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AN EVALUATION OF ETHNIC REPRESENTATION WITHIN THREE THIRD
GRADE BASAL READING SERIES

by

Ashlee Hirsh Horton

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Instruction and Curriculum Leadership

University of Memphis

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to the students I have taught in the past and those I hope to teach in the future. Thank you for showing me the world through your eyes. It is my hope that through quality literature my student's may see the world.

Acknowledgement

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of many people. A very special thank you to my chair, Dr. J. Helen Perkins; I could not nor would I have wanted to do this without your guiding hand. Thank you for believing in me, challenging me, and polishing me. It is because of the time I spent with you that I can shine.

I would also like to thank Dr. Monte Tatom and Dr. Lewis Walker for their time in assisting me with methodology, revisions and edits. I aim to encourage and assist emerging professionals the way you both have encouraged and assisted me.

To my husband, Kevin Horton, I truly could not have done this without you. Thank you for encouraging me to go back to school when we first met; I am a better person because you loved me through this process. Thank you for your support, hours of listening to me, and for being my rock.

To my mom, Lynne Hirsh, thank you for always wanting the best for me and for sacrificing so much to ensure I had the highest quality education. Because of your belief in the value of education and most importantly your belief in me I have pursued what was once unthinkable.

Abstract

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This content analysis study examined 99 basal reading narratives from three publishers: Harcourt, SRA-McGraw Hill, and Scott Foresman. The stories were classified according to the ethnicity of the major characters. The observed frequencies were compared to expected frequencies to indicate over representation, adequate representation or under representation based on the ethnic breakdown of the student population on the state of Tennessee and national levels. The stories identified “African American” ($n = 18$) were investigated further to determine if the elements of quality African American literature (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001) were present. Cohen’s Kappa indicated strong agreement between the 2 raters ($k = .88$).

The study indicates African American students observed occurrences were less than the expected occurrences based on the student population on the state level in both the Harcourt and Scott Foresman text; SRA-McGraw Hill observed occurrences were equal to expected occurrences on the state level. On the national level, Harcourt observed occurrences were less than expected occurrences based on student population and SRA-McGraw Hill and Scott Foresman were greater than the expected occurrences on the national level. The total sample of stories identified as African American exhibited the qualities of African American children’s literature.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

The underperformance of African American students' literacy development, when compared to their European-American peers, is a trend that spans the last decade. Throughout the past ten years, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) data suggest the number of African American students performing at proficient and advanced literacy levels on the NAEP exam is less than their Caucasian counterparts (NAEP, 2008). In the primary grades, the gap is not as large as it is in the upper grades; however, by the students' senior year the gap has widened significantly. Students struggle with comprehension among all text genres (RAND, 2002); yet the schools' solution tends to be more interventions, more programs, and more skill-based instruction (Durden, 2007; Flowers, 2007; Horn, 2003). The shift in education from a balanced literacy approach (Cunningham, 2008) to skill-based instruction using basal reading programs as influenced by the National Reading Panel Report (2000) has not bridged the reading achievement gap for these students (NAEP, 2008).

When the NRP report was released, the government, in response, issued Reading First grants for underperforming K-3 grade schools. The Reading First funds supported professional development and training for K-3 teachers in the five subskills of reading as identified by the National Reading Panel report as the most influential in children's reading success. Any materials purchased for the teachers' had to be grounded in Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) (Keresten & Pardo, 2007). The grant required a 90 minute uninterrupted literacy block where only SBRR materials could be used. The SBRR materials included a basal reading series, intervention pieces and

computer-based instruction. Teachers could not use trade books and high-quality literature during this time since it was not SBRR (Keresten & Pardo, 2007). The curriculum for a standard primary grade classroom included phonics, fluency, and vocabulary and comprehension instruction from a basal reading program. The initial reports on Reading First were positive; however, over time, students' proficiency in reading decreased (Conner, Jakobson, Crowe, Meadows, & Granger, 2010). The current era of accountability may leave some teachers apprehensive to use balanced literacy practices which minimize the role of the teacher in the classroom by limiting their creativity in lesson planning, time allocation and management of instructional resources.

