"DREAMKEEPERS": SCHOOL EXPERIENCES FROM THE VOICES OF
SUCCESSFUL ADULT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

A Dissertation
by
CONNIE MILES COLE

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**Abstract**

"DREAMKEEPERS": SCHOOL EXPERIENCES FROM THE VOICES OF
SUCCESSFUL ADULT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

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As adults, African American males encounter a host of challenging problems.

Among these problems are high incarceration rates, low college degree attainment, and high

unemployment rates. A contributing factor to these problems is the lack of academic success

in the school setting that African American men experience as youths. While there is an

abundance of literature portraying the African American male in a negative light, this study

focused on successful African American males and explored educational practices that

contributed to their academic success. This study asked successful Black adult school leaders

to reflect on their early school experiences and to discuss the impact of their school

experiences on their academic success. In addition, this study explored the commitments

successful adult males made to support young Black males and focused on the guidance these

men provided to support school success.

In this interpretive qualitative study, a phenomenological approach was employed to

document, in their own voices, the early school experiences of successful African American

male school administrators. Ladson-Billings' (2009) characteristics and critical dimensions

of culturally relevant teaching were employed to guide this study. Results indicated that the

Black adult male participants experienced academic success during their early school

experiences and that they have success stories to voice despite the predominance of negative research in the literature.  These African American male school leaders experienced teachers that Ladson-Billings would describe as *Dreamkeepers.*

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I would like to thank the male participants that took part in this study. These participants took the time out from their tedious schedules to lend their voices to this study. For this reason I am appreciative.

Thank you to my husband, Michael, and son, Mikwan, for taking this journey with me. Thank you to my parents, who prayed for me throughout this journey; never letting me quit when times were rough. Thank you to my Aunt Ann, who found ways to keep me laughing even when I wanted to cry.

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**Dedication**

This study is dedicated to my son, nephews and young male cousins--future successful African American males. To them I say, "Keep Your Dreams Alive." Also, to my parents who have always encouraged my two brothers and me to be successful, no matter the challenges we endured.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As adults, African American males encounter a host of challenging problems. Among these problems are high incarceration rates, low college degree attainment, and high unemployment rates. A contributing factor to these problems is the lack of academic success in the classroom that African American men experience as youths. Researchers believe that if African American males have positive school experiences, then they will achieve academic success in the PK-12 educational setting, a precursor to postsecondary goal attainment (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; McDougal, 2009; Milner, 2007; Whiting, 2006).

The focus of this study is the early school experiences of successful African American male school administrators. In addition, this study focused on the commitments that these successful African American male school administrators made to assist or support young African American males in experiencing positive school outcomes. This study will add to the limited research focused on success stories of African American males.

This chapter includes an overview of: (1) the social challenges adult African American males face in today's society, (2) the challenges African American males face in schools, (3) the culturally responsive policies and strategies that have been put in place to aid in the success of all students, (4) the need for a culturally relevant curriculum, (5) the methodology used in the study, and (6) the significance of the study.

**Social Challenges**

African American males experience incarceration at a much higher rate than their White counterparts (Barbarin, 2010). Among 18 to 19 year old prisoners, Black males were

imprisoned at more than nine times the rate of White males. Among persons ages 20 to 24, Black males were imprisoned at about seven times the rate of White males (Carson & Sabol, 2012). According to Barbarin (2010), the number of African American male preschoolers can give an estimate of how many prisons will be needed by the time they grow into adults. Black males who do not achieve success in schools are more likely to be part of the prison system due to the lack of assistance needed to achieve positive outcomes in the classroom.

Along with high incarceration rates, Black adult males are less likely than their White male counterparts to attain a college degree. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), 17.4% of African American males between the ages of 25 to 29 attained a bachelor's degree compared to 37.1 % of White males. Dropping out of college or not obtaining a college degree has a negative effect on African American males' employment status (Davis, 2003).

High incarceration rates and low college degree attainment are not the only problems that adult Black males experience. Black males also face higher unemployment rates than White males. In July 2013, the unemployment rate for Black males age 20 and older was nearly twice that of White males with Black males displaying an unemployment rate of 12.5% versus a rate for White males of 6.3% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

Adult African American males face many social issues in today's society. The challenges faced by African American males begin before they are adults. As youth, African American males face perils in the schools before they are faced with social issues as adults (Kunjufu, 1989). Young African American males face challenges in schools. Academic assessments show that Black males are out-performed by their peers in school (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

**Challenges in Schools**

As youths, Black males have radically different experiences in schools than that of their White male counterparts.  In kindergarten, African American males seem to thrive on education, but by the time they get to the ninth grade they begin to disengage and lose enthusiasm for learning in school (Kunjufu, 2011). Many gradually give up expecting school to make sense in the context of their lives (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Kunjufu, 1985, 1996).

Young African American males face several challenges in the school setting.  The Schott Foundation for Public Education reports biennial data to monitor the academic progress African American males are making in different states. This report has been instrumental in documenting the educational conditions for African American males. According to The Schott Foundation for Public Education reports (2010; 2012),  African American males experience (a) low graduation rates, (b) high dropout rates, (c) low academic progress, (d) high suspension rates, and (e) higher referrals to special education than their White counterparts.  These challenges can be linked to negative school experiences and low academic achievement among African American males.

According to the 2010 *Schott 50 State Report*, an overwhelming majority of U. S. school districts were failing to provide the necessary resources to make education successful for Black male students.  In the United States, forty-seven percent of African American males graduated in the 2007/2008 cohort compared to seventy-eight percent of White males. More than twice as many Black male students are suspended from school than White males. Black males are three times more likely to be expelled from school than their White counterparts and these suspensions and expulsions lead to higher dropout rates for African American males (Schott, 2010).

The Schott Foundation 50 State report (2012), which conveyed data from 2009-2010, noted that 52% of Black males graduate from high school in four years. Nationally, the gap between the Black and White male graduation rates has only decreased three percentage points in the last 10 years (Schott, 2012). The report pointed out that "At this rate of progress, with no 'large scale' systemic intervention, it would take another 50 years to close the graduation gap between Black males and their White male counterparts" (p. 2). Among the 10 states with the largest enrollments, North Carolina had one of the highest graduation rates of 58% for Black male students (Schott, 2012).

Along with having a lower graduation rate, African American males have a higher suspension rate than any other subgroup in schools today. According to the Schott Foundation report (2012), Black students are three times more likely to be suspended out of the classroom than White students. Nationally, more than three times as many Black as White students are given out-of-school suspensions, despite the fact that researchers have found that these administrative measures are the first step toward falling behind academically and eventually leaving school altogether. Chronic absences have been linked to low academic achievement; therefore, it is important for strategies to be put into place to support Black students (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011).

African American males who struggle to achieve academic success in the regular education classroom are more likely to be referred for special education services than their White male counterparts. Black males represent 75% of the population in remedial and special education classes (Kunjufu, 2005). Black males are also twice as likely to be classified as "mentally retarded" as White males (Schott, 2010). According to Harry and Anderson (1994), "African American males have been disproportionately represented in

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special education since its inception" (p. 602). In an attempt to address the challenges that African American males face in schools, there have been court decisions and various policies put in place to aid in the success of culturally and linguistically diverse youth, including African American males.

**Culturally Responsive Policies and Legislation**

The denial of an education has been an issue for Black Americans since the onset of slavery. Yet, it is quite possible that no event in education has equaled the impact of the 1954 Supreme Court decision Brown v. Board of Education in the 20th century. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court issued one of its most controversial, yet momentous, rulings in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). Under Chief Justice Earl Warren, the court unanimously ruled that "in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place." Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). With the implementation of this decision, the majority of the nation's large school districts were subject to mandatory desegregation plans. Despite this, desegregation was not banned until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited racial discrimination in schools receiving federal aid.

Approximately 47 years later, the No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation was birthed. In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2003a), NCLB was "designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools" (p. 1). Yet, since the inception of NCLB, disadvantaged students, as a whole, have not demonstrated increased proficiency in reading, math, and writing.

Despite the efforts of numerous national reforms and policies to create a curriculum that would promote success in schools for all students, including African American males, educators are challenged to meet the needs of the child who is difficult to teach or is in jeopardy of school failure.  While there has been some progress made in the educational system, the educational system's ability to properly educate African American males has not improved (Donnor & Shockley, 2010).  The high-stakes testing movement results display how the educational system is failing African American males.  For example, despite the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the achievement gap between Black and White males continues to reflect negatively upon Black males (Schott, 2010, 2012; Thompson & Allen, 2012).

In a qualitative study, Thompson and Allen (2012) investigated the effects of school reform and federal laws on the academic achievement of African American students. Thompson and Allen (2012) found that despite the efforts to improve the educational experiences of African American students, these students continue to lag behind their peers. The achievement gap between African American students and their White counterparts has decreased but the gap has not closed at the rate policymakers envisioned. The achievement scores have increased for African American students but their scores overall continue to be lower than their White counterparts. Thompson and Allen (2012) suggested that policymakers focus on what works for African American students in the school setting and provide teachers with the training needed to reach students who are not achieving academic success, instead of focusing exclusively on test results.

**Reforming for Success**

Due to the increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students in schools, researchers have emphasized the need for a culturally relevant curriculum in order to improve academic achievement (Banks, 2002; Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Thompson & Allen, 2012). Banks (2002) believed that all schools, including colleges, should implement multicultural education in order for all students to achieve academic success. Reyes, Scribner and Scribner (1999) conducted a qualitative study to identify ways that school districts can be successful in supporting success among Hispanic students. The researchers believed that all constituents--including administrators, school faculty and staff, students, parents and communities--should be willing to work toward changes in a curriculum that reflects many cultures. Reyes, Scribner and Scribner (1999) provided a framework for creating learning communities that would provide excellent results in the school setting for all students, no matter their culture. The framework consisted of four categories required knowledge, responsive school cultures, disciplines of a learning organization and action. Yin Chu (2011) argued that educators should not expect students and parents of diverse backgrounds to adjust to the schools; instead, educators should be willing to change to meet the needs of the diverse population.

The increasing number of diverse students has resulted in a call for culturally responsive schools. In an ethnographic study, Bazron, Osher, and Fleischman (2005) uncovered ways to promote culturally responsive education in schools. The researchers discovered that educators should be sensitive when talking to parents and teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Educators should also be aware of the challenges these students face while attempting to learn in an unfamiliar environment.

Similarly, Green (2005) provided strategies that should be used daily in schools for improving the education of African American males. She suggests that schools should be responsible for developing strategies and interventions that meet the needs of the underachieving student. According to Green (2005), school professionals should actively attempt to understand the world through the eyes of those who are culturally different and be sensitive to different cultures when developing strategies that could help them in the classroom.

Culturally relevant pedagogy as described by Ladson-Billings (1995b) is a theoretical model that allows students to accept their cultural identity in order to achieve academic success in the classroom. Teachers that understand the cultural differences of their students and implement culturally relevant teaching practices in their classrooms see academic success among African American males (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In Ladson-Billings' (2009) study of eight effective teachers of African American students, she observed that the Black males were achieving academic success because the teachers were implementing culturally relevant practices in their classrooms. These characteristics fall under the three critical dimensions of culturally relevant teaching categorized as: 1) Conceptions of Self and Others, 2) Structures Supporting Social Interactions, and 3) Conceptions of Knowledge. Because these teachers were successful in making sure African American males were academically successful in the classroom, Ladson-Billings (2009) called these teachers *Dreamkeepers*.

Although there is an emergent body of research that explores success among African American boys in academic domains, these studies are small in number when compared to the literature that focuses on deficit models or models that blame African American males for the challenges they face in schools. Since the mid-1990s, however, there have been a few

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research studies that have documented the voices of academically successful, historically marginalized students (Bergin & Cooks, 2000; Hebert & Reis, 1999; O'Connor, 1997). Although these studies did not exclusively focus on academically successful African American male students, most included academically successful African American male students as research participants.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore educational practices that aided in promoting academic success among African American male school administrators. The study worked to give a voice to successful African American adult males who are most often portrayed negatively in the literature. In reflecting on their early experiences in schools, these men were asked to explain how their school experiences influenced their academic success. In addition, this study explored commitments the successful adult African American school administrators made to support young African American males. A phenomenological approach was employed to document the voices of successful adult African American school leaders. In-depth, phenomenological interviewing was employed to understand and capture the meaning of the participants' lived experiences.

**Research Questions**

This study explored practices that promoted academic success for African American males and worked to give voice to successful African American males' experiences in the educational setting. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What school and community experiences aided in the academic success of adult African American males?

2. In what ways have early school experiences influenced how successful adult African American males resolve to assist young African American males?

3. What are successful adult African American males doing to guide young African American males towards positive engagement in school?

**Research Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the research questions focused on educational strategies that led to academic success for African American males. Also, this research focused on giving voice to successful African American males in education. Specific educational strategies, described in participant responses, were studied for significance in promoting success. Interview questions prompted the exploration of educational strategies that have worked for successful African American males.

The study's participants were drawn from African American male school administrators of an urban school district in the southeast. The African American male school administrators were chosen because they themselves had lived the school experiences they were being asked to describe and analyze. Adding to the study was the fact that these participants worked in close contact with young African American males on a daily basis. This study employed a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is known as a process and, as well, a method and a procedure that facilitates a richly contextualized study of the "essence" of an experience shared by a small number of participants (Creswell, 2009). In this process the researcher sets aside her experiences in order to understand those of the study's participants (Creswell, 2009). In this study the school experiences of adult African American males were explored through two sets of interview questions. These in-depth, phenomenological interviews were conducted in order to collect the data needed to understand participants' multi-faceted lived school experiences leading to success. Similar to

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the interview model used by Seidman (2013), interviews were completed in three sessions.

**Significance of the Study**

Researchers have informed society about the many reasons African American males do not find success in the educational setting.  However, few researchers have deepened the scope of inquiry to find practices to improve academic success among Black males in educational settings based on the experiences of Black males who have achieved success. This study was important because Black males are less successful than other students.  It is also important for educators to understand what social processes or activities account for the differences in achievement and to investigate ways to increase student engagement (Entwisle & Webster, 1974).  This study elicits the following questions.  From their own experience, what school and community experiences aided in the success of adult African American school leaders?  Furthermore, what are successful African American males doing to support the academic success of young African American males in schools?  Insights from this research can potentially aid in closing the achievement gap among African American and White males, positively affecting a decrease in the number of African American males referred to special education in school districts, lower the dropout rates, and raise graduation rates among Black males in public schools.

**Summary**

Recently, African American males have shown some improvement in educational achievement.  They still lag behind their White counterparts despite the efforts of policymakers and educators to improve the academic experience of the African American male in schools.  It is the purpose of this study to make a contribution towards improving the schooling experience of African American males.

Chapter two provides the cultural portrayals of African American males, parental involvement, teacher perceptions, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the past and current models of strategies implemented in classrooms and school districts that have led to the educational success of African American males. In chapter three, the research methodology used for the study is explained. In chapter four, the findings of the study are revealed. In addition, chapter five contains a discussion of the themes with respect to the literature on African American males, along with the delimitations, implications, and the need for further research.

**Definition of Terms**

*African American or Black males:* males of Black African descent. For purpose of this study, African American boys/males and Black boys/males will be used interchangeably.

*Deficit Schooling:* When schools blame the underachievement of students of color and students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged on the student, family and community.

*Culturally Relevant Curriculum*: Curriculum that by design encompasses, acknowledges and respects all cultures of a school and that addresses sociopolitical understandings of position and power for cultural groups. Culturally relevant curriculum focuses on teaching strategies that place students in position to learn collaboratively. There is an emphasis on developing self-determination through an understanding of what exists in a socially and politically stratified society and what, through deliberately designed activities, could be.

*Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*: Culturally relevant pedagogy is a community and student-centered approach to teaching that focuses on affirming individual cultural identities to improve achievement. There are three domains to culturally relevant teaching: (1) teachers' conceptions of themselves and others that are efficacious in nature and where students are

seen as vessels of knowledge, (2) teachers' manner of structuring classroom social interactions where students accept responsibility for others and also develop individual self-determination within a community of learners, and (3) teachers' conception of knowledge that is viewed critically and that re-creates itself.

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*: Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching in which teachers consider students' unique cultural strengths planning for instruction and promoting student achievement.

*Culturally Responsive Schools*: A culturally responsive school is one that honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice.  Teaching and learning are planned through considerations of and response to student cultural backgrounds.

*School Culture*: Beliefs, traditions, policies, and norms that set the stage for learning by all sociocultural student groups. School culture can be reformed by school district officials, school's principal and staff, students and parents to become more deliberately welcoming and inclusive of and, as well, relevant to the sociocultural backgrounds of students.

