classmates, teacher, classmates, other resources |

Appendix H: Definitions of Categories

Category Definitions

Major Findings Categories: serve as headings for major findings in the study.

- Achievement goals: consists of mastery and performance goals; mastery-oriented relates to understanding and learning new content; performance-oriented relates to demonstrating competence or avoiding a negative judgment of competence.
- Instructional preferences: Teaching that is valued more or liked better.
- Academic press: A teacher's push for understanding and learning.
- Care: To be concerned with and have thought and regard; special preference.
- Collaboration: The act of working with another or others to learn and/or understand content.

Organizational Categories: serve as headings and acted as bins for sorting theoretical categories.

- Achievement goals: consists of two categories: (a) "mastery (learning) goals, in which learners seek to increase their competence, to understand or master new skills and (b) performance goals, in which learners seek to gain favorable judgments of their competence or to avoid negative judgments of their competence" (Dweck, 1986, p. 1040).
- Learning preferences: to obtain knowledge, skills, and habits of mind in a context valued or liked.
- Learning patterns: examples of behaviors demonstrated by students to change performance, knowledge, and/or skills.
- Teacher goal orientation: the message the teacher communicates in the classroom is mastery or performance approach.
- Preferred instructional **context**: the type of instructional setting a student prefers.
- Instructional **factors**: "teaching methods that assist in student understanding" (Darby, 2005, p. 428).
- Academic related perception: teacher push for understanding and willing to show achievement.
- Preferred relational context: type of teacher-student interaction the student values or likes.

- Relational **factors**: describe “how the teacher nurtures a relationship with the students” (Darby, 2005, p. 428).

Theoretical Categories: developed both inductively and deductively during data analysis in response to research questions; represents what the researcher thought about student data, and the researcher used these categories to generate findings.

- Mastery: goal to develop competence, skills, and understanding; to attend to or focus on a task.
- Performance approach: purpose to develop competence with focus on self and comparison to others and grading standards.
- Performance avoidance: purpose to avoid demonstrating incompetence and to avoid looking dumb.
- Communalism: group work, social interdependence to promote understanding.
- Verve: a student’s need for stimulation in a learning environment.
- Competition: seeking to be better than others.
- Individualism: individual efforts that lead to success.
- Effort vs. good grades: exertion of cognitive/affective energy; hard work to learn versus the exertion of energy to get good grades.
- Challenge: a contest of skill or strength with a change from elementary to middle school.
- Attentiveness: to be mindful and aware of what happens with their learning in the classroom.
- Self-assessment: to identify information about performance based on self-standards and/or normative standards.
- Strategies vs. appeal: response employed by students at point of difficulty – use of academic strategies versus asking a teacher.
- Study skills: methods for learning.
- Recall: to remember information.
- Teacher mastery: the teacher emphasizes learning and understanding a task to develop competence.
- Teacher performance approach: the teacher emphasizes getting good grades to develop competence.

- Teacher performance avoidance: the teacher emphasizes avoiding failure to develop competence.
- Teaching and learning style: the type of instruction and learning model that promotes understanding and is best for the student.
- Check for understanding: to review, go over, and/or give feedback to students about their learning.
- Show and tell clearly: to explain and/or provide examples so students know what to do.
- Differentiation to promote understanding: to provide a variety of instructional opportunities to work with different content, process, and/or products.
- Math and reading important: content important to learn for real life and to succeed in school.
- Explanation to promote understanding: to demonstrate and/or explain during instruction so students understand content in the classroom setting.
- Attention important: to attend to and/or focus on instruction as essential instructional content.
- Model and review: to show students how to solve and complete assignments for understanding.
- Academic press: teacher push for understanding and learning.
- Self-presentation of low achievement: not wanting other students' to know how well they are doing in school.
- Care: to have concern with; have thought or regard; special preference.
- Humor: attempt to be comical.
- Reward: something given for something good.
- Independent work: reliant on self not the teacher for help.
- Scholar: smart; good on tests.
- Collaboration for understanding: to work in groups and/or the teacher to understand content or designated learning.
- Academic equity: students get what they need academically within the classroom setting.

- Teach for understanding: the teacher explains the learning opportunity to students to promote understanding.
- Good student: a student who does their work and is obedient to the teacher.
- Disciplinary equity: students get what they need in regards to conduct in the classroom setting.
- Rapport: to get along with the teacher.
- Student-centered: collaboration between the teacher and student.
- Kind: to be nice, friendly.
- Collaboration: the act of working with another or others to learn and/or understand content.

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