Basal Reading Instruction

The use of programmed reading instruction, referred to as Basal Reading Series, is common across the United States. Basal reading series include student books on differing levels, workbooks, teacher's manuals and support materials used to implement the series flawlessly. The basal reading series contains all materials a teacher needs to successfully implement the reading program. Additionally, the teacher's guide directs the teacher how to use, implement and teach using these materials. In the previous decades, school districts insist teachers use these materials to teach reading. This approach was developed in the late 1970s and termed "teacher proof" materials in the fields of math and science. The teacher is no longer the decision-maker in the instructional practice in the classroom which may be perceived as a power issue as the program or reading series drives the teacher (Keresten & Pardo, 2007). The basal reading series are mass-produced. As efficient and good intentioned as the text companies are in designing the basal series,

to what extent do they consider the diversity evident in the composition of the school district, school or classroom which the books are used?

Appealing Literature

Over the past decade, since the inception of government reform, the achievement gap has narrowed slightly in the early elementary years (NAEP, 2008). However, the gap widens at fourth grade and continues to spread throughout the high school years. Although there are many contributing factors to student achievement, this study examined the literature the students are being exposed to in the school setting. This is only one piece of the all-encompassing puzzle of student success. However, the literature students' are exposed to during the school day is largely dependent upon the materials the school possesses. If the school utilizes the basal reading program as its primary means of instruction then the students are exposed to a smaller selection of stories for instructional purposes. Students disenchanted or bored with programmed instruction, instead turn their attention away from the literature school has to offer. The students' may feel literature has no relevance or personal appeal; it can be distant from the lives they lead on a daily basis (Tatum, 2000). Literature creates a powerful connection with students; it is one of the materials that can bridge the gap between home and school cultures (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). Literature connects the students to the school setting in the following ways. First, the illustration of the text draw a primary grades student in or eliminates their desire to read the text (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). When a student selects a text and sees them reflected in the pictures, they are much more likely to read the book (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Tatum, 2000). Second, the students can see their life, issues and problems reflected in realistic fiction. This allows the student to find a place in

literature; the language of the text can affirm the student (Tatum, 2000). Textual language which mimics the students' home language connects the students' home and school; in addition, it allows the student to feel affirmed by the school (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Irvine, 1990). If availability of literature encompassing strong African American characters is not prevalent in schools today then it could be a contributing factor to the achievement gap.

Underperformance in literacy by African American students is a concern for schools all over America (Flowers, 2007; Horn, 2003; NAEP, 2008). The schools search for and implement programs designed to assist struggling or reluctant readers. Yet, do the children see others who look, talk and at times act like them reflected in the literature? Does the usage of basal reading series place African American students at a disadvantage? It depends on whether the mass-distributed text appeals to the diverse ethnicities represented in the elementary classroom. Motivation and relevance hook diverse students; if the text is monochromatic, or features characters of one ethnicity, it could dampen students' interest in text. There may be lack of cultural representation in the books or curriculum implemented by the school system if the teachers are forced to instruct using a basal series only (Jackson & Boutte, 2009). Students may not be interested in the reading materials if they do not see or hear themselves or others like them in the text (Tatum, 2000). Students feel devalued when they are not represented in the texts they encounter on a daily basis (Ladson-Billings, 1991). If the basal reading series included monochromatic literature, then ethnically diverse students' may lack cultural schema or background experiences for the text at hand (Brooks, 2001).

Reading comprehension is dependent upon the text and the depth of background knowledge the reader has for a given text. When students are repeatedly asked to read texts that do not feature characters, events or language familiar to the student, those students are at a disadvantage because they do not possess the cultural schema to fully assimilate the text (Collier, 2001). When students lack the cultural schema to assimilate text, they struggle to apply comprehension strategies or vocabulary cues to make meaning. However, this cultural discontinuity is not an isolated occurrence; some students spend the majority of their educational career disengaged due to lack of culturally relevant text (Brooks, 2006; Collier, 2001; Durden, 2007).