*Success:* For purposes of this study, success is defined as graduating from high school, continuing on to receive a college degree, and becoming gainfully employed.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

African American males face several challenges in school. According to Schott Foundation reports (2010, 2012), African American males experience (1) low graduation rates, (2) high dropout rates, (3) low academic progress, (4) high suspension rates and ( 5) higher referrals to special education than their White counterparts. Duncan (2002) suggests that most studies lead readers to believe that Black males and their families along with schools contribute to the low achievement of Black males. This study explores, through the participants' own voices, practices that aid in the academic success for African American males. Listening to what Black male educators have to say about their academic and social experiences in school can contribute to changing the conditions that undermine the achievement of Black males (Duncan, 2002). This study also explores what successful adult African American male educators are doing in schools to support the academic success of young Black males. African American males need positive support in classrooms in order to achieve academic success. The review of the literature focuses on sources that reference successful educational strategies and practices for African American males.

**Cultural Portrayals of African American Males**

The media and popular culture portray Black males as angry, dangerous, hostile, aggressive, overtly sexual, and lazy (Tatum, 1997). These negative depictions of Black people are sometimes the only exposure some White teachers experience prior to the classroom. Tatum (1997) explained the impact of negative stereotypes:

If we live in an environment in which we are bombarded with stereo-typical images

in the media, are frequently exposed to ethnic jokes of friends and family members,

and are rarely informed of the accomplishments of oppressed groups, we will develop

the negative categorizations of those groups that form the basis of prejudice (p.6).

Rarely is African American males seen in a positive light in the media.  Therefore, based on

what people see in the media, society as a whole has a tendency to think the worst about

African American males.  Ferguson (2000) posits that Black males are perceived through

three socially invented categories:

…[A]ge, gender, and race…are grounded in the commonsense, taken-for-granted

notion  that existing social divisions reflect biological dispositional differences among

humans: so children are essentially different from adults, males from females, Blacks

from Whites.  At the intersection of this complex subject positions are African

American boys who are doubly displaced: as Black children, they are not seen as

childlike but adultified; as Black males, they are denied the masculine dispensation

constituting White males as being 'naturally naughty' and are discerned as willfully

bad. (p. 80)

 No matter the age, Black males are seen in a negative light and treated as if they are

immoral.  Ladson-Billings (2011) points to the ultimate outcome of negative racial images:

"We see African American males as problems that our society must find ways to eradicate.

We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in schools and society"

(p. 9).

Negative cultural messages from the media and society play an enormous part in the

way Black males are treated and perceived in schools (Davis, 2003).  Teacher expectations of

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Black males are low due to what they see and hear about Black males in the media. Due to being treated differently in school, Black males perform poorly academically and display more behavior problems than their peers in school (Davis, 2003). According to Davis (2003), schools should aid Black males in having positive school experiences, especially when they are young.

In summary, society and the media portray African American males in a negative light. African American males carry negative labels which affect the way they are seen and treated in and out of the educational setting. African American males are often misunderstood by their teachers and schools. Furthermore, teacher expectations of African American males are low due to the negative images portrayed by the media and society. Despite these negative stereotypes and low expectations, parental involvement in the school setting has been found to result in academic success for African American males.

**Parental Involvement with African American Males**

Parental involvement in schools has been consistently related to high academic achievement (Fan, 2001). Positive school experiences have been linked to the parent's involvement in their child's schooling (Jeynes, 2005). Activities such as school-based parent participation, assisting with homework, and parent supervision have shown to positively impact a child's academic success (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1996).

Parents' expectations for educational success have also been a strong predictor of academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lee & Croninger, 1994). In a qualitative research study, Shearin (2002) described the relationship between family variables as seen by the adolescent and parent and the academic achievement of African American males. Shearin, using a participant sample taken from Black males in the 7th and

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8th grades, concluded that African American middle school males' academic achievement is significantly related to family variables.  The African American male participant's perception of positive parent-adolescent interaction, which supports a stable sense of well-being, enhances their efforts toward high academic achievement.  Shearin (2002) examined the parents' perceptions of involvement with their African American males, whereas Graves (2010) explored the levels of involvement between parents of African American males and females.

Graves (2010) completed a quantitative study to inquire if parents were comparatively more involved in the schooling of their African American daughter or their African American son. The participants consisted of an equal number of African American males and African American females. Graves (2010) found that parents of African American males and females were involved with their children in activities in the home setting.  The study also concluded that as African American males progressed through elementary school, their parents' academic expectations of them decreased.  Though Graves (2010) inquired about the levels of parental involvement, Robinson and Werblow (2012) concentrated specifically on the influence of Black mothers on their sons' academic success in the educational setting.

Robinson and Werblow (2012), in a qualitative study, explored the relationship Black mothers shared with their sons and how these relationships influenced the educational success of their sons. Their case study was conducted in a large urban school district, and Robinson and Werblow (2012) found that the success of their sons in school was a high priority for the mothers. The researchers found that the mothers in this study learned about the educational system in order to help their sons achieve academic success. While Robinson

and Werblow (2012) explored the influence of Black mothers on their sons' academic success, Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) examined parental styles and African American males' academic achievement.

In a quantitative study, Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) examined the parental characteristics, ecological factors, and the academic achievement of African American male high school students. The participants were African American males from two large school districts and in the study 153 high school African American males completed a parenting survey and a questionnaire. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) discovered that there was no significant relationship between parenting styles and African American males taking honors classes. African American males from two-parent families had a tendency to have higher grade point averages than those from one-parent homes.

Using a qualitative case study approach using critical race theory and phenomenological lenses, Reynolds (2010) interviewed Black middle-class parents about their public school experiences. Parents in this study were involved in their child's education. However, parents reported that they did not feel school officials heard their voices. According to Reynolds (2010) the parents expressed that racism played a part in the way they were treated when talking with school officials. The goal for the parents was to make sure school officials met their sons' needs. The African American males in this study often received verbal warnings from their parents about what was expected from them in the educational setting. Parents in this study told their sons to separate from friends if they seemed to be getting into trouble and parents felt this advice was necessary for academic success (Reynolds, 2010).

In summation, parental involvement plays a pivotal role in the academic success of African American males. At times parents feel intimidated by teachers and school leaders because the climate of the school does not seem inviting. Parental involvement in activities inside and out of school has resulted in positive academic success for African American males. Parents, especially the mothers, have high expectations for their African American sons, which has a great impact on their son's academic performance in the classroom. Nevertheless, the parents' expectations for positive academic success were found to decrease as the African American male gets older. Along with parental involvement playing a role in the academic success for African American males, schools can also integrate relevant pedagogy into the schools if academic success for all students is expected.

**Teacher Perceptions of African American Males**

Teachers play an important role in the lives of students and can have lasting effects on the lives of children (Pedersen, Faucher, & Eaton, 1978; Werner & Smith, 1989). Research has also shown that teachers' relationships with students impact school adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1997). McKown and Weinstein (2008) examined the relationship between teacher expectations and child ethnicity and discovered a high rate of teacher preferences for White students over African American males. In the study, teachers expected more academically from White students than from their African American male students.

Researchers suggest that teachers have a preeminent role in children's lives once they enter the school environment, and that the relationships established between students and their teachers can have a great influence on the way children adapt to school, both socially and academically (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, 1999). Ladd and Burgess (2001) contend that positive student-teacher relationships serve as a resource for students at risk of school failure,

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whereas conflict or disconnection between students and teachers may compound that risk. Research also indicates that negative discrepancies between teacher perception and a student's promotion and retention and special education eligibility could be affected as well (Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle 1993; Saft & Pianta, 2001).

Stipek (2006) conveyed that the spotlight should not be on the results of students' performance on tests, but support should be geared towards providing staff development on developing positive relationships between teachers and students. Stipek (2006) contends that the most "difficult-to-reach students" (p. 48) will do well for a teacher who shows that they care for them and who is committed to their academic success. Positive relationships between teachers and students can contribute significantly to high expectations and high academic performance (Stipek, 2006). This is important because some students of color, especially African American students, tend to be more dependent on teachers than their other-race peers. They tend to perform poorly in school when they do not like their teachers or feel that their teachers do not care for them (Ferguson, 2002). The findings from the preceding research studies validate the importance of teacher perceptions and how they can positively or negatively impact Black male achievement.

Emdin (2012) believed that Black males face false perceptions when entering the classroom. Black males are not expected to achieve to the same level as their White male peers. According to Emdin (2012), "To address the low achievement of Black males, schools must be willing to accept that there are ways of looking at the world, modes of communication, and approaches to teaching and learning that are unique to Black males" (p. 13). Schools should acknowledge and embrace the cultural differences that Black males bring into the classroom. Milner (2007) explained that the mindset of negative thinking

about Black males must be changed or Black males will continue on the road to failure in public schools.  Milner (2007) found that teachers often see Black males through deficit lenses.  These deficit lenses encourage educators to have low expectations for Black males to achieve in the classroom.  Hargrove and Seay (2011) found that "teachers perceive students from low-income and minority backgrounds as less intelligent than other students" (p. 440). In their study, African American students fell in the low-income and minority background categories; therefore, teachers perceived African American students as less intelligent than their peers.

Along with positive teacher perceptions of African American males, Milner (2007) found other ways to improve the educational experience of African American males in the classroom.  Milner (2007) emphasized that "there are no cookie-cutter ways to improve the educational experience of Black males" (p. 241) and suggested pathways for schools and teachers to promote success for Black male students.  Milner (2007, p. 241) proposed that the following actions can bring both teachers and students to a higher level:

- Teachers and students envision life beyond their present situations.

- Teachers and students come to know themselves in relation to others.

- Teachers and students speak possibility and not destruction.

- Teachers and students care and demonstrate they care.

- Teachers and students change their thinking to change actions.

Teacher perceptions and positive relationships with Black males in the classroom result in academic success for Black males.

A child's race has an impact on how teachers respond to their behavior (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Clark, Lee, Goodman, & Yacco, 2008).  Racism is endemic in American

society and is evident when class and gender-based arguments "are not powerful enough to explain the variance in school experience or performance" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 51). Racism is deeply ingrained in American life in all aspects, including legally, culturally, and psychologically (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Piggot and Cowan (2000) conducted a study to assess the roles that child race, teacher race, and teacher–child racial congruence play in teacher ratings of children's school adjustment and performance. In the study, "African American children were judged by both teacher groups to have more serious school adjustment problems, fewer competencies, more negatively stereotypic personality qualities, and poorer educational prognoses than White children" (Piggot & Cowen, 2000, p. 189). These findings suggested that many Black children do not have the same access to classroom opportunities as their White counterparts because of their teachers' perceptions. Teachers perceived Black students as more difficult to teach, which contributed to a more contentious teacher-student relationship. For example, Murray et al. (2008) found that children of color had relationships that were more conflicting with their teachers than their White peers. Murray and colleagues' study was consistent with other research findings suggesting that the quality of the teacher-child relationship impacts early school adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1997) and that "students of color have poorer-quality relationships with teachers…and teacher-child relationships may affect student adjustment differently depending on the student's race" (Murray et al., 2008, p. 572). Therefore, a positive teacher's relationship with Black male students may result in an increase in academic achievement.

It is important for teachers, current and prospective, to understand the specific and unique qualities of the African American cultural experience (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Historically, teacher expectations for ethnic minority children or children from lower socioeconomic groups are generally lower than those for other children (Dusek & Joseph, 1983).  Baron, Tom, and Cooper (1985) confirmed similar findings in that teacher judgments about White students were more favorable than those for Black and lower social economically disadvantaged students.

In the preceding findings, teacher expectations of their African American male students are very important to their academic success.  African American males who feel their teachers care about them are more likely to perform well academically. When the relationship between the teacher and student does not seem genuine, the student will withdraw and not perform up to expectations.  African American males who do not perform up to their teachers' expectations are more likely to be referred to special education or to have academic concerns ignored in the classroom, setting the African American male up to fail academically.

**Addressing the African American Male's Responsiveness to Success and Schooling**

There is a sense of urgency to address the education achievement problems of Black males because low achieving Black male students experience drastic social, emotional, and cognitive consequences (Heath & MacKinnon, 1988). Therefore, issues of race and gender are central to any discussion about African American males and achievement (Delpit, 1988; Fordham, 1996; Mickelson, 1990; Williams, 1996).

In 2009, President Barack Obama established as a national goal that the United States produce the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.  In order to reach for this goal, educational leaders must reclaim some of the students that have been lost in the education pipeline.  The *Urgency of Now Report* (Schott, 2012) stated:

Black and Latino students who navigate through the 'pushout' challenge are still

likely to be 'locked out' of systems with well-resourced schools, where teachers have

the supports necessary to provide them with a substantive opportunity to learn. The

American lockout crisis often leaves Black and Latino students locked out of several

critical resources: 1) early childhood education, 2) student centered learning, 3) well-

resourced community schools, 4) gifted/talented and advanced placement

opportunities and 5) post-secondary opportunities. (p. 39)

Students, mostly Black males and Latinos, who experience pushout do not have the

opportunity to be successful in school. Those students who experience lockout do not have

the resources in their schools to assist them in learning (Schott, 2012).

In order for the needs to be met for African American males, they should not be

pushed out or left out of opportunities to achieve. African American males should also enjoy

positive schooling experiences. These positive schooling experiences cannot be achieved

without the willingness and support from teachers and administrators. In ensuring that

African American males are exposed to positive school experiences, educators must be

willing to incorporate strategies that have been proven to work in the PK-12 educational

setting. Some of these strategies will be discussed in the next section.

**Various Approaches to the Successful Education of African American Males**

Livingston and Nahimana (2006) suggested that an "ecological approach" may aid in

improving the academic outcomes of young Black males. "In creating interventions,

curriculum, and programs for Black children, educators must account for and be mindful of

the cultural, social, structural, and psychological realities that impact Black male

development" (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006, p. 213). In other words, understanding the

young African American male in a holistic way has its advantages and educational implications.

Fergus and Noguera (2010) found a series of instructional strategies that had a positive influence on educational experiences and outcomes. The researchers explored seven single-sex schools in a three-year study to identify strategies that were centered around social/emotional programming, rites of passage programs, community service requirements, culturally responsive  instruction, rigorous curriculum and an emphasis on basic skills. The schools focused on changing the mindsets of teachers and students, developing and enhancing core basic skills of Black, as well as, Latino males. According to Fergus and Noguera (2010), changing the mindsets of teachers and students, then changing the curriculum resulted in positive academic outcomes for the Black, as well as, the Latino males of the school.

Whiting (2006), in a qualitative study on gifted African American males, offered the *scholar identity model* as a way for schools to fight against the academic challenges facing African American males. Whiting (2006) defined scholar identity as an identity in which Black males "view themselves as academicians, as studious, as competent and capable, and as intelligent or talented" (p. 224). Whiting (2006) provided strategies to empower Black males:  (1) recruit qualified Black males in schools and communities, (2) incorporate Black culture into the curriculum, (3) provide milestone ceremonies where accomplishments are acknowledged and (4) recognize and challenge stereotypes and prejudices that exist in society. Empowering Black males will increase academic success among Black males in schools (Whiting, 2006). Furthermore, schools that acknowledge and recognize all cultures in their classrooms generally have positive academic outcomes for all students.

Bergin and Cooks (2000) found a high level of competition for grades and recognition among students in a predominantly Black inner-city high school, and they noted that their research participants perceived academic competition as beneficial. Additionally, Bergin and Cooks (2002) investigated the concept of 'acting White' or changing to be academically like the dominant culture, with a group of average to high-achieving students of color. In their study, Bergin and Cooks (2002) concluded that they "did not hear a single comment from students admitting that they had altered their behavior, reduced their effort, or earned poor grades in order to avoid accusations of acting White" (p. 132). Bergin and Cooks (2002) believed that harassment about acting White was more likely to occur when students showed " 'proper speech,' or 'White dress,' or preference for other 'White' things" (p. 131), rather than from projecting school or academic success. Therefore, African American students did not feel that they had to give up their identity in order to be academically successful.

In a qualitative research study Stinson (2011) interviewed academically successful African American males. Stinson (2011) found that the responses from his participants demonstrated that they were academically successful because they wanted to be successful in school. The successful academic males did not see their school success as "acting White". Nor did they see success as part of giving up their Black identity for the most part in their schooling experience even though at times race did seem to play a conflicting part in some instances of their early school experiences.

Some African American males are capable of achieving academic success regardless of the negative environmental challenges they face. Hebert and Reis (1999) analyzed a culturally diverse group of high-achieving, successful students from an urban high school

who experienced circumstances in and out of school that inhibited academic achievement. Their participants were successful despite the negative aspects of their urban environments. According to O'Connor's (1997), low-income, high-achieving African American high school research participants also experienced circumstances in and out of school that have been hypothesized as inhibiting academic achievement. In addition to the factors identified by Hebert and Reis (1999) as promoting achievement, O'Connor (1997) documented that her high-achieving African American students had a positive racial identity. Also in O'Connor's study (1997), African American males were found to have a high awareness of race and socially structured racism.

In a qualitative study guided by an Afrocentric paradigm, McDougal (2009) examined how African American students chose to learn new and difficult information. In this study, McDougal (2009) found that the African American males learned better if they connect what they were learning to "the real world" (p. 435). In addition, the males explained that they learned best when a teacher explained how to complete an assignment step by step. These findings suggested that Black males would benefit greatly from problem-based teaching strategies and culturally relevant instructional techniques (McDougal, 2009). Two researchers who promote positive teaching frameworks are Geneva Gay (2000) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006, 2009, 2011).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of culturally diverse students to make learning appropriate and effective for the culturally diverse student (Gay, 2000). Gay (2000) gives culturally responsive teaching the following characteristics:

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- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.

- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.

- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.

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

- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subjects and skills taught in schools (p. 29)

Gay's (2000) characteristics of culturally responsive teaching invite teachers to make sure students understand their culture and the cultures of others. Ladson-Billings (2009) takes Gay's (2000) characteristics a step further through her efforts to promote collaborative learning environments where students not only learn about their own cultures but also understand the sociopolitical aspects of their group within the larger society. Ladson-Billings (2009) also promotes that teachers with students engage in understanding sociocultural positions and to advocating for positive cultural changes in schools, the community, and larger society. She called this teaching stance culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy as described by Ladson-Billings (1995b) is a theoretical model that allows students to embrace their cultural identity in order to achieve academic success. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a):

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or 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 (p. 160).

Teachers can help incorporate culturally relevant tools into the classroom, which can yield

positive results from all students.

Teachers who practice this pedagogical model commit to and prepare students to

confront inequitable and undemocratic social structures (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995b, 2006,

2009; Murrell, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Successful teachers of Black students have

an extraordinary ability to look for talents and gifts in students rather than focusing on their

deficits (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a; Murrell, 2002; Thompson 2002, 2004). Teachers

using this model are able to view students as human beings with a rich culture that is valued

and appropriately integrated into the pedagogical practice (Thompson, 2002, 2004).

In her study of eight teachers, five African Americans and three European Americans,

who were successful educators of African-American children, Ladson-Billings (2009)

identified 16 characteristics of culturally relevant teaching which she aligned under three

critical dimensions of culturally relevant teaching. Ladson-Billings (2009) explained what

she found in her study through observations of the eight teachers' classrooms.

The eight teachers focused on three central things in their teaching, even though their

specific methodologies may have varied greatly. All eight teachers had a strong focus

on student learning, developing cultural competence, and cultivating a sociopolitical

awareness in their classrooms (p. xi).

Accomplished and effective teachers of Black students integrate culturally relevant teaching into their classrooms daily (Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2006, 2009; Murrell, 2002; Thompson, 2002, 2004).

Teachers who successfully educate Black students understand how to create an intellectual environment and cultural community that provides social, intellectual, and cultural learning and development (Murrell, 2002; Thompson, 2004). These teachers consistently challenge themselves to develop a profound knowledge of their students' culture, history, language, life, and community (Murrell, 2002). Being armed with that knowledge enables them to establish meaningful, caring relationships with each student (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2006; Murrell, 2002; Thompson, 2002, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Additionally, this pedagogical practice results in the development of students into capable, caring, and intelligent young adults (Murrell, 2002).

Culturally relevant teachers understand the importance of social relationships within the school context. These teachers create an atmosphere wherein they effectively connect with students to create a community of learners in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Culturally relevant teachers have core knowledge of themselves as agents within the classroom and have the ability to use that knowledge to construct learning that has meaning to students (Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Students who encounter culturally relevant teaching in the classroom experience academic success. "Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 17-18). Proficiency in

culturally relevant teaching "entails a highly complex set of professional knowledge, including curriculum, pedagogy, instructional design, developmental psychology, history, and philosophy of education, legal issues, human relationships, cross-cultural communication, conflict management, and more" (Howard, 2006, p. 126). When schools encourage and support the development of culturally relevant practices, they provide self-determination for students, honor and respect the students' home culture, and help Black students understand the world as it is and equip them to change it in a positive manner (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Much of the empirical research on culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on African American and Latino students. In their comprehensive review of the literature, Irvine and Hawley (2011) focused on several aspects of effective teaching and examples of research showing that essential characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy are related to positive student outcomes. For example, caring relationships and high academic expectations resulted in positive academic consequences. Students experienced academic success in classrooms where their teachers had high expectations for them in the classroom. In addition, assessing student learning, selecting and effectively using learning resources, as well as promoting and learning from family and community engagement are important aspects of effective teaching designed to enhance student learning outcomes (Irvine & Hawley, 2011).

Engaging and motivating students is a key component of culturally relevant pedagogy and positive educational outcomes. In a longitudinal study conducted by Cohen and his colleagues (1999), African American students were given the task of reflecting on an important personal value, such as relationships with friends and family or musical interests,

in a series of structured writing assignments.  Over two years, the students' grade point averages improved and the rates of remediation or grade repetition decreased.  Cohen and his colleagues (1999) concluded that the self-affirming intervention interrupted a reoccurring cycle of poor performance and prevented the achievement gap between African American male students and their White counterparts from widening over time.

In summation, there are strategies that have proven to result in academic success for African American males.  Strategies such as implementing a multicultural curriculum in the classroom, mentors, role models, parental involvement in schools, self-motivation, problem-based teaching strategies and culturally relevant instructional techniques in the classroom have proven to produce academic success for African American males.  Despite the different strategies that have proven academic success, African American males as a whole still face academic distress in the educational setting.

In conclusion, according to research, schools that responsively honor the culture of all students generally have positive academic outcomes for all students no matter their culture. Teachers who recognize the cultural differences of their students and incorporate culturally relevant materials in the classroom produce positive academic results from all students. African American males have been found to be academically successful in classrooms that incorporate a culturally relevant curriculum.  Teachers must also have positive perceptions of the African American males in their classrooms in order for these students to achieve academic success.  In conclusion, schools where teachers engage in culturally relevant pedagogy experience high academic performance of all students, especially African American males.

**Conceptual Framework**

Gay (2000) provides five characteristics of culturally responsive teaching, which focus on teachers making sure different cultures are incorporated in the curriculum.  Gay's (2000) characteristics require that teachers have a basic understanding of all cultures so that students are better educated in schools.  Ladson-Billings (2009) built upon Gay's characteristics of culturally responsive teaching to develop the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching.  Ladson-Billings' model of culturally relevant teaching requires a commitment to building community and relationships with students, and, as well, a commitment for teachers to teach about, promote understanding about, and change the status quo collectively with the students (see Table A).

In a qualitative study of eight successful teachers, five African American, three White, of African American students, Ladson-Billings (2009) was able to document practices of culturally relevant teaching.  Ladson-Billings (2009) interviewed and observed these eight teacher teachers over a period of time.  Through data from the interviews and observations, Ladson-Billings revealed 16 characteristics of culturally relevant teaching.  These characteristics fall under the three critical dimensions of culturally relevant teaching categorized as: 1) Conceptions of Self and Others, 2) Structures Supporting Social Interactions, and 3) Conceptions of Knowledge (see Table A).  Ladson-Billings requires a commitment from teachers to change the status quo collectively with the students in order to reach academic success in the classroom.

In her study, Ladson-Billings (2009) identified effective teachers of African American students as *Dreamkeepers*.  *Dreamkeepers* are those teachers who are using culturally relevant teaching methods to keep the dreams alive of African American students,

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making sure they achieve academic excellence and success in the classroom.   In keeping the dreams alive for African American students, Dreamkeepers acknowledge, respect, and critically examine all cultures in the classroom.

A review of literature reveals parental involvement in schools, high expectations, positive teacher relationships, mentors, advocate programs, cultural understanding, and a change in the curriculum to reflect all cultures are needed to motivate African American males to achieve academic success in schools.  This study used the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching documented by Ladson-Billings (2009) as a framework to understand the school experiences of the participants of this study.  This study focused on classroom experiences because students spend more time at school in the classroom than any other place on a daily basis.  This study highlighted the personal narratives of successful adult African American male educators to understand their public school classroom experiences and to document their current efforts to guide young African American males in positive engagement with learning.

This study explored practices that promote academic success for African American males.  Open-ended questions probed into the experiences that led the study's participants to become academically successful.  Research results will be viewed through the culturally relevant teaching lens outlined by Ladson-Billings (2009).  Ladson-Billings' (2009) characteristics of culturally relevant teaching provide a powerful framework to use when looking at the best ways to assist and work with culturally diverse students.  Table A displays the critical dimensions and characteristics of culturally relevant teaching.

Table A

*Dimensions and Characteristics of Culturally Relevant Teaching*

| Critical Dimensions of Culturally Relevant Teaching | Culturally Relevant Teaching Characteristics |
|---|---|
| Dreamkeepers'/Teachers' Conceptions of Self and Others | <ul><li>Teacher has high self-esteem and a high regard for others</li><li>Teacher sees herself as an artist, teaching as an art.</li><li>Teacher sees herself as a part of the community and teaching as giving something back to the community, encourages students to do the same.</li><li>Teacher believes all students can succeed.</li><li>Teacher helps students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.</li><li>Teacher sees teaching as "pulling knowledge out"-like "mining."</li></ul> |
| Dreamkeepers'/Teachers' Structures Supporting Social Interactions | <ul><li>Teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community.</li><li>Teacher cultivates relationships with students beyond the classroom.</li><li>Teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students.</li><li>Teacher encourages a "community of learners."</li><li>Teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other.</li></ul> |
| Dreamkeepers'/Teachers' Conceptions of Knowledge | <ul><li>Knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by teachers and students. It is not static or unchanging.</li><li>Knowledge is viewed critically.</li><li>Teacher is passionate about content.</li><li>Teacher helps students develop necessary skills.</li><li>Teacher sees excellence as a complex</li></ul> |

|  | standard that may involve some postulates but takes student diversity and individual differences into account. |
| --- | --- |

*Note. Table A is comprised of Ladson-Billings'(2009) Critical Dimensions and Characteristics of Culturally Relevant Teaching.*

**Implications of this Study**

Davis (2003) acknowledged that the academic achievement of Black males in PreK-12 and postsecondary schools has been the subject of numerous research studies over the past three decades. Much of the data has focused on challenges involving communities and Black male social class. Milner (2007) contended that the challenges are directly located in classrooms due to lack of racial and culture awareness among school personnel, teacher attitudes and poor instruction.

Howard (2013) countered the documented challenges of African American males with the reality that not all African American males are suffering and dropping out of schools, and not all are incarcerated. According to Howard (2013), African American males do experience degrees of academic success, yet their successful experiences are not represented in the research on African American males' educational experiences. Howard (2013) believed that Black males' accounts of their own school experiences have been found more in social science research because it is believed that these males are unable or unwilling to explain their school experiences.

Despite concerns that African American males do not like to discuss their school experiences, my study will address those perceptions. I believe that African American males will share their educational experiences, especially if they know that their success will be documented to share with others. Sharing the specific experiences that led to their success will help other African American males gain insight on what is needed to achieve academic

success. The experiences and strategies that led to the academic success for the African American males in this study can also help educators gain insight on what needs to be initiated in schools to help struggling African American males succeed in the classroom.

In addition, African American males' positive school experiences have been masked by the literature focusing mainly on the negative social and educational challenges faced by African American males. Although many African American males have achieved academic success, African American males as a group remain at risk for numerous social and educational reasons. Noguera (2008) concluded that in spite of the many challenges faced by African American males, many still manage to be academically successful.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed (1) the cultural portrayals of African American males, (2) parental involvement with African American males, (3) culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy, (4) teacher perceptions of African American males, (5) African American male's responsiveness to success and schooling, and (6) various approaches to the African American male schooling issue. The next chapter explains the methodology that was used in this study.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore practices that enable academic success for African American males and to give voice to successful African American males' experiences in the educational setting.  A phenomenological approach was employed to document the school experiences of successful adult African American male school leaders.

**Research Questions**

The following three research questions guided the study:

1.  What school and community experiences aided in the academic success of adult African American males?

2.  In what ways have early school experiences influenced how successful adult African American males resolve to assist young African American males?

3.  What are successful adult African American males doing to guide young African American males towards positive engagement in school?

**Research Design**

The primary approach of the study was a qualitative research method designed to capture the African American male school administrators' perceptions of their educational experiences.  The study involved five African American adult male participants.  The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, reviewed by each participant to ensure accuracy and validity, and then coded by the researcher.

**Rationale for the Design**

In the 1960s, qualitative research rose because of the need to understand social phenomena in a non-quantifiable manner (Alasuutari, 2010). Creswell (2007) posited the following characteristics of qualitative research:

- Natural setting, a source of data for close interaction

- Researcher as a key instrument of data collection

- Multiple data sources in words or images

- Analysis of data inductively, recursively, interactively

- Focus on participants' perspectives, their meanings, their subjective views

- Framing of human behavior and belief within a social-political/historical context or through a cultural lens

- Emergent rather than tightly prefigured design

- Fundamentally interpretive inquiry- researcher reflects on her or his role, the role of reader, and the role of the participants in shaping the study

- Holistic view of social phenomena (pp. 37-39).

This study touched on all of these characteristics in some manner; therefore, a qualitative research design was chosen. A qualitative research design was selected for this study because it is systematic and it gave more flexibility to explore different events in natural real life settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As Creswell (2009) explained, "Qualitative research is a means for exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). This study explored the lived school experiences of African American males. "Qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2). Also, qualitative research allows

the researcher to go to the study  participants to collect data (Creswell, 2009).  The

participants in this study were interviewed in the comfort of their offices after school hours

behind closed doors.

In order to answer the research questions pertaining to the school experiences of

successful adult African American males, along with the adult African American males'

commitments to assist young African American males, a phenomenological approach was

employed.  A phenomenological approach is designed to explore human lived experiences.

Creswell (2009) stated, "Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the

researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by

participants" (p. 13).  In using a phenomenological strategy for this qualitative study, I

captured the essence of successful African American males regarding their school

experiences and efforts to support the achievement of the next generation of African

American boys.

Researchers who employ the phenomenological approach set aside their own

experiences in order to understand the experiences of the participants of the study (Creswell,

2009).  My opinions were never expressed when the participants were discussing their school

experiences. "In order to understand the essence or structure of an experience, the researcher

temporarily has to put aside, or 'bracket,' personal attitudes or beliefs about the

phenomenon" (Merriam, 2002, p. 7).  In this study I set aside my school experiences and

concentrated on the school administrators' lived school experiences to understand what made

them successful.

Data was collected through in-depth, phenomenological interviews.  According to

Seidman (2013), "A phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on the experiences

of participants and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 16). Seidman's (2013) model of interviewing involved "conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant" (p. 20). The interviews in this study were completed in three sessions similar to Seidman's (2013) model. In Seidman's (2013) interview model, the first interview focuses on the participant's life experience, the second interview concentrates on the participant's present lived experience, and the third interview reflects on the participant's meaning of their experience. The first interview sessions for this study focused on the participants' early school experiences. The second interview sessions described the participants' later life experiences as successful adults. Also, the third interviews of this study focused on the meaning of their school experiences. The meaning of the participants' lived school experiences came through in the interview sessions.

**Participant Selection**

This study explored the school experiences of successful African American men. The successful adult African American males in this study were school administrators from an urban school district of a state in the southeast. In order to gain access to these participants, an employee directory list of the urban school district was used to contact the African American male school administrators. The school administrators contacted for the study were either a school principal or assistant school principal. The rationale for choosing school administrators was based on the research findings that African American males face social challenges as adults and they are behind all of their peers academically in the school setting. These school administrators are examples of African American males who graduated from high school, attended college and are gainfully employed in the field of education. As school administrators, they can advise young African American males on how to achieve academic

success because they themselves have had the actual experience of achieving academic success.

The participants for this study were selected using the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is used when a researcher aims to understand and gain insight into the experiences of a specific population (Merriam, 1988). The study sample was comprised of five participants. The school administrators met certain criteria before being selected to participate in the study. All the participants were 25 years old or older and had at least a master's degree in school administration. The school administrators had at least five or more years of experience as school administrators and the school in which they are administrators had 25% or more African American male students. By having 25% or more African American male students in the school, these adult African American males had the experience of working with young African American males.