Literature and the Achievement Gap

The aforementioned situation is one contributing factor to the achievement gap between African American students and their Caucasian counterparts. The majority of a population performing at basic or below proficient levels does not actually reflect on the particular population; rather, it could be a reflection on the tools used to teach those individuals. Standardized assessments should be evaluating the programs used to teach students; they determine a program's effectiveness (Caldwell, 2002). If the majority of a population of students is not performing then it points more toward the programs, materials and the teachers instructional practices than at the population of students in question.

Hughes-Hassel, Koehler and Barkley (2010) examined trade books on a transitional level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1998) for racial identities of the stories' characters and authors. The study showed a discrepancy between the amount of books featuring Caucasian characters and characters of color. When students do not see themselves in

literature then literature is viewed as exclusive; it does not include nor find their culture and language worthy of being represented (Richardson, 2002). This can contribute to disengagement and lack of motivation to find value in school and literacy found therein.

Authentic Literature

Tatum (2000) states the use of basal reading series and programmed instruction benefits students when there is a wide-variety of authentic literature. When this is done consistently, it allows all children the opportunity to increase their text comprehension since they have the cultural schema needed to assimilate the text itself. Furthermore, it allows the student to see themselves in print which is very affirming to the student. Ladson-Billings (1995) and Irvine (1990) suggest the underperformance by African American students could be attributed to these students not seeing themselves, their culture or their cultural norms represented in school literacy. Culturally relevant literature affirms cultural identity and allows the individual to make a text to self connection from the start. This connection fuels the student's ability to make a connection between home and school; the student will not feel like a stranger at school. The school becomes a place where the student feels included and accepted thus engaging the affective aspect of reading. Past studies indicate students' not seeing themselves in literacy as a hindrance to their academic development and achievement (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The current era of accountability demands both teachers and students to perform at their very best according to established academic standards; literature selections featuring cultural representation of all students allow the student to apply their background experiences and connect to characters in the story that look like them. Others point to the higher levels of engagement when the affective aspect of reading increases (Tatum, 2006). When the

student begins to view reading as a pleasurable activity it greatly increases the likelihood of reading success. When students are reading a wide variety of culturally relevant literature, they will identify and relate their home vernacular (Richardson, 2002; Sancore, 2004). This is important for 2 reasons: 1) there will not be a language or vernacular barrier impeding their understanding. 2) The literature affirms language used at home which allows the student to feel accepted by literature (Richardson, 2002).

Basal Reader Usage

Conversely, there are some outlying factors in relation to fidelity of elementary reading instructional applications. The first unknown in the classroom is the teacher's use of materials. Does the teacher use only the basal and its resources while teaching or does the teacher use the basal and other outside materials? Since basal readers differ in story selection, there may be one basal reading series more culturally relevant than others. Some teachers may believe the basal reading series is culturally relevant and meets the needs of their students. However, other teachers, regardless of district guidelines, refuse to teach from the basal series and provide instruction from trade books instead. Access to quality text featuring characters that look like oneself is key for reluctant readers (Tatum, 2000); they need to access these texts on a daily basis. Culturally relevant literature used to teach processing strategies is not nearly effective as it is when the literature promotes dialogue and discussion about the characters, setting and themes of the various books (Jackson & Boutte, 2009).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the three basal reading series stories on the third grade level. The investigation is 2-fold. First, the researcher will look at the racial identity of all major characters noting their racial identity. This study focused on the occurrences of African American characters in comparison to other groups especially Caucasian students. However, the quantity of stories featuring African Americans is not enough; the second part of this study identifies how many of the stories display the quality components of African American literature. The quality components, identified by Barksdale-Ladd (2001), are: character portrayal, language usage, illustration authenticity, and information accuracy.

Research Questions

1. What is the ethnic representation of major characters in the three basal reading series?
2. Do the stories featuring African American major characters contain the elements of quality literature as defined by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001)?