**Role of the Researcher**

In my current position as a lead special educator, observing the learning experiences of African American males who are not successful in the general educational setting is a daily occurrence. Also, I work with special education teachers to ensure state and federal guidelines are followed before and after students are placed in special education. As the paperwork for special education placements comes across my desk, I am constantly reminded of all the African American males who have not been successful in the regular education classroom, and who have received or are now receiving services in the special education classroom. As I review the paperwork, I often wonder why special education is the solution for so many African American males. I ask myself if there could be another solution to help

African American males be successful in the regular education classroom before the consideration of special education.

In my previous position as a special educator in alternative schools in an urban school district, over 95% of the students I served were African American males. These African American males were labeled "at-risk," suspended out of their middle or high school, and in some cases placed the judicial system. These African American males had low self-esteem, scored below grade level in reading and math, and did not believe that they could make it in their schools, even when they had the chance of going back into the public school setting. Seeing so many African American males in the alternative school settings was both disappointing and concerning.

To observe African American males with such low morale and functioning below grade level was an eye-opener, especially when I became a mother. My son has medical issues that warrant accommodations in the regular education classroom in order to access the general curriculum. In facing this issue first hand, I know that there are strategies that can be used in the regular education classroom without referring an African American male to special education or sending him to an alternative school. My lived experience of knowing that there are strategies that can be implemented in the general education setting that can yield academic success for African American males helped me to understanding the schooling experiences of the study's participants.

As a colleague of the selected school administrators, I maintained a separate role during the collection and analysis of the data. While I am employed in the same system as these administrators, those chosen for the study worked in schools outside my administrative assignment. Therefore, I had no official, work-related relationship with these participants.

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Personal bias can deter the research process throughout the collection of data, analysis and reporting of findings. Therefore, my researcher bias was noted as needed and steps were taken to remain true to the research protocols. Steps were also taken to be impartial during the research process. While conducting this study, my role was that of a learner. I monitored my reactions when hearing the responses to the interview questions. As the researcher, I also set aside my personal biases, opinions and experiences throughout the study in order to concentrate on the participants' lived experiences.

**Data Collection Procedures**

An urban school district in the southeast was chosen for the site of this study. The urban school district employs African American male school administrators who work daily with assisting young African American males to achieve success in the educational setting. Each school administrator participated in two in-depth interviews in a one-on-one setting, face-to-face for two sessions. A third session was scheduled as a follow-up to check for accuracy and meaning of the responses from the previous two interview sessions.

In collecting data needed to answer the research questions, interviewing the participants to document their voices was the best practical method. An interview promotes change and emphasizes intellectual understanding (Kvale, 1996). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe interviewing as simply 'a conversation with a purpose' (p. 268). "An interview yields data in quantity quickly" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). The data collected from the interviews of the five participants in this study informed the research questions that guided this study. "When more than one person is interviewed, the process takes in a wider variety of information" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, pp. 101-102). This study employed in-depth, phenomenological interviewing. According to Seidman (2013), "At the root of in-

depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9).

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis and data collection should take place alongside each other (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The information collected from the interviews was analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Berg (2007) contends that content analysis is "the most obvious way to analyze interview data" (p. 134). The data was analyzed after the in-depth interviews were transcribed. Once transcribed, the data interview were read thoroughly. After the interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy, the participants were given the opportunity to validate their individual interviews to make sure their experiences were accurately recorded through their voices. After the participants checked the transcripts, the data were organized into charts and coded in order to find common or salient themes that derive from the interview responses. After coding for major themes, the transcripts underwent recoding in order to see if more phrases or words could be coded. The reoccurring phrases or words were color coded and highlighted. The highlighted codes were organized then categorized. Results of the data are recorded in the findings section of the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Steps were also taken to assure that the participating school administrators of the urban school district were aware that the researcher's role in the study was only one of researcher and that their participation was voluntary. The school administrators were asked to be interviewed one-on-one in a stimuli free environment of their choice with their consent in three sessions, no more than two hours at a time. A consent form (see Appendix A) was

required before the interviews took place.  The consent form followed the guidelines set forth

by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Appalachian State University.  Names of the

participating school administrators were kept confidential and participants were given

pseudonyms. The participants had the option to dismiss themselves without any

repercussions if they did not want to participate in the study.  All audiotapes of the interviews

were kept in a locked secure area with only the researcher having access to the data.  The

audiotapes will be destroyed one year after the study has been completed.

**Validity and Trustworthiness**

"Trustworthiness or research validity is, however, an issue that should be thought

about during research design as well as in the midst of data collection" (Glesne, 2006, p. 37).

A researcher can use different ways to strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of their

research (Creswell, 2009).  Creswell (2009) recommends "the use of multiple strategies, and

these strategies should enhance the researcher's ability to access the accuracy of findings as

well as convince the readers of that accuracy" (p. 191).  A colleague, serving as peer

reviewer, examined all data for authenticity. Member checking of data by the participants

was also used to ensure trustworthiness.  A transcriptionist transcribed the audiotaped

interviews and the researcher reviewed the transcribed data before the transcribed data was

given to the participants for review.

Member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the finalized themes which

were shared with the participants to determine fidelity (Creswell, 2009).  Member checking

is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

After the two interview sessions, in the third session, the school administrators of this study

were given the chance to review their individual transcribed interviews to check for accuracy

and validity. "Member-checking assists in validating qualitative research findings, as themes and descriptions are taken back to participants to determine whether or not *participants* feel they are accurate" (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p. 26). After review by the individual school administrator, no adjustments to the transcribed data were necessary. According to Creswell (2009) researchers can:

> Use peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account. This process involves locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher. This strategy-involving an interpretation beyond the researcher and in another person-adds validity to an account (p. 192).

Peer debriefing enhances the credibility of a study because others not connected to the study review and agree on the themes documented from the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data was checked by a neutral colleague for accuracy in the themes derived from the data collected by the researcher.

Each participant had the opportunity to discuss and review the results of their transcribed interviews to make sure the information was transcribed verbatim. The participants' transcribed interviews were placed into charts organized by individual question. Responses for each question were reviewed for common words and phrases. From the common phrases the salient themes and sub-themes emerged. The emerging themes and sub-themes derived from the data were reviewed and discussed with a mutual colleague who knew nothing about the participants of this research study.

**In Summary**

In summary, a qualitative research approach was the best design for this study because this method allowed for flexibility and understanding of the lived experiences of one or more individuals.  Giving voice to successful African American males through an interpretive phenomenological approach allowed readers to understand the school experiences of the African American males in the research study.  The study employed open-ended, in-depth interview questions in which each participant participated in three different interview sessions.  All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and coded for salient themes. The data was reviewed for accuracy and validity by the interviewees.  Research results of the data add to the research literature that focuses on stories of successful adult African American males.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore educational practices that contribute to the academic success of African American males. The study focused on the early school experiences of selected African American male participants. In reflecting on their early experiences in schools, the successful African American males were asked to describe their school experiences and explain how these school experiences influenced their academic success. In addition, this study explored the personal and professional commitments these participants have made to support young African American males. An interpretive phenomenological approach was employed in this study.

*Research Questions*

This study explored practices that promoted academic success for African American males and gave voice to successful African American males' experience in the educational setting. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What school and community experiences aided in the academic success of adult African American males?

2. In what ways have early school experiences influenced how successful adult African American males resolve to assist young African American males?

3. What are successful adult African American males doing to guide young African American males towards positive engagement in school?

The results of the analyzed data are presented in three sections. The first section contains background and descriptive information related to early life experiences. The

second section describes the interview process and presents the participants' responses to the interview questions with a focus on the early school experiences that led to their academic success and their commitments to support young African American males in schools. The last section discusses the major themes that emerged during the data analysis.

*Participant Profiles.* Pseudonyms were used for the names of the participants in order to keep their identity confidential. Each participant was given the name of a great male African king or warrior. The African names selected were chosen and assigned at random to the participants. The pseudonyms chosen were Shaka, Idris Alooma, Ja Ja, Khufu, and Hannibal.

*Shaka.* Shaka was considered King of the Zulus from 1818 to 1828 in southeast Africa. Shaka was a great African warrior king who conquered and punished those who did not agree with his militant ways. He trained his own army to fight with special tactics and standard weapons. He created a short stabbing spear, which was used in many of his battles. Shaka was put to death by the hands of his step-brother (Strobridge, 2006).

*Idris Alooma.* Idris Alooma ruled the Borno kingdom of West Africa from 1571 to 1603. Idris Alooma united the kingdoms of Kanem and Bornu. Today that region includes what are now Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria. Idris Alooma encouraged his people to be educated (Peperempe, n.d).

*Ja Ja.* Ja Ja was King of Opobo, an area near the Eastern Nigeria River. Ja Ja was known to be one of the most powerful men in the eastern Niger Delta in which he controlled trade and politics. He fought to protect his trade routes from the British until he was seventy years old. He was captured by the British and sent into exile in the West Indies (Rotimi & Ogen, 2008).

*Khufu.* Khufu was known to be the first pharaoh to build a pyramid at Giza. He ruled Giza from 2551 to 2528 B.C. Khufu built the Great Pyramid, which is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Some considered Khufu a cruel and wicked leader because it was thought that he enslaved his own people to build the pyramid. On the other hand, he was thought of as smart and wonderful as a leader (Bayuk, n.d.).

*Hannibal.* Hannibal was considered one of the greatest leaders of Northern Africa. Hannibal was known as the greatest general and military strategist that ever lived. Military schools are still studying his military tactics today. Hannibal was captured and taken prisoner at the age of sixty-four; while in prison Hannibal poisoned himself and died (Thorpe, 2013).

While definite character traits are linked to each of these kings and warriors, participants are not meant in any way to be associated in personality, character, or leadership style with these kings or warriors. Again, the pseudonyms were assigned randomly.

*Participants.* The participants of the study were five African American males who are currently serving as school administrators in the position of principal or assistant principal. Two of the participants were assistant principals and three were principals. The total number of years served as a school administrator ranged from six to 20 years. Four of the African American male participants have earned their Master of School Administration degrees and one has earned an Educational Specialist in School Administration degree. Three of the participants have future plans to earn their Doctorate in Educational Leadership. All of the participants are employed in an urban school district in the southeast. Each of the participants is an administrator of a school in which the African American male enrollment is 25% or more. Table B provides a brief profile of the participants' demographic information,

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which includes current position with school district, highest degree obtained, future educational plans, and number of years as a school administrator.

Table B

*Participants' Profile and Administrator Experience*

| Alias | Position | Highest Degree Obtained | Future Educational Plans | Years' Experience as a School Administrator |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shaka | School Principal | Masters | None | 13 |
| Idris Alooma | Assistant Principal | Masters | Doctorate | 7 |
| Ja Ja | Assistant Principal | Masters | Doctorate | 6 |
| Khufu | School Principal | Educational Specialist | Doctorate | 20 |
| Hannibal | School Principal | Masters | None | 16 |

*Shaka.* Shaka attended school in the eastern part of a southern state in the early sixties and seventies. During his elementary school years, schools were segregated. He transitioned to desegregated schools in his middle school years. Shaka has two brothers. His mother raised him and his brothers for the first 10 years of his life due to his dad's military status. Shaka attended college in the eastern area of a southern state and obtained his teaching and master degrees. He is currently married. Shaka was a teacher, assistant principal, and now an elementary school principal in his urban school district.

*Idris Alooma*. Idris Alooma attended school in a metropolitan area outside the South. Idris Alooma was raised by both parents who graduated from high school and college. He was an athlete and received a partial athletic and academic scholarship to college. Idris Alooma received his teaching degree and master's degree from a large southern university. He is married with two young children. Idris Alooma' entire teaching and administrative career has been in an urban school district.

*Ja Ja.* Ja Ja grew up in the housing projects of central plains area of a state in the southeast. His mother did not graduate from college but his father did attend a technical college and was considered a genius. He is unmarried. Ja Ja received his teaching degree in business and taught computer classes at a middle school in his urban school district before becoming an assistant principal in one of the middle schools.

*Khufu.* Khufu went to school in a small town in a Southern state. He was raised by both his mother and father. Neither of Khufu's parents graduated from high school. Khufu and his three siblings all pursued different career pathways. He attended a large college located in the central plains area of a southern state. He is not married. Khufu has been an assistant principal and principal on all levels in the public school setting. Along with being a school administrator, Khufu is also a pastor of his own church.

*Hannibal.* Hannibal grew up in a rural area of a state in the South. Hannibal's parents did not attend college. He was raised in a home with both a mother and a father. He went to elementary, middle and high school with the woman he married. They have three children in college and one child in elementary school. He attended a large college in the southeastern United States. He has a teaching degree in history along with his principal's license.

**Themes Focused on Early School Experiences and Keys to Success**

The following themes evolved from the participants' interviews. The major themes that emerged from the study were: (1) Positive influences for success, (2) Integrity of teachers and (3) Supports for academic success. The theme of positive influences for success refers to the effects teachers, parents and others had on the participants' success along with the self-determination the participants demonstrated to be successful. The theme of integrity of teachers focuses on the participants' perceptions of the characteristics of a great teacher

and what characteristics a teacher should possess in order to help African American males to achieve academic success.  The theme of supports for academic success refers to the strategies that aided the participants in achieving academic success on the classroom.

Table C

*Major Themes for Keys-to-Success*

| Themes | Sub-Themes |
|---|---|
| Positive Influences for Success | Teacher Influences |
| | Parental and Influences of Others |
| | Self-Determination as a Student |
| | |
| Integrity of Teachers | Positive Teacher-Student Relationships |
| | Teacher Display of Concern for Students |
| | |
| | |
| Supports for Academic Success | Practices and Strategies |
| | Recognition of Academic Achievement |

**Positive Influences for Success**

Positive influences for success refer to the effects that teachers, parents and others had on the successful decisions made by the participants.  In reflecting on their early school experiences, all of the participants had a teacher that influenced them in some way that led to success.  A teacher either influenced the participant to achieve his best and/or led him to become a teacher himself. Parents, family members, neighbors and church members would not let the participants settle for less when it came to achieving academic success.  Several of the participants had the determination and motivation to achieve academic success for themselves.

*Teacher Influences.*  Classroom teachers played a powerful role in the success of all the participants during their early school experiences.  In discussing how their teachers influenced them, only two of the participants, Shaka and Hannibal made an ethnic reference

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to their teachers being Black males.  The race of their teachers did not play a role in the participants' academic success.  Participants also explained how their teachers' encouragement in the classroom led to academic success.  Khufu explained how his teachers encouraged him: "The positive encouragement over and over again, saying you can do this and you can make A's and B's. The encouragement that I got from teachers allowed me to say that there is no limit to what I could do."  Shaka recalled his sixth grade teacher: "She was someone that really wanted us to be successful.  She brought a different sensibility to our school.  All of the teachers cared but she was much more emotional about it."  In a similar way, Idris Alooma remembers his teachers:

> Some of my most memorable teachers were teachers at the time I thought were mean.
> I thought that they were mean and that you couldn't get anything over on them. As an
> adult now, I realized that they weren't mean; they wanted what was best for you.
> They did aid in my academic success because you did things the right way. They
> were the ones most like my parents. You did things the right way the first time, so
> you won't have to go back and do them over.

Teachers were found to have an influence on three of the participants' career paths.  Ja Ja stated:

> I was fascinated with meteorology, and I always talked about being a doctor.  So one
> of those two paths were always what I communicated to people until I got into Miss
> Woods' class.  She made learning real and relevant.  We got to go outside the
> building, outside of the four walls and experience the community.  So I became her.
> My career choice became I'm going to be a business teacher.  I am going to be
> another Miss Woods.  I am going to take kids out of the four walls and show them the

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world.  I am going to make learning real.

Ja Ja's teacher's influence was so powerful that he changed his mind about his first career choice to become an educator just like her.  Hannibal reflected on the teachers that influenced him to be an educator.  "I had two teachers that really stand out to me as a student.  Both were history teachers and as it turns out I became a history teacher." A teacher from his early schooling also influenced Shaka's educational career.  "Mrs. Torrey would always encourage me to become a teacher.  She was always so encouraging.  So it really helped me in my desire to become an educator." All five of the participants expressed that their teachers left them with memories they will never forget.  Their teachers' actions in the classroom helped them succeed.  Shaka remembered:

> Schooling and education was important and that importance was communicated by my teacher's actions and by my teacher's communication with my parents. I really believe that that experience really helped ground me as a youth. I remember those years with a lot of fondness.

Idris Alooma stated:

> My most memorable experiences in the classroom were having teachers that held high standards for myself and other the students.  Most memorable because they were the ones that would typically expect more but then they would also give more to the students.  They were very tough and very demanding.  They did not settle for what they thought was best for you as a student.

Idris Alooma had teachers that did whatever it took to make sure he experiences academic success.  Ja Ja remembered that he had a fifth grade teacher that taught him more than he could imagine.  He remembers:

I kind of find that interesting that my fifth grade teacher taught me more English than my college or high school teachers. We were all very poor students and yet she treated us as if we were going to be presidents and corporate CEOs. That's what she instilled in us. So when I encountered teachers who tried to tear that down, I was prepared.

Ja Ja had a teacher who looked beyond his circumstances while making sure he achieved academic success. Khufu remembered his first grade teacher as showing compassion and one who made him feel comfortable in the classroom. Khufu explained, "I met a great teacher who reached out to me and made me feel comfortable and encouraged me to do more." Khufu also had a teacher that was able to pull the best work out of him.

Her name was Mrs. English. She made sure that I did not have any excuses. She knew I could do it and she made sure that whatever had to be done was done. She would not accept anything below a 'C'. She said that you can do better than this, now go back and do it again.

Like Khufu, Hannibal remembered a teacher that had a similar effect on him. Hannibal stated:

Her name was Ms. Copley, my history teacher. For the first time in her classroom I felt successful. I felt that she thought of me as one of the smarter kids in her class and put that stock in me, let it be known that she thought highly of me as a student. And it gave me confidence not only in her class but as for other classes that I had to want to do well and to perform well. I ended up winning the history award trophy in her classroom at the end of that school year, and I think that's what spurred me on to think that I had what it took to be a good student overall, not just in history.

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Hannibal's teacher built up his confidence to make him feel he could do anything not only in her class but she gave him the confidence to achieve success in all his classes.

Not only did teachers play a role in influencing the participants in achieving academic success, but parental influences of others had the same positive academic affect.

   *Parental and Others Expectations.* All the participants experienced parents, family, people in the church, as well as friends and neighbors who expected them to achieve academic success. Their parents and other adults expected them to be successful in the classroom. The participants' parents settled only for them to do their best in the classroom in hopes that their early school experiences would lead to being successful adult males. Other family members, people in the church and neighbors checked on what and how these participants were doing in the classroom. Shaka remembers those who influenced his success in the classroom:

   We lived in a neighborhood where everybody was everybody's child. My point is
   that one of the biggest factors of success was the fact that each child was everybody's
   child. Everybody looked out for the child. I think that that is an important factor to
   academic success because you have that sense of security. We would walk home from
   school and the neighbors would say 'Let me see your report card'. Not just my
   parents, but neighbors, family and friends would ask to see it. If you had a good
   report card they would give you candy. If it was bad they would say, 'Better do
   better next time'. All that built into that sense of security and academic success. It's
   not just in the classrooms or school building but the community played a big part, too.

Idris Alooma's parents were also influential in his academic success. He relayed:

   My parents also contributed to my academic success. It was a must to get the

education. The best teachers have been my parents. No matter how good a teacher is, if you don't have that reinforcement at home, sometimes it will stick and sometimes it won't; but I had the two greatest parents in the world.

Khufu believed his parents influenced him to go in the right direction. He recalls his parents saying, "When you turn 18, you are leaving this house. You are going to do something with your life whether it's military, college, or get a job." When reflecting on their early school experiences, the participants were influenced by their teachers and parents to achieve academic success. Also, the participants encountered high expectations from important people in their lives.

While parents who either did not complete high school or go to college raised several of the participants, much more was expected from the participants than from their parents. Shaka remembers how his parents encouraged him to perform well in school:

The expectations of my parents are what inspired me to succeed. They expected me to do my best. My mom always said, 'You might not come home with an A, but whatever it's your best.' My inspiration to succeed was the fact that my parents had high expectations for me and the fact that I always felt a sense that I could do it. Even if it was tough, I just studied a little harder. I knew myself and I knew areas in which I may have slacked on. So I knew if I didn't do as well on the test as I could have, I would just have to study next time. Just the expectation of my family and not wanting to let them down is what inspired me to continue on.

Idris Alooma believed that coming from a "two-parent home and the importance of academics" inspired him to succeed. Ja Ja was inspired by his parents to succeed also, but remembers his parents differently than Idris Alooma. Ja Ja explained:

My mother was not a good student.  My father was a genius.  So my father would not

accept anything less than a 'C' without a punishment.  My mother, on the other hand,

had the best work ethic, where you stuck to stuff.  Character was extremely important

to her. The marriage of those two kept me going.  So I would never quit on a

problem.  If I didn't understand something, it was not a choice to give up.

Ja Ja goes on to say:

There certainly was an expectation in the family that academics were important. I

think I was blessed to grow up where there was a village that raised me. Whether it

was a church or whether it was the neighbors, it didn't matter that we were low

income housing, there was an expectation that you did well and that education was

important and was valued. All the people around me congratulated me when I was

successful.

Khufu remembered how his father inspired him to succeed.  In a conversation that he had

over and over again with his father, Khufu stated his father would express that "he worked

hard so that I wouldn't have to live the life that he lived."  Despite the fact that Hannibal's

parents did not go to college, he always knew he was going to college.  Hannibal explained:

When I was growing up, my parents always said that 'you are going to college,' but

neither one of my parents went to college.  So it was a goal even though I really

didn't understand what it meant necessarily, but it was what I was told I was going to

do.  I was always going to do what I was told I was going to do.  It didn't start to

become a serious thing until I got into my last couple years of high school.  So

basically, good grades for me were always dictated by the fact that my parents told

me, 'you're going to make good grades or there are going to be some repercussions.

*Self-Determination as a Student.* Regardless of who expected them to succeed in the classroom, three of the participants were determined and created their own ways to achieve. The data revealed that two of the participants enrolled in accelerated and academically gifted (AG) classes on their own due to high grades or by choice due to the encouragement of a teacher. The data also revealed that one of the participants had the drive himself to achieve academic success. Idris Alooma stated, "I was one of the fortunate kids growing up and took accelerated classes." As an early school experience, Ja Ja remembers that in preschool, teachers told him that he "wasn't going to be successful." Later on, Ja Ja had a teacher that taught him to be an advocate for himself when it came to enrolling in classes. Ja Ja explained:

> I was a student who was always a straight 'A' student but I was not going to score in the 95th percentile. I was going to be a straight 'A' student, but I was not going to be considered AG. I enrolled in AG courses every time they had them on the high school schedule. I took AG English in all four years of high school but I was not in an AG program. They figured it out and I still signed up for it every year ,and I completed every year.

When reflecting on what contributed to his success, Hannibal stated that he had "the drive to succeed." Three of the successful African American male school administrators were able to achieve academic success because they had the drive and self-determination to reach beyond what they were expected to do. These adult African American males did not let anything or anyone defer their dreams of achieving academic success.

**Integrity of Teachers**

The theme of Integrity of teachers focuses on the participants' perceptions of the characteristics that a great teacher must possess if they want their students to be successful. As the participants reflected on teacher characteristics, they described the teachers as being those who could build meaningful relationships with students and show they are concerned for the student's wellbeing.

*Positive Teacher-Student Relationships.* Teachers' ability to build relationships with students is a characteristic that several of the participants described as being important from their early school experiences. Shaka had fond memories of all the teachers he encountered during his early school experiences. Shaka stated, "The characteristic of a great teacher is the ability to build a relationship with your students and the ability to help student feel a sense of capability and capacity."

Ja Ja felt that great teachers needed to have some type of relationship with the student. Ja Ja added:

> The characteristics of great teachers are when teachers can connect with students both in terms of the relationship and then understand how students learn and can reach those students. I was not a smart kid in elementary school but I finished fourth in my high school class, and I was awarded multiple awards in college. I attribute that to some great teachers who cared about me as a person and also understood that teaching is both a science and an art.

*Teacher Display of Concern for Students.* Having teachers who displayed concern for their wellbeing emerged as an important theme from the participants' stories. Three of the participants explained that great teachers never accept failing from their students, showed

compassion and cared about their students.  Idris Alooma described great teachers as "those that won't let a student settle for less. They don't accept failing as an excuse or an option. They will do whatever they can to get a kid to wherever that kid needs to be."  Khufu believed that great teachers are caring and compassionate.  Khufu also stated that "great teachers have to reach out to students where they are and build them up so they can handle the high expectations."  Khufu shared the following story to show why he thought these characteristics of a great teacher were important:

> So many times now, I see kids who I know can do the work but unless you build a bridge for them to do it, they will fail and not reach those high expectations.  For instance, we just had a kid today, he came to school sick, and he got here late so he didn't get breakfast.  He went upstairs to get his medicine, and then he got sick on the stomach because he didn't get his breakfast.  He went to homeroom sick and we couldn't get anybody to pick him up.  So if there is a kid that you want to do this and that and we are holding you to these expectations, but you can't today.  We actually found out from the social worker visit that it's not in the house.  So you have to find a way to build all those bridges so the kid can be successful.  And this kid can be, academically.  If you look at his test scores, he should be doing A-B work, but because of what he is dealing with in his home, he is not.

Hannibal alleged he did not encounter teachers that he would describe as "great teachers".  Nevertheless, he expressed the characteristics that he felt a great teacher should possess:

> I think you have to build relationships with students.  That goes to taking interest in them in their academics, in aspects of their lives outside of the classroom, and being able to express that interest to them, that you are interested in them as a person,

not just what kinds of grades that they make. I think you have to be able to engage

students in your curriculum. I think you have to be able to motivate them to want to

achieve beyond what they think they can. I think you have to be able to, and this is

going to sound very simple, but you have to make sure that you are prepared on a

daily basis, because I think that's where we lose a lot of our students.

Along with the importance of teachers building relationships and displaying concern for their

students, the participants also experienced strategies provided by their teachers that aided in

their academic success.

**Supports for Academic Success**

The theme of supports for academic success refers to the strategies and practices that

aided participants in experiencing success in the classroom. The participants all experienced

success in the classroom and at times were rewarded for their academic achievement.

*Practices and Strategies.* The participants' teachers initiated various practices and

strategies in the classroom that aided in the participants' academic success. Two of the

participants revealed they excelled success when their teachers provided hands-on activities

and broke down material for them to understand. Two of the participants achieved success

when group work or group projects were given by the teacher. Only one of the participants

thrived off of assignments in which he could rationalize his answers out in his own voice.

Shaka described strategies that aided in his academic success. "The strategies that my

teacher used in those years were hands-on and kinesthetic. Shaka went on to describe one of

his hands-on experiences:

I will never forget in the fourth grade, I learned my multiplication. You would throw

the little ball up in the air and pick up jack rocks. It was so much fun because you

picked up the little pieces in twos, then threes, then fours and so on.  So, the hands on

experience, those real life experiences that was not in a worksheet.  I had very few

worksheets in elementary school because everything was hands-on.  Everything was

experiential learning.  That was one experience of how I learned my multiplication in

fourth grade by playing jack rocks.

Ja Ja encountered success in his math class with the use of breaking down the material into

parts.  Ja Ja explained:

I have never encountered a math teacher this good before.  The way she introduced

every unit, she would give us this big intricate problem and she would work through

solving this huge problem and showing us the big picture first.  In essence, we knew

on the first day of the activity what we were going to have to do at the end of the unit.

She showed us the big picture first of where we were going and then she broke the

pieces down.

Khufu stated that he experienced academic success "any time there was group work or

partners."  Khufu conveyed that he was able to build friendships when he was allowed to

work in groups.  In a similar way, Hannibal added:

I think that I enjoyed probably more than anything the projects. That's because I'm a

very social person.  And so whenever we did projects, it gave us an opportunity to

collaborate with other students.  It gave us an opportunity to work on something long

term, build relationships with the other students in your classroom.

Idris Alooma remembered another approach that he encountered and enjoyed in the

classroom:

What I thought benefited me most, particularly when I got to high school, were those

teachers in philosophy and history classes where there just weren't yes or no answers

to certain questions. They allowed you to elaborate and give your opinion about

certain things. I always enjoyed instructional strategies that allowed me to expound

and speak my mind and relate to different things.

Not only did the participants provide strategies that aided in their academic success but they

also shared that being recognized for academic achievements played a role in their continued

academic success.

*Recognition of Academic Achievement.* Along with the strategies that aided the

participants in achieving success, all five of the participants remembered being recognized

for their academic success. Idris Alooma admitted his teachers recognized his academic

achievements even though he was in gifted classes. Shaka described the award celebrations

he encountered and how he felt afterwards. He explained:

We would have honor roll assemblies. In those days, the early sixties and seventies,

it was important for me as a student, and all the students to have the approval of the

teacher. So there would be middle classroom celebrations but just doing a good job

was rewarding of itself. I think the celebration and acknowledgments were done on a

daily basis. I just felt good when I was in elementary school and those middle school

years. I didn't feel like I was a failure. I felt like school was something I could be

successful at.

Being recognized for academic achievements gave Shaka the confidence to excel in school.

Ja Ja experienced academic celebrations at all three school levels. He stated, "In elementary and middle school the teachers made a big deal about celebrating academic achievement. When I got to high school, it went a step further." Ja Ja remembered the following:

> The principal made it his goal that every student that made honor roll would receive a trophy. That was every time they made honor roll. Plus he made everyone come to the assembly. The first time we had only a handful of kids walking up to get their trophy, and by the third quarter, you had over half of the auditorium walking up to get their trophy. It was just something about that trophy, and getting that pat on the back.

Khufu recalled the ways academic achievement was awarded during his early school years: "Honor roll celebrations, the ribbons, the pencils, National Junior Honor Society, and National Honor Society, all those things were there for me." Hannibal remembered achievement celebrations that were at the end of the school year where certificates were received.

The participants had early school experiences that aided in their academic success. The participants had teachers, parents, family members, and friends who encouraged them to achieve at their greatest potential. As successful African American male school administrators, the participants now strive to assist in promoting success for the young African American males in their schools.

**Themes Focused on Personal and Professional Responses to Early Education**

The previous themes were revealed through the interview data about the participants' early school experiences. Due to their early school experiences and current success as an adult African American male, the participants passionately expressed what they face personally and professionally while assisting with the success of young African American

males in their school building.  The themes of personal and professional issues that evolved from this study were (1) Disconnection: Lack of Support Systems, (2) Personal and Professional Influence in the Workplace and (3) Initiatives That Work: Need for Action in the Workplace. Table D provides a brief synopsis of the three themes that emerged from this study.

Table D

*Themes for Personal and Professional Issues*

| Themes |
| --- |
| Disconnection: Lack of Support Systems |
| Personal and Professional Influence in the Workplace |
| Initiatives That Work: Need for Action in the Workplace |

**Disconnection: Lack of Support Systems**

The theme regarding disconnection denotes the lack of support in the schools for promoting academic success among young African American males.  The participants expressed that there are strategies in place in their schools to assist struggling students but nothing that is explicitly geared towards assisting just young African American males in schools.  All the participants admitted that there is a lack of teacher trainings, workshops and professional development in the schools that could assist teachers in promoting academic success for young African American males.

When it comes to strategies and practices specifically for African American males, Shaka admitted that his school deals with differentiated learning and that the school has had professional development on that specific topic, "even though it's not targeted for Black males specifically."  Idris Alooma added, "I don't know of any strategies or practices that are currently being used.  I often tell teachers, particularly if they have problems with African

American males, to see me." Hannibal blatantly said, "I'm new here and I'm discovering some as we go but I don't know if we have any aimed at African American males." Ja Ja's school has a program in place that he admits works, but it promotes success for all students not just African American males. Ja Ja explains:

> We have a very strong mentoring program that we tie our support staff to those students. We have an Achieve 3000 Program, which is basically a reading program that would test a kid's reading ability. From that point on, every reading assignment that they do in any subject is going to be at that level of proficiency. It moves them to the next reading level, so that students are able to be successful in reading.

Khufu honestly stated, "I still have staff members here who don't believe in some African American males." Nevertheless, Khufu stated that his school does have practices in place for supporting all students in his school. Khufu relayed, "We have three here. The three 'Rs', which are rigor, relevance and relationships. And they speak for themselves. The one that I feel sometimes we are lacking is the relevance." The participants admitted that there is a lack of focused support in schools to assist in promoting the academic success of young African American males. Nevertheless, the participants still strive to do what they can to assist the struggling young African American males in their own schools.