Significance of the Study

The achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students has continued despite school reform at the state and national levels. The reforms focused attention on standards, assessment, accountability and research-based methods and materials. Yet, there has not been as much emphasis placed beyond these items. Emphasis placed on standards and skills is perceived as equipping teachers with research-based strategies and materials yet it fails to take into account the students that fill the seats in those classrooms on a daily basis. Although the achievement gap has narrowed

slightly for students in first through third grade in the past five years, it has not closed all the way. The assessments administered are used to discuss the performance of teachers and students throughout a given school year; the assessment is also measuring the curriculum or program the teachers are using to instruct the students. Consequently, the curricular materials utilized so students can practice and apply reading strategies and skills have a larger role in student performance than they are given credit for. Other studies have examined teacher technique and strategies to determine what role the teacher plays in student achievement. Additional studies have investigated the various external factors affecting the student: socio-economic status, family composition, and parental support. The aforementioned factors are crucial to students' academic success. This study focuses on an issue of equal importance: the materials students are expected to read during the course of a school year. The school system and the teacher can provide students with something worth reading and materials that draw the student in.

Ladson-Billings (1995, 2001) and Tatum (2006) studied the effects of culturally relevant literature on non-white students; students motivation, attitude and ultimately test scores dramatically improve when the students have text featuring individuals who resemble them in thought, speech and appearance. Literacy engagement skyrockets for these students; they see themselves as members of the school and literate society.

Conversely, these students feel alienated in the school setting; often, they do not see, hear and find anyone resembling themselves. The lack of culturally relevant literature leaves these students disengaged and disconnected from school; they do not find or witness their cultural norms apparent in school. Therefore, they compartmentalize school in one place and home skills and knowledge are compartmentalized in another

space. There is no bridge connecting the 2 until the school uses culturally relevant materials to create a “third-space” (Moje, 2007). This “third space” connects home and school knowledge thus allowing the student to view school as a place of value instead of a bore and waste of effort and time. Third space is activated when students read culturally relevant literature; they have the cultural schema to comprehend the text. The text becomes very appealing and engaging because it connects to their everyday life or life outside of school.

Culturally relevant literature is an effective way to bridge the achievement gap (McCellan & Fields, 2004). Since previous research notes literature as such a powerful tool, it is important to examine its usage in the classroom especially as it pertains to the achievement gap. The classroom library reflects books the teacher selected to be quality reading for students; students are free to read books from this segment of books. Yet, the contents of classroom libraries are different from teacher to teacher and school to school. It is necessary to examine the basal reading series injected into most classrooms across the United States. If students cannot find relevance in the stories contained within the basal reading series it is detrimental to them scholastically and their attitude toward reading (Durden, 2007). This study evaluated the ethnic composition of major characters in three third grade basal reading series in order to provide insight into the frequency of stories in which students can find cultural relevance.

Gray (2010) studied student responses to literature in the classroom; students wanted book selections where the characters resembled them. Brooks (2008) conducted a study in middle schools using three novels considered African American literature because of their reoccurring themes, linguistic patterns and ethnic group practices.

Students responded positively to the texts; they found relevance and affirmation from the literature. The students also noted realistic fiction as their preferred genre because of their ability to make a connection with the piece. Hughes-Hassell et al. (2010) examined transitional texts for the racial identities of its characters and authors. They found that 75% transitional texts were authored by Caucasians and 81% of the texts featured Caucasian characters. The study contrasted these findings to the current ethnic data of schools; there is a disparity between trade book authors/characters and the students in today's schools. This study examined the field of literature basal reading publishers have to choose from when they are selecting stories for the third grade reading series. The basal reading series is a minute sample of the stories that are available for transitional readers; this study seeks to examine the representation of African Americans in the basal reading story selection.

Delimitations

1. The time of the study was from June 2011-September 2011.
2. Passages from three recently published reading series were examined: 2008 Scott Foresman Reading Street Series; 2005 SRA/McGraw-Hill Open Court Reading series and 2007 Harcourt Trophies series.
3. The literature sample included grade three only.
4. All stories were examined for the characters racial identity.

Assumptions

1. The three basal reading series selected was a representation of all basal reading series.
2. The third grade text level was representative of all other grade levels.

3. Teachers instruct using the basal reading program as provided by the school district.

Definition of Terms

African American. Any student who has origins to any of the Black racial groups in Africa (Census, 2000).

Afrocentric. Education studied from an African American point of view.

Afrocentric Literature. Literature written by African American and features African American characters, themes, plots and settings consistent with history And/or current cultures.

Culturally Relevant Literature. Literature which features characters, plot, setting and theme consistent with the cultural norms and understandings of a particular group of people

Caucasian Any student who have origins in Europe, the Middle East or Northern Africa (Census, 2000).

Eurocentric. Education studied from a European point of view.

Genre. The type of story based on children's literature classification.

Major Character. The character(s) who encounter conflict and are changed by it.

Monochromatic. Literature anthologies with one dominate ethnicity featured.

Transitional level. Literature identified by Fountas and Pinnell. Levels range from B-C, H-I, L-M, O-P, S-T, and V.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study contains five chapters, a bibliography and appendices as outlined below. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature relevant achievement gap and

usage of culturally relevant literature in the classroom; past studies indicate students need literature which adequately represents the diverse student population in classrooms today. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology for the study. The instrument used to gather the data for the study, the procedures followed by the researcher and the studies' sample are outlined there. Chapter 4 includes data analysis and a discussion of the findings. Chapter 5 contains conclusions and recommendations of the study. The study concludes with a section containing references and appendices.

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Today's Schools

The face of America's schoolchildren is changing at a rapid pace. According to the 2001 U.S. Census data, America's population is ever evolving into a different composite than the Census taken just a decade earlier. When comparing the 2000 Census to the 1990 census, the African American population grew by 15.6% while the Native-American population rose 26.4%. The Pacific Islander population grew by 9.3% while the Hispanic/Latino population rose 57.6%. Yet, America's schools not involved in the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) appear to remain stagnant or tied to the Eurocentric curriculum and ideals of the past. While the 1960's through present day have seen the rise of Multicultural Education, the efforts of educators focus on the SBRR not the voice of the underrepresented population (Dressler, 2005; Reed, 2010). Others have indicated rural school districts see no value in multicultural education (Ayalon, 1993).

Reed (2010) views multicultural education as "a movement without boundaries. It is not limited to those who appear different or speak another language. Multicultural education is inclusive of all cultures" (pp.16-17). Culture is unique to every individual; it embodies personal elements of language, customs, behaviors and possessions of a various group of individuals (Hoover, Klingler, Baca, & Hatton, 2008). Students have to understand their own culture and where they fit in the big picture prior to understanding the cultural norms of others (Reed, 2010). However, some schools today are missing the mark in educating the individual student. Instead of educating students about one issue from various perspectives, schools place emphasis on various groups at various times.

For example, all ages tend to focus on the contributions of African Americans during the month of February. As well intended as these themes are, they are inclusive enough to educate the whole child. During the months not designated as a particular culture group's month, students are taught using strategies, materials and perspectives which are Eurocentric.

Further evidence can be seen in the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students that continues to exist in American schools in regards to literacy education. Over the past decade, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) data indicate fewer African American students than Caucasians performing at proficient and advanced literacy levels on the standardized assessment (NAEP, 2003). In the primary grades, the chasm is narrow; however, by their senior year it has widened significantly. African American students are struggling with comprehension of all text types; yet, the solution tends to be more interventions, more programs, and more skill-based instruction. At the same time, these students continue to fall further behind in school-based literacy skills and comprehension.