**Personal and Professional Influence in the Workplace**

Personal and professional influence in the workplace refers to how the participants use their personal and professional influence to assist young African American males in achieving success. Participants reflected on the many informal practices and strategies they use in their school buildings such as building positive relationships, modeling positive images, showing that they care and mentoring young African American males which aids in

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their academic success.

Because of their early school experiences, the participants felt they can implement practices and strategies in their school buildings to assist young African American males. Four of the participants felt that by being a role model would influence young African American males to succeed in their studies. Shaka explained what he does and can do to influence African American males in his school building:

One of the most important things that I try to do as an administrator, especially a Black male administrator, is to provide that example as a role model to my students. To make sure that every child, African American students in particular, feel validated and supported. The influence that I have has to start with changing mindsets. I cannot just tell teachers to respect Black males. I have to first of all find the right people, the people who are willing to recognize the differences and then accentuate those gifts, skills, and talents. Many times in our schools, the gifts and talents that our Black males bring to the setting are completely ignored because they are completely misunderstood. My influence is finding those teachers.

Shaka is committed to trying to find teachers who are competent in teaching African American males. Idris Alooma believed that being a model can influence African American males to be successful in the school building, too. Idris Alooma displays to African American males "how people should dress, how people should speak, and how people should act and interact with other people." Ja Ja also mentioned being a positive role model for young African American males. Ja Ja explained:

I am an African American male and I can model. I don't think that there is any other better way to create that positive culture than to show them that you can be cool, you

can be an athlete, definitely be professional, and be an African American male.

Modeling, first of all, then, providing the efficacy in students. Not just the belief that

they can do it, but then also handing them some tools so that they actually will be

successful.

Hannibal added, "I model myself on a daily basis, as far as the attitudes and the appearance

that a Black male should present." Hannibal demonstrates to Black males in his school how

to act and dress in a positive manner.

**Initiatives That Work: Need for Action in the Workplace**

The theme of Initiatives that work: need for action in the workplace identifies what

the participants feel has or may work to promote academic success for African American

males. The participants of the study were aware of initiatives that may work in schools for

African American males. Two of the participants agreed that mentor programs work in

assisting African American males to perform well in the classroom, whereas one of the

participants believed hiring African American male staff in schools would promote success

among young African American males. Meaningful relationships between teachers and

students may also promote academic success said one participant. Idris Alooma proposed

that African American male educators in the school building promote success among young

African American males. He stated, "It's not really spoken initiatives but it's hiring more

men of color to put in the classrooms and be administrators in the building. I think that

naturally yields success for African American males in the building." Ja Ja and Hannibal

both believed that mentoring programs promote academic success among African American

males. Ja Ja stated, "The mentoring program, I would say, has helped get some students on

the right track." Hannibal found that a mentoring program, which engages the school staff,

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students and parents, results in the academic success of African American males. Khufu believed that meaningful relationships between the teacher and African American males play a huge part in the academic success.

The participants suggested that there are other informal practices that could aid African American males in experiencing success in the classroom. Shaka believed that African American males needed to know that someone cares and will not give up on them. Shaka stated, "If you as an educator say, 'I care about you. You are wrong, but I care about you and I will not let you fail.' If we do those two things, we will be very supportive and help our Black males." Idris Alooma suggested getting to know the African American male as a strategy. Idris Alooma relayed, "Get to know the male student and it would have to be about something other than just athletics and rap music." Ja Ja suggested providing a visual such as students seeing people like them in positive situations. Ja Ja gave the following example:

> If I am teaching a pharmacy tech class, and I'm doing a PowerPoint presentation, something as simple as the pictures in the presentation go a long way. The reason why I say that is because, we had a young man who was Hispanic and struggled in middle school. He had an opportunity to go on a field trip to a well-known hospital. That was the first time that he ever saw a Hispanic doctor. All of a sudden, he became interested in the medical field; this young man will likely graduate as our salutatorian this year.

Getting African American males to believe that they can do the work is a strategy that Khufu has seen to produce positive results. Shaka felt that African American males need meaningful relationships. Shaka provided this example:

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A student got suspended today for fighting. I had just finished talking with him. I

didn't run him over the coals. I asked him what was going on and we talked about it.

I asked him did he see where he was wrong. We should be able to engage in building

an ongoing relationship with students, especially males, because Black males need

this.

Ja Ja found a combination of positive relationships and mentoring programs are needed to

assist in the success of African American males. He added:

Relationships, I found to be extremely important. Students need to know that you are

real and that you care, especially males. I found that mentoring is a very important

factor. We need to have lots of mentoring programs in place for African American

males. Mentoring both in the classroom and then some mentoring pieces in terms of

non-academic are things that I focus on making sure that our African American males

get.

Khufu believed in a similar thinking as Shaka and Ja Ja. Khufu believed that African

Americans "must see that you are genuine and the only way to get to this point is by building

a relationship with the African American male." Khufu went on to state:

If they know that you truly genuinely care about them, ninety-eight percent of the

time they will do it because of who you are and we've got to find a way to connect

every ' at risk minority male.' Every 'at risk minority male' needs somebody as a

vision for them in their lives.

The participants are striving to assist young African American males in achieving success in

school. Despite, the challenges they face in assisting young Black males, the participants are

doing what they can to make the school experience positive for young Black males.

**Summary**

Three themes regarding keys-to-success emerged from the interviews and data analysis of successful African American male school administrators' school experiences. The keys-to-success themes of positive influences for success, integrity of teachers and supports for academic success were identified and discussed through the interviews.

Positive influences for success encompassed the early school experiences that aided the adult African American male participants. The participants identified the influence of their classroom teachers as contributing to academic success by way of just showing that they cared and believed in them. The influence of their teachers not only resulted in academic success but also guided the participants in choosing the career path of an educator. The teachers of the participants left impressions upon them that made them feel that as students they could succeed beyond what was expected of them. Parents and others played an important role in the participants' academic success. Participants admitted that their parents would not accept anything but success from them in the classroom. In some instances, the participants' parents did not expect anything less, therefore not going to college was not an option for the participants. Along with parents, participants revealed that family, neighbors, church members and friends expected them to achieve academic success in the classroom. Several of the participants had the desire and drive to achieve academic success no matter the challenges they faced.

The theme of integrity of teachers focused on the characteristics that participants used to describe or define a good teacher. The participants attributed their classroom success to being able to be in a positive relationship with their classroom teachers and teachers showing that they were concerned for their wellbeing in the classroom. Their great teachers never

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gave up on them, did not accept anything but the best from them, and assured them that they

could and would be successful.

Supports for academic success concentrated on the strategies and practices that were

given to the participants during their early schooling in order for them to experience

academic success.  Participants explained how strategies used by their teacher such as hands-

on activities, group work or group projects, and breaking down information into pieces

helped them tremendously when it came to understanding classroom material.  During their

early school experiences the participants remembered how great they felt when being

recognized at award ceremonies for their academic achievement.

Three personal and professional commitment themes emerged from the interviews

and data analysis of how successful adult African American males in school leadership

positions are assisting in the success of young African American males in schools.  Also the

personal and professional commitment themes of 1) Personal and Professional Influence in

the Workplace, 2) Disconnection: Lack of Support Systems and 3) Initiatives That Work:

Need for Action in the Workplace were identified and discussed through the interviews.

*Personal and professional influence in the workplace* refers to how the participants

use personal and professional influences in assisting young African American males to be

successful in the schools.  Participants reflected on the many practices and strategies they use

in their school buildings such as building positive relationships, modeling positive images,

showing that they care and mentoring young African American males all of which aid in

their academic success.

*Disconnection: lack of support systems* denotes the lack of support networks or

systems in schools which the participants describe as missing when it comes to promoting

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academic success among young African American males.  The participants expressed that there were strategies in place in their schools to assist struggling students but nothing that is specifically geared towards assisting just African American males in the schools.  All the participants admitted that there is a lack of teacher trainings, workshops and professional development in schools that assist teachers in promoting academic success with a focus on young African American males.

*Initiatives that work: need for action in the workplace* identified what the participants feel works in promoting academic success for African American males.  The participants of the study found that there are initiatives that have been proven to work in the schools for African American males.  Also, the participants have found informal initiatives that they could implement personally in their schools due to the lack of support systems.  The participants found that informal initiatives such as hiring more African American staff, implementing mentor programs, and teachers developing meaningful relationships with Black male students may promote academic success among African American males in schools.

The three keys-to-success themes provide understanding into the early school experiences of successful African American male school administrators.  Additionally, three more themes emerged when the adult African American male participants discussed their commitment in assisting the success of young African American males in schools.  The following chapter discusses the themes with respect to the literature on African American males.  The study's research questions are addressed, followed by implications of the research and the need for further research.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

*Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to explore educational practices that aided in the academic success of African American male school administrators. This study asked successful African American adult males to reflect on their early experiences in schools and discuss the impact of their school experiences on their academic success. In addition, this study explored the commitments successful adult African American male school leaders made to support young African American males and the guidance they provide these young men in order to support school success. A phenomenological approach aided in exploring the school experiences of the participants in this study.

Through her study of eight teachers, including five African Americans and three European Americans who were successful educators of African-American children, Ladson-Billings (2009) identified 16 characteristics of culturally relevant teaching. As the framework for this study, these characteristics of culturally relevant teaching were used to explore what aided adult African American males in being successful in the classroom. Three keys-to-success themes evolved from the participants' interviews when they discussed early school experiences. The three keys-to-success themes are 1) Positive Influences for Success, 2) Integrity of Teachers, and 3) Supports for Academic Success. Three themes also emerged regarding professional and personal issues. The professional and personal issue themes are 1) Personal and Professional Influence in the Workplace 2) Disconnection: Lack of Support Systems and 3) Initiatives that Work: Need for Action in the Workplace.

This chapter will provide an overview of the study, discussion of findings, and recommendations for future research. The discussion of findings and the discussion of the research questions will be guided by the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analyzed data. The implications for schools and school districts, colleges and universities, young and adult African American males, and the African American community will also be addressed. Lastly, recommendations for further research will be given.

**Overview of Study**

Black males are not seen as achievers. According to The Schott Foundation *50 State Report* (2012), 52% of Black males graduate from high school in four years. In 2013, only 17.4% of African American males ages 25 to 29 attained a bachelor's degree compared to 37.1% of White males (U. S. Department of Education, 2013). Not obtaining a degree negatively affects the African American males' employment status (Davis, 2003). Yet all the African American males in this study defied the stereotype that African American males are not successful. All of the African American males in this study graduated from high school and graduated from college with a degree. This evidence begs the question who or what assisted these African American males in achieving academic success?

**Discussion of Findings**

In her study of eight teachers who were successful educators of African-American children, Ladson-Billings (2009) identified three critical dimensions of culturally relevant teaching and 16 related characteristics. Ladson-Billings built upon Gay's (2000) characteristics of culturally responsive teaching with her characteristics of culturally relevant teaching, requiring teachers as well as students to understand different cultures and also requiring teachers and students to advocate for cultural changes in schools and the

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community.  Ladson-Billings' (2009) 16 characteristics of culturally relevant teaching were presented under the following critical dimensions: Conceptions of Self and Others (p. 38), Developing Structures Supporting Social Interactions (p. 60), and Conceptions of Knowledge (p. 89).  Teachers who practice culturally relevant methods are teaching professionals who care for themselves and the students in their classrooms.  In classrooms of teachers who practice culturally relevant methods, students are required to work together to achieve excellence.  Also, these teachers assist students in understanding their own knowledge and participate in knowledge building (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009).  The themes that resonated through this study align with the critical dimensions of culturally relevant teaching identified by Ladson-Billings (2009).

**Emergent Themes from Early School Experiences and Keys to Success**

The participants identified the positive influences of their classroom teachers as contributing to academic success by way of just showing that they cared and believed in them.  The participants had teachers who made great impressions on them, which made them feel that they could do more than what was expected of them. The influence of their teachers not only resulted in academic success but also guided them in choosing the career path of an educator.  This confirmed that culturally sensitive teachers looked for talents and gifts in their Black males students instead of focusing on their deficits as indicated by Murrell (2002) and Thompson (2004) in their research on successful teachers of Black males.

Parents played an important role in the participants' academic success.  Participants admitted that their parents would not accept anything but success from them in the classroom.  This confirms what Fan (2001) and Jeynes (2005) found in their studies that parental involvement in school leads to positive academic achievement and success.  Along

with high parental expectations, several of the participants gained encouragement from other family members, neighbors and church members. Because of their earlier school experiences, the administrators found that they themselves could have a personal influence on the success of young African American males in their own buildings. The administrators display themselves as positive role models with the hope that young African American males in their schools will see a positive image of an African American male.

Parents who did not complete high school or go to college raised several of the participants, but these parents held much higher expectations for educational achievement. The participants discussed how their parents and others including family members, church members and neighbors expected them to go beyond what society expected of them. This study did not find that parents expected less from their Black male sons as they progressed through elementary school which contradicted the findings of Graves' (2010) study. In addition, several of the participants had the desire and drive to achieve academic success no matter the challenges they faced. Similarly, in Stinson's (2011) study of successful African American males, the males attributed their academic success to being self-determined.

Another theme, integrity of teachers, focused on the participants' perceptions of the characteristics of great teachers. As they reflected on those teachers, participants described great teachers as being those who could build meaningful relationships with students and show their concern for the student's wellbeing. The participants had teachers that never gave up on them, did not accept anything but the best from them, and assured them that they could and would be successful. Irvine and Hawley's (2011) research on effective teaching found that teachers that engaged in caring relationships resulted in positive academic achievement from students.

Supports for academic success concentrated on the strategies and practices that enabled the participants to experience academic success. Participants explained how strategies used by their teacher such as hands-on activities, group work, and breaking down information into pieces helped them tremendously. Green (2005) believed that school professionals should develop strategies in the classroom that address different cultures. During their early school experiences the participants remembered how they felt when being recognized at award ceremonies. Like the African American males in Bergin and Cooks' (2000) study, the participants of this study appreciated being recognized for their academic achievements.

**Themes from Personal and Professional Responses to Early Education**

This theme referred to how the participants used their personal and professional influence to assist young African American males in reaching success in the school setting. Participants reflected on the many practices and strategies they use in their school buildings such as: building positive relationships, modeling positive images, showing that they care, and mentoring young African American males. The participants in this study, like Livingston and Nahimana (2006), believed that using an ecological approach or understanding the environmental factors that surround the young African American male has its advantages and improves academic outcomes.

The theme of disconnection denoted the lack of support structures in schools when it comes to promoting academic success among young African American males. The participants expressed that there are strategies in place in the schools to assist struggling students but nothing that is exclusively geared towards assisting African American males in schools. All the participants admitted that there is a lack of practices, teacher training,

workshops and professional development in schools targeted for promoting academic success for young African American males. The participants believed that changes are needed within school systems if African American males are expected to achieve academic success in the classroom, which is consistent with the conclusion reached by Thompson and Allen (2012).

The theme of initiatives that work identified what the participants feel has worked to promote positive achievement for African American males.  The participants found initiatives that they could implement as individuals in their schools in order to improve and address the lack of support given to schools to assist African American males.  The participants believed initiatives such as hiring more African American staff, implementing mentor programs, teachers developing meaningful relationships with Black male students, awareness of cultural differences, and the implementation of a relevant curriculum will promote academic success among young African American males in schools.  These initiatives align with the strategies Whiting (2006) found to empower young African American males in schools.

**Revisiting the Research Questions**

*Question 1: What school and community experiences aided in the academic success of adult African American males?*

African American males had positive school experiences which aided in their academic success.  The African American males had teachers, parents and other adults in their lives who expected them to perform well in the classroom.  They experienced teachers who never gave up on them and showed that they cared for their well-being.  According to Stipek (2006), students will do well for teachers who show that they care and are committed to their academic success.  Some teachers implemented strategies and practices in the

classroom that aided in the academic success of the African American males.  Additionally, the African American male participants were recognized for their academic successes, which encouraged them to be more successful in the classroom.  Their teachers had such an influence on their lives that several of the African American males in the study credited their teachers for the career paths in education they chose.  For example, Ja Ja stated:

> I was fascinated with meteorology, and I always talked about being a doctor.  So one of those two paths were always what I communicated to people until I got into Miss Woods' class.  She made learning real and relevant.  We got to go outside the building, outside of the four walls and experience the community.  So I became her.

The parents of the African American males stressed the importance of academic success and did not expect anything less from their sons.  The adult African American males in this study attributed their academic success to having high parental expectations.  Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) believed that a strong predictor of academic achievement is parents' expectations for educational success.

*Question 2: In what ways have early school experiences influenced how successful adult African American males resolve to assist young African American males?*

Successful Black males in this study had early school experiences with great teachers which influence how they assist young African American males.  The successful Black males had teachers that were able to build positive relationships, connect, and show they cared for them.  Shaka stated, "The characteristics of a great teacher is the ability to build a relationship with your students and the ability to help student the  feel a sense of capability and capacity."

Successful African American male school administrators are building positive

relationships with young African American males, as well as modeling positive images for

them.  Shaka stated, "We should be able to engage in building an ongoing relationship with

students, especially males, because Black males need this."   According to Ladd and Burgess

(2001), positive student-teacher relationships serve as a resource for students at risk of school

failure.  The adult African males have found that showing they care and being mentors for

young African American males aid in their academic success.  Ja Ja commented:

> Relationships, I found to be extremely important.  Students need to know that they are
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> real and that you care, especially males.  I found that mentoring is a very important
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> factor.  We need to have lots of mentoring programs in place for African American
>
> males.

*Question 3: What are successful adult African American males doing to guide young African*
*American males towards positive engagement in school?*

With regards to mentoring young African American males in their schools, successful

African American male school leaders are making sure teachers that understand Black males

are in place to help them.  Shaka explained what he is doing in his building to assist young

African American males:

> One of the most important things that I try to do as an administrator, especially a
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> Black male administrator is to provide that example as a role model to my students.
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> To make sure that every child, African American students in particular, feel validated
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> and supported.  The influence that I have has to start with changing mindsets.  I
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> cannot just tell teachers to respect Black males.  I have to first of all find the right
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> people.  The people who are willing to recognize the differences and then accentuate
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> those gifts, skills, and talents.  Many times in our schools, the gifts and talents that

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our Black males bring to the setting are completely ignored because they are completely misunderstood. My influence is finding those teachers.

Successful teachers of African Americans take the time to learn their student's culture, life and community (Murrell, 2002). The successful adults are making sure they themselves are visible as positive role models for the young African American males in their schools. Ja Ja gave the following explanation for being a positive role model for young African American males:

> I am an African American male and I can model. I don't think that there is any other better way to create positive culture than to show that you can be cool, you can be an athlete, definitely be professional, and be an African American male.

As far as strategies and practices being implemented in the schools, all the adult African American males in this study expressed that the strategies and practices in their schools are for all students, not just African American males. The participants explained that their schools are using differentiated learning and a mentoring program which ties support staff to students as a strategy. Achieve 3000 is also a reading program that is used in the school buildings along with the three Rs, which stands for rigor, relevance and relationships. These strategies and practices were revealed by the participants as being implemented in the school building for all students, and thereby contributing to the success of African American male students.

**Lessons Learned**

From this study, I have learned that there are successful African American males whose stories should be heard. Despite the research that depicts African American males lagging behind their peers academically, African American males want to experience

academic success. African American males must experience some type of success in school in order to foresee a positive future. Each of the participants in this study had early school experiences that led to their academic success. The participants of this study attribute their academic success to their teachers, parents, neighbors, church members and friends. Due to their academic success, the participants strive to be a positive role model for the young African American males in their schools.

The data from this study revealed that the parents of Black males want their sons to experience academic success, even if they themselves did not experience success or graduate from high school or college. African American parents want their sons and other siblings to have better experiences in school than they had. As the research literature indicates, parents' expectations for educational success have been a strong predictor of academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lee & Croninger, 1994). Jeynes (2005) found that parents who were involved with their child's schooling had a positive impact on academic success. Unlike what Robinson and Werblow (2012) found in their study, this study revealed that fathers are not always absent in the lives of African American males. In fact, the participants in this study stated that their fathers along with their mothers played significant roles in their academic success.

Based on this research, parents not only play important roles in the success of African American males, but teachers also play important roles in the academic success of Black males. The participants of this study had teachers who enhanced and supported their academic success. A teacher influenced one of the participants so much that he wanted to be like her. Birch and Ladd (1997) contended that a positive teacher relationship with a student has a positive impact on the life of that student. It is important for teachers to show they

care, build positive relationships and take the time to understand African American males, if they want these African American male students to experience academic success. According to Milner (2007), positive teacher perceptions of African American males improve the educational experience of African American males in the classroom.

According to this study, among adult African American male school administrators, there is an awareness that young African American males are in need of assistance to be successful in schools. Nevertheless, school administrators are not capable of mandating different strategies and practices in their school building that are exclusively designed for African American males. The African American male school administrators have several innovative ideas about how to reach African American male students, but cannot put those ideas into action due to strict school district and state policies. State policies guide the curriculum that should be taught in schools and students are assessed on the material from the curriculum. School administrators are responsible for making sure the curriculum is followed in their schools.

**Delimitations**

This study had delimitations due to the small sample of participants that were used to derive the essence of the early school experiences of successful African American male school administrators. The first delimitation of this research was that the participants all worked in an urban school district in the southeastern part of the United States. Expanding to other types of school districts would give more voices to the early experiences of successful African American males from across the United States.

A second delimitation of this study was that all the participants were in the same educational position of school administrator. The criteria set in the study limited the

participants to only African American male school administrators.  There are other

educational positions that are held by successful African American males, which would have

also given a voice to more African American males.

Finally, this research was limited to only successful African American male school

administrators in the southeastern region of the United States.  Expanding the study to

participants outside of the southeastern region may have yielded additional information.

Giving voice to successful African American male school administrators from different states

would provide more in-depth data from different regions of the United States.  However, due

to the time limitations and resources, branching out to other geographical areas to interview

other successful African American male school administrators was not a possibility.

**Revisiting the Conceptual Framework**

In reviewing the participants' responses about their commitments to assist young

African American males in their school building, the data does support the many findings of

Ladson-Billings' (2009) critical dimensions of culturally relevant teaching.  Therefore, the

participants had teachers that Ladson-Billings would identify as *Dreamkeepers*.

Nevertheless, the participants themselves maybe considered *dreamers* but not quite *keepers*

because of their reluctance to commit to implementing strategies in their schools for young

African American males only.

The African American male school administrators in this study were aware of the

challenges young African American males face in school.  The school administrators have

implemented strategies and practices in their school buildings that work to assist in the

success of all students in the school building, but no strategies and practices were geared

specifically towards the success of young African American males only.  State and school

district policies make it difficult for these African American school administrators to strike out on their own to implement strategies and practices focused only on the success of young African American males in their school buildings. The African American male school administrator does not want to be accused of "helping his own culture," risking his position as a school administrator. However, the participants expressed dreams of what should be implemented in schools to ensure the academic success of young African American males. For example, Shaka stated:

> Schools, all across the country need to develop a culture of empowering of our African American males and a culture of acknowledging who they are. I feel that in most schools, African American males feel invisible unless they are athletically gifted. If you are an athlete you are seen. We need to change that around. We need to acknowledge and make visible and celebrate the academic success of our African American males, because there are boys out there that are successful. Schools have to create a culture where African American males are part of the school culture and are not just those boys. They have to create a culture where African American males feel like they have a voice and they matter. They have to create a culture where African American males see themselves visually in the environment.

Shaka believed that Black males needed to be recognized for their academic achievements and seen as important young men. Hannibal felt that schools must be aware that African American males have 'cultural differences.' Therefore, schools must find ways to make modifications in order for these students to find success. Similar to Shaka and Hannibal's comments, Ja Ja explained, "Relevant curriculum should be implemented. If we had a relevant curriculum and we allow students to master the standards in a variety of

intelligences, I think we will see African American males be a whole lot more successful."

On the other hand, Idris Alooma believed that "there should be a conscious effort to have a

certain amount of African American males working in the building." Khufu added, "Ideally,

every African American male should have one mentor in the school building that's genuine."

The participants may be reluctant to implement strategies and practices in their school

buildings for young African American males, but they had some heart felt advice for both

young and adult African American males.  Table E displays the advice that the participants

had for both young and adult African American males.

Table E

*Participants' Advice for Young and Adult African American Males*

| Participants Advice for Young African American Males | Participants Advice for Adult African American Males |
|---|---|
| Do Not Paint Self as a Victim | Share Your Journey with other Young African American Males |
| Seek Mentors/Role Models | |
| Leave no Opportunity Unturned | Duty to Raise young African American males (Biological/Non-Biological) |
| Think Positively | |
| Have a Vision | It Takes a Village to Raise Young African American Males |
| Know What You Want/Develop a Plan | |

The successful African American male school administrators provided advice they felt would

help young Black males succeed in school based on their own early school experiences.  The

successful Black male school leaders also provided advice to other adult Black males which

would assist in promoting success among young African American males.  The advice given

by the successful adult male administrators suggests that it takes more than just great teachers

in the classroom to aid in the academic success of Black males.

**Characteristics of Culturally Relevant Teaching and Participants' Early School Experiences**

*Critical Dimension 1: Conceptions of Self and Others.* All the participants expressed that their teachers encouraged them to be successful in the classroom.  Teachers made them feel that there were no limits to what they could do, made learning real and relevant, held high standards for them, pulled the best work out of them, and gave them confidence to succeed in all classes.  Also, a participant stated his teacher treated everyone in the class like they were presidents or corporate CEOs, which encouraged them to achieve academic success.

*Critical Dimension 2: Social Relations.* The study revealed that teachers allowed students to work in groups and complete group projects. Working with partners in groups allowed the participants to build friendships, relationships and work collaboratively with other students.  The participants experienced positive teacher relationships, which they felt was important and led to academic success in the classroom.

*Critical Dimension 3: Conceptions of Knowledge.* All of the participants expressed that they had teachers who expected them to be successful in the classroom. A participant admitted that one of his teachers encouraged him to enroll in Academically Gifted classes, though he was not certified as gifted. Three of the participants of the study had teachers who influenced them so much in the classroom that they wanted and did become teachers themselves.  All of the participants stated that teachers recognized their academic achievements, which influenced them to continue their academic success.

The participants' responses from their early school experiences aligned with the three critical dimensions of culturally relevant teaching described by Ladson-Billings (2009).  As

adults, the participants strive to assist young African American males in becoming successful in schools.

**Characteristics of Culturally Relevant Teaching and Participants Commitments to Assist African American Males**

*Critical Dimension 1: Conceptions of Self and Others.* As successful African American males, all of the participants saw their presence in the school building as a way for young African American males to see positive role models. As Black male school leaders, the participants are showing young black males that they care about them. The African American male administrators are also attempting to hire other school staff in their school buildings that understand the African American male.

*Critical Dimension 2: Social Relations.* The participants, as school administrators, do not work one-on-one with any of the African American males in their school building to ensure academic success. However, the school administrators have dreams of what can be implemented in their schools to assist African American males in achieving academic success.

*Critical Dimension 3: Conceptions of Knowledge.* The participants are aware that there is a need for practices to be implemented to assist African American males in the classroom, but admitted the current strategies and practices in the classrooms are implemented to assist in the success for all students, not just African American males. The participants are reluctant to use the knowledge they have to assist young African American males because of district and state policies.

**Keeping the Dream Alive or Not?**

The participants' school experiences revealed that they had teachers that assisted in their academic success in the classroom. The data about the participants' teachers revealed

that the teachers did what they had to do in the classroom to keep the dreams alive for the

African American male participants; therefore, the African American males have achieved

successful careers as school administrators.  As school administrators, the African American

males are aware of the perils young African American males face in the classroom, but are

limited to what they can do for only African American males in their school buildings.

These successful African American male school administrators have dreams of what can

work or what can be done but face challenges in keeping the dream alive for young African

American males in their own school building.  Successful African American male school

administrators should not let the dreams of young African American males die or be

deferred.  In thinking about dreams being deferred, the following is a poem from *The

Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Rampersad & Roessel, 1994):

> **Harlem[2]**
> by *Langston Hughes*
>
> What happens to a dream deferred?
>
> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?
> Or fester like a sore—
> And then run?
> Does it stink like rotten meat?
> Or crust and sugar over—
> like a syrupy sweet?
>
> Maybe it just sags
> Like a heavy load.
>
> Or does it explode? (p. 426)

If the dreams of African American males are not kept alive, they will continue to face school

and social challenges throughout their lives.

**Implications**

The findings from the study have implications for 1) district and schools 2) college and university teacher education programs 3) African American males and 4) the African American community. These implications include all stakeholders who can make a difference in making sure African American males are successful in schools. The suggestions may aid in keeping the dreams alive in Black males, which will lead to academic success.

**Implications for school districts and schools**. Administrators of schools and school district administrators should make an effort to recruit and employ African American male personnel in teaching positions and other staff positions in the schools. The presence of successful African American males in the school building and classrooms would provide young African American males with persons who look like them who can serve as educational role models. The African American males in the school building could be role models for the young Black males in the classroom. A strategy that can be used to empower African American males in schools would be to hire qualified Black males in the schools (Whiting, 2006).

Once hired by a school district and before going into any classroom, all teachers and staff should be required to take cultural diversity training focused on strategies for supporting Black students. Teachers and administrators should engage in staff development that is geared towards teaching strategies that assist in the academic success of African American males as a culturally diverse subgroup. Administrators, teachers and all other staff of a school should be encouraged to learn about the cultures of their school community. Teachers who successfully teach Black students challenge themselves to develop a profound

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knowledge of their students' culture, history, language, life and community (Murrell, 2002).

Administrators and the school district leaders should make sure all staff members are

competent in teaching African American males. According to Livingston and Nahimana

(2006), "In creating interventions, curriculum, and programs for Black children, educators

must account for and be mindful of the cultural, social, structural, and psychological realities

the impact Black male development" (p. 213). School district leaders should engage in

finding strategies and practices that promote academic success for African American males.

After researching these strategies and practices, school district leaders should allow school

administrators and teachers to implement those initiatives and programs that have been found

to work in the school building. This would increase positive academic results among young

African American males at all grade levels.

District level leaders should research what works for African American males and

give school administrators permission to implement some strategies for the African

American males in their school buildings. If district leaders give the approval for school

administrators to implement these strategies, then the school administrators would not be

reluctant in implementing strategies and practices that work in their schools for young

African American males. These initiatives could increase the academic performance of all

African American males in classrooms of the school district.

Districts and schools should also recognize the importance of parent and family

involvement in the school setting. Districts and schools should encourage parents and other

important family members to join and participate in school activities that aid in the academic

success of African American males throughout their entire school experience. Parents and

other important family members should have the opportunity to participate in the decision

making process for schools. School based parent participation has shown to positively impact a child's academic success in the classroom (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1996). These key stakeholders could share insight on ways to assist and promote academic success among young African American males in the classroom.

**Implications for college and university teacher programs.** All college and university educational leaders should revisit their teaching and administration programs to ensure all aspects of diversity in the classroom and schools are addressed. Teacher preparation programs should be designed so that all aspiring teachers are competent in the area of teaching students with diverse backgrounds. According to Gay (2000), teachers should have a basic understanding of all cultures so that students are better educated in the classroom. The diversity course would allow potential teachers to better understand the challenges African American male students face in school. It is important for teachers to understand and acknowledge the cultural experiences of their African American male students and to participate in understanding the importance of self-determination through knowledge of sociocultural factors (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Courses in teacher preparation programs would also provide teachers with the tools to assist in the academic success of African American males.

**Implications for African American males.** Young African American males should be encouraged to seek support not only from family members but also to seek assistance from churches, programs and organizations in the community that support positive academic success among African American males. Young Black males should not be afraid to seek assistance from teachers when they know they are struggling in the classroom. These young

men should also be encouraged to advocate for themselves.  This advocacy would build self-confidence allowing the young African American male to believe that he can do anything.

Adult African American males can assist young African American males by taking the time to inform them of their own positive school experiences.  Listening to what Black males have to say about their academic success can contribute to changing the conditions that undermine the achievement of young Black males (Duncan, 2002). Adult Black males should empower young Black males to be successful.  This way, young African American males can see that someone like them has endured the same school experiences and was able to be academically successful.

Adult African American males should be mentors for young African American males. By becoming a mentor for a young Black male, the adult male could encourage and give valuable advice that would assist in achieving academic success.  Seeing that someone cares for them and their education would lead to positive results for young African American males.

**Implications for the African American Community.** African American males need someone to check on their academic success in the classroom.  The African American community needs to embrace all young African American males by making sure someone is in their corner at all times.  This means the African American community needs to go back to "the village" concept by making sure the Black male is being cared for at all times by all in the community.

**Further Research**

Results of this study revealed that adult African American males had early school experiences that aided in their academic success.  Participants shared experiences that can aid

in promoting the success of young African American males in our schools today. This study suggests several important areas for further study.

Studies that explore African American males in a positive light are needed. Completing research on successful African American males could assist young Black males in having pride in their day-to-day school activities. Young African American males would strive to advocate for themselves and experience academic success. The research would allow young African American males to see what they can become beyond the school building. African American male youth would be able to see the places that academic success could take them.

Research on how the high expectations of fathers aid in the academic success of African American males is also needed. This research would allow young African American males to see the importance of their roles in the lives of other males. The research would show young African American males the importance of being positive role models for their sons and other young African American males.

Exploring school experiences from the perspective of a larger sampling pool of successful adult African American male participants is needed. More participants could give more successful insights on what can assist in the academic success of young African American males in schools. The success stories from more participants may yield more rich data adding to the findings from this study.

More research on the importance of positive teacher relationships with young Black male students is needed. This research would allow current and future teachers to see how their positive relationships in the school building could assist in the academic success of Black male students. Current and future teachers would have a guide on how to build

positive relationships with Black males that would promote academic success in the classroom.

**To Conclude**

According to the *Schotts* reports (2010, 2012), African American males lag behind their White counterparts in all academic areas, experience more out of school suspensions, and graduate at a lower rate than White males. Policies have been put in place to improve these outcomes for African American males, but the results are minimal. With the policies in place, why is it that so many of our African American males are not experiencing academic success? There must be more research that gives voice to African American males by letting them explain how they experienced academic success and what aided in their academic success. This research study found that African American males are and can achieve academic success in the classroom. As revealed in this research study, African American males are willing to share their positive lived school experiences, and this study adds to the limited research in the literature on success stories of young African American males. Shaka agrees that stories of successful African American males are needed. He makes the following revelation:

> We need to acknowledge and make visible and celebrate the academic success of our African American males, because there are boys out there that are successful. Schools have to create a culture where African American males are part of the school culture and are not just 'those boys.' They have to create a culture where African American males feel like they have a voice and they matter.

This study revealed that teachers and parents play very important roles in assisting in the success of African American males in schools. Ladson-Billings' (2009) characteristics of

culturally relevant teaching concentrated on the importance of teachers and students working together to ensure academic success.  This study confirms the dimensions identified by Ladson-Billings' characteristics of culturally relevant teaching through the early school experiences of the participants and adds that parent involvement is poignant in the academic success of African American males.

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APPENDICES

## Appendix A

## Consent To Participate Form

**School Experiences:  From the Voices of Successful Adult African American Males**

My name is Connie Cole. I am a doctoral student at Appalachian State University, under the supervision of Dr. Roma Angel, Dissertation Chair. I invite you to participate in a research study focusing on adult African American male school administrators.  The purpose of the study is to investigate the school experiences of successful African American males through their own voices. I am striving to understand strategies that could lead to academic success for young African American males.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed in-depth twice, followed by a third session focused on transcript accuracy and emergent themes.  Each interview will last no longer than two hours.  With your permission, I would like to take written notes and audiotape each session for transcription and review.

I am asking you to participate because I believe that your educational experiences, expertise and thoughts about classroom factors that led to your academic success will help me understand pedagogical practices that can potentially lead to academic success for young African American males. The benefit to you for participating in this study is that you may help me and others understand practices educators can implement in advocating for academic success for African American male students.

There are no foreseen risks in your participation in this study. Your identity will be confidential; no one but me will know that you are contributing to this study. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. All information from this study will be kept in a secure, locked area during the entire study and will be destroyed one year after the study.

Participation in the study is voluntary.  At any time you may choose to discontinue your participation, or you may refuse to participate with no consequences.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at cc48358@appstate.edu or my Dissertation Chair at angelrb@appstate.edu.

Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the IRB Administrator, Research and Sponsored Programs, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608, (828) 262-2130, irb@appstate.edu.

The ASU Institutional Review has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

*I have read the description above and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.*
Participant's Signature_____ Date_____

**Appendix B**

**Interview Questions**

**Questions for 1ˢᵗ Interview with African American Male School Administrators**

1. Today we are going to talk about your school experiences.  Think about the time when you were in P-12 schools.  Consider your classroom experiences.  Relate with detail the most poignant and/or memorable experiences from those years.

2. Think about the curriculum your teachers chose.  Did you encounter materials that really spoke to you as a young African American male? If so, what were those materials?  In what ways did they speak to you as a young Black student?  Did any of these materials affirm your real-life experiences as an African American male?

3. Think about the instructional strategies and activities provided by your teachers.  Did you encounter any specific strategies and/or activities that were of particular benefit to you?  Were there any strategies or activities that you enjoyed more than others?  Explain.

4. Speaking to learning experiences that involved reading literature, oration, collective/group/community learning, and peer learning.  Did you encounter any of these and did you find these experiences to be valuable?

5. Did your teachers celebrate student academic achievement?  Did they include rigor as a normal aspect of their expectations?  Did they aid you in thinking about yourself as an intellectual?  Discuss.

6. Think about teachers from your early school experiences.  Describe some of the most memorable ones.  Did these teachers aid you in becoming academically successful?  Explain.  If so, in what ways did these teachers help you?  Would you describe these

teachers as being great teachers?  What do you consider to be the characteristics of a great teacher?

7. Was there a time you felt you had a meaningful relationship with one of your teachers?  If so, describe that relationship and how it affected you.

8. When you were faced with challenges in the academic setting, what inspired you to succeed?

9. In achieving academic success in the classroom, was there a time that you felt that you had to give up your identity as an African American?  Please explain.

10. Were there classroom experiences that aided you in focusing on your own future as a successful African American male?  If so, what were these and how did you respond to them?

11. Other than the curriculum, pedagogical factors, and teachers already discussed, is there anything else that you feel contributed to your academic success?  Discuss.

12. Are there other factors relating to the classroom setting and academic success of African American males that were not addressed today?  Is so, let's discuss those now.

13. As a result of your own classroom experiences discussed today, what advice would you give to African American males to help them achieve academic success in schools today?

**Appendix C**

**Interview Questions**

**Questions for 2nd Interview with African American Male School Administrators**

1.  Consider your last interview. From your own experiences, what factors did you find, or have you found, to be of most benefit in promoting positive academic engagement and success as an African American male? As an African American educator?

2.  Consider your current position as a school administrator. How have the P-12 experiences discussed in the last interview affected your present ways of leading schools?

3.  How have these experiences influenced your commitment to assist young African American males to succeed academically?

4.  Are there any particular initiatives or personal actions you take towards positively engaging young Black males?

5.  What strategies or practices are currently being used in your school building to assist in the success for African American males?

6.  What supports, workshops, or other professional development activities are provided for teachers in your school building to help in the success of African American males in the classroom?

7.  Does your current school affirm the culture of young African American males? If so, in what ways? Is there evidence of affirmation of young African American culture in the classroom (curriculum, activities, teaching strategies, teachers)?

8.  Of the strategies, practices, supports, or initiatives already mentioned, which do you think has yielded the most success for African American males in your building?

9. What should be implemented in schools to ensure the academic success of African American males?

10. How much influence do you feel that you have to create a positive culture for young African American males in school? Discuss.

11. Are there any other suggestions that you would like to offer about what works to engage African American males in schools today?

12. As a result of this interview, do you have further advice for young African American males?

13. Are there topics that I did not mention that you would like to discuss?

14. How many years have you been a school administrator?

15. What is your highest obtained degree?

16. Do you have plans to further your education? If so, what are your plans?

**Exemption Request for Research with Human Participants**

*Instructions: **Complete and send the request form electronically to [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu).***
***Note:** checkboxes can be checked by putting an "x" in the box.*

Research activities are not exempt if prisoners, fetuses, or pregnant women are **targeted** for participation; if participants will be exposed to more than minimal risk; or if the research involves deception of the participant.

## Section I: Study Description

**1. Study Title:** School Experiences: From the Voices of Successful Adult African American Males

**2. Principal Investigator (PI) and responsible faculty member if student is the PI:**

Connie Miles Cole, PI

Dr. Roma Angel, Committee Chair

**Department(s):** Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership; Department of Leadership and Educational Studies

**3. Purpose of research**: *Please describe briefly the purpose of the research, and research question.*

      The purpose of this study is to explore early school experiences instrumental in aiding adult African American males to achieve academically and to explore the ways these successful African American male educators currently assist young African American males to engagement in academic success. A phenomenological approach will be employed to ensure that the essence of their school experience is revealed "in their own voices."

      The following research questions will guide the study:

- What school and community experiences aided in the academic success of adult African American males?

- In what ways have early school experiences influenced how successful adult African American males resolve to assist young African American males in schools?

- What are successful adult African American males doing to guide young African American males towards positive engagement in school?

4. **Procedures of the research as they relate to participants:** *include a summary of recruitment, type of data collected, how data will be stored and destroyed.*

   With help of employees of an urban school district with African American student populations of at least 25 percent, names of African American male administrators will be selected as possible study participants. Participants will be contacted by email and phone to ascertain interest in study involvement. Upon receipt of the signed consent, data will be collected through two in-depth interviews focused on classroom experiences and resulting commitments. A third interview will focus on accuracy of data and coded themes. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The original audiotaped interviews, along with all transcriptions, will be stored in a locked, secured fireproof safety box kept in a locked file cabinet. Only the researcher will be in possession of a key to the locked. fireproof safety box. A year after the completion of the research study, all audiotapes and transcriptions will be shredded.

5. By submitting this request, the PI (and responsible faculty member if PI is a student) accepts responsibility for ensuring that all members of the research team: 1) complete the required CITI training and any other necessary training to fulfill their study responsibilities, 2) follow the study procedures as described in the IRB approved application and comply with *Appalachian's Guidelines for the Review of Research Involving Human Subjects* and all IRB communication and 3) uphold the rights and welfare of all study participants.

   The parties (i.e., the IRB and the PI and responsible faculty member if PI is a student) have agreed to conduct this application process by electronic means, and this application is signed electronically by the Principal Investigator and by the responsible faculty member if a student is the PI.

   My name and email address together constitute the symbol and/or process I have adopted with the intent to sign this application, and my name and email address, set out below, thus constitute my electronic signature to this application.


   Connie Miles Cole                                          cc48358@appstate.edu
   PI Name                                                    PI Email address


   Dr. Roma Angel                                             angelrb@appstate.edu
   Faculty Advisor Name if PI is a student      Faculty Advisor Email address if PI is
   a student


Date: March 23, 2014

6. Dissemination of Results
[x] I plan to publish (thesis, dissertation, journal, book, etc.)
[ ] I plan to present off campus (conferences, etc.)

☐ I plan to present on campus (Celebration of Student Research, Capstone, etc.)
☐ I will not publish or present outside of class assignment
☐ Other: describe

**7.** Type of research, check all that apply: ☐ Faculty Research ☒ Dissertation/Thesis
☐ Product of Learning/ Capstone Research
☐ Class Project – Course Number:
☐ Other: describe (e.g., Honor's Thesis)

**8.** Source of Funding: ☒ Not Funded ☐ Funds Awarded ☐ Funds Pending
☐ Federally Funded ☐ University Funded: describe
If funds awarded/pending, provide sponsor name, Sponsored Programs number:

*Attach a copy of the contract/grant/agreement.*

**9.** What, if any, relationship exists between the researcher(s) and agencies (e.g., schools, hospitals, homes) involved in the research? *Attach appropriate approvals (e.g., letter of agreement) from agencies involved in the research.*

In gathering names of potential participants to provide the best possible information for the study, I had to select some participants who work in the school district with me. Despite, this fact, we do not work directly with each other nor do we have job functions that overlap. One of my job responsibilities is traveling to schools to audit folders for special education; however, I do not check folders in any schools where the participants are the school administrators. I do not attend the same professional meetings as the school administrators in this large urban school district.

A review of research and interview questions by the urban school district where I am employed determined that as PI I do not need to have the school district's permission to interview the study participants. This study received exempt status. See letter attached.

## Section II: Research Personnel

**1.** Enter each team member (including PI) in the table below. All members of the team must complete the required CITI training.
(**Note:** Changes in personnel must be sent to the IRB. Changes can submitted via email with the information below. If you need additional room, add rows by: right click, insert, and then insert rows below)

| Name | Role (e.g., PI, co-I, Research Assistant, Research Coord., Faculty Advisor, etc.) | Receive IRB Correspondence (Y/N)? If yes, provide preferred email address. |
|---|---|---|
| Connie Miles Cole | PI-student | Yes cc48358@appstate.edu |
| Dr. Roma Angel | Dissertation Chair | Yes angelrb@appstate.edu |
| | | |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |

**2.** Are there any known or potential conflicts of interest related to this research?
*Conflict of interest relates to situations in which financial or other personal considerations may compromise or have the appearance of compromising an employee's objectivity in meeting University responsibilities.*

[x] No    [ ] Yes    If yes, describe and explain how participants will be protected from the influence of competing interests:

## Section III:  Participant Population and Recruitment

**1.** Number of participants sought: 5

**2.** Targeted Participant Population (check all that apply):

[x] Adults (>= 18 yrs old)      [ ] College Students (only 18 or older)
[ ] Minors (< 18 yrs old) Age range:    [ ] College Students (under 18 may participate)

[ ] Minorities      [ ] Cognitively or emotionally impaired
[ ] Inpatient participants      [ ] Non-English speaking
[ ] Outpatient participants      [ ] Employees of a profit or non-profit organization

[ ] International research

## Section IV:  Risk

*Minimal risk* means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

Assessment of level of risk:
[x] This study contains no more than minimal risk.
[ ] This study contains risks that are more than minimal.

## Section V:  Exempt Categories

Please select the category or categories most applicable to your research and answer the question(s) associated with any selected categories:

[ ] **Normal Educational Practices and Settings (1)**
Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal education practices, such as (a) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (b) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

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1a. Explain why the research procedures are normal educational practices in a commonly accepted educational setting:

1b. If research includes accessing identifiable educational records, how will the records be protected from unauthorized access?

1c. If research includes accessing identifiable educational records, when will access to the records for research purposes be terminated? Or, if identifiable educational records are copied for research purposes, when will the identifiable information be destroyed?

**☒ Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations (2)**
Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), surveys, interviews or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that participants can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of an individual's response(s) outside of the research setting could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.  [**Note:** Surveys or interviews which include minors as subjects are not included in this exempt category.]

2a. Can the information collected be linked (directly or indirectly) to participants?  ☐ Yes  ☒ No

2b. If the answer to 2a is yes, would an accidental disclosure of the information damage a participant's reputation, employability or financial standing?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

**Identifiable Subjects in Special Circumstances (Public Officials or Federal Statutes) (3)**
Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), surveys, interviews, or observations of public behavior that are not exempt under (2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personal identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

3a. Explain why the research applies to this category:

**Collection or Study of Existing Data (4)**
Research involving the collection or analysis of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if such sources are a matter of public record or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

4a. All of the data/specimens involved in the study have already been collected:  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

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4b. The investigators will not record any information that can be linked directly or indirectly to participants:

☐ True ☐ False

4c. The data/specimens are considered Protected Health Information and are subject to HIPAA Privacy Policy:

☐ True ☐ False

☐ **Public Benefit or Service Programs (5)**
Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of, department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under such programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to such programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under such programs.

5a. Explain why the research applies to this category:

☐ **Taste and Food Evaluation and Acceptance Studies (6)**
Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

6a. Explain why the research applies to this category:

### Section VI:  Informed Consent

**1.**  Consent to participate in the research will be sought by providing (please check all that apply):

[x] A statement of the purpose of the research.
[x] An explanation of the procedures of the study.
[x] If there are foreseeable risks, benefits to the participant, or compensation, they are explained.
[x] An explanation that participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences if the subject refuses to participate or decide to discontinue participation (at any time).
[x] Contact information for the investigator and faculty advisor if the investigator is a student.

If any of the consent items above are not checked, please explain why it is impractical to explain this information to participants:

**2.** Will participants sign an informed consent?     [x] Yes ☐ No

Please **send an electronic Word attachment (not scanned) of this application and any accompanying materials (e.g., informed consent, surveys, interview questions) to [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu)**. Thank you for taking your time to promote ethical human participant research at Appalachian!

**Vita**

Connie Miles Cole was born to Leroy and Janie Miles.  She attended elementary, middle, and high schools in Rowland, North Carolina.  In 1993, she received a B. A. degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Management from Winston-Salem State University.  She also received her Teaching Certification in Teaching Students with Emotional Disturbances from High Point University in 1996.  She earned her Master of School Administration and Educational Specialist in Educational Administration from Appalachian State University in 2003 and 2007 respectively.

She is currently employed as an Exceptional Children's Process Specialist.  She resides in Winston-Salem, North Carolina with her husband and son.