Theoretical Framework

Comprehension is the crucial component in reading; without comprehension the literacy act does not occur. Comprehension is not just a set of subskills which will result in the act of comprehension. Rather, reading comprehension is dependent upon the text and students' background knowledge (Pressley, 1996). Rosenbaltt (1978) developed the transaction theory of comprehension. Comprehension, according to Rosenbaltt (1978), occurs when a reader interacts with a text. The reader brings the sum of her experiences to the text and creates meaning using the words in the text coupled with the reader's

background knowledge. Consequently, reading comprehension is the result of an individual's life experiences interacting with the text to create a new meaning. Life experiences vary from individual to individual; Rosenblatt (1978) describes the reading transaction as a unique and personal experience. Since schools today primarily reflect a Eurocentric approach to curriculum and instruction, it is possible that African American students cannot connect with the cultural norms of school. African American students possess a culture (background knowledge) that could differ from that of their Caucasian counterparts. If the literature is predominately Caucasian then it may cause difficulty in the transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). If the background knowledge of these students is not reflected in school literature or thematic topics on a consistent basis, the students are missing a vital component of comprehension thus completing the transaction. Furthermore, students do not have the schema to readily assimilate the school based literature to create comprehension or the transaction. As a result, students disengaging with literature selections are less likely to access cognitive comprehension strategies to adequately comprehend the literature.

Cultural Schema

Rosenblatt's (1978) transaction theory of comprehension serves as a foundation to work focused on cultural schema. An individual's cultural schema is their background knowledge encompassing their family's thoughts, experiences and beliefs. Based on the cultural schema African American students do not underperform because they are not competent; rather, students possess different background knowledge than the school values and uses daily for instructional purposes.

Pardo (2004) defines reading comprehension as “a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text” (p.272). This process is multi-faceted and relies as much on the reader’s background knowledge as it does on the text itself. From this perspective, the literacy event is not derived only from a defined set of subskills as set forth by the Reading First (2002) initiative. Butcher and Kinstch (2003) relate the amount of background knowledge (or cultural knowledge) a reader has about a text directly to their ability to understand the text. In essence, comprehension is a transaction between the reader and a text (Kuacer, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1978). Consequently, if one of these parties is deficient, then a transaction cannot occur regardless of the students’ reading subskills. Thus, this lack of knowledge and experience has a mal effect on reading comprehension.

In schools across America, elementary teachers spend countless hours creating experiences to increase students’ background knowledge in order for students to more readily assimilate the text at hand. Educators incorporate activities including graphic organizers, story maps, anticipation guides, picture/text walks, quick writes and semantic maps (Roe, Smith, & Burns, 2005) in order to increase background knowledge. Although these background building methods have merit, they are vicarious experiences occurring in the context of the school day. Direct experience builds schema; an individual’s family and culture impact their background knowledge. Since students of color are not performing at or near the rate of their Caucasian counterparts (Irvine, 1990), culturally relevant literature offers a way to bridge the gap between the subskills a student possesses and the act of comprehension. When students are exposed to culturally relevant literature

coupled with their subskills then they have the greatest opportunity to succeed (Butcher & Kintsch, 2003). They utilize their knowledge of the text (their subskills) coupled with cultural schema to comprehend what they are reading. While reading, they view illustrations that reflect others who look, talk and act like them.

Ladson-Billings (1995) further promotes the usage of Afrocentric text or text written by African Americans with an African American point of view to further engage African American students with text. This connection results in increased motivation which has a positive effect on reading comprehension. The students will spend more time engaged in the text which results in greater time on task. Students who spend more time reading actually become and ultimately are better readers (Allington & Cunningham, 2008). When teachers seek text reflecting the student and his/her cultural norms then the students' background knowledge, including culture, would be reflected in the textual studies they engage in. Encompassing the student's cultural identity in a constructive approach is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Culturally relevant pedagogy, defined by Patchen and Cox-Peterson (2008), seeks to "identify and address power relations, linking the home and classroom both inside and outside of school while bolstering metacognitive processes and recognizing the students' native language in instruction" (p. 995). With CRP there may be less need for prior knowledge building activities since cultural schema would already be present. The teacher simply accesses the preexisting schema rather than spending numerous minutes or class periods building the students background knowledge. Most often, in today's schools, the opposite is true. Students of color struggle to find experiences similar to their own, books with individuals who look just like them or cultural experiences similar to their lives in the literature provided by the

school. Instead, the current school curriculum attempts to restructure the students' background knowledge to fit the values and ideals of the school. When students cannot latch on to the new schema, possibly due to insufficient background knowledge, it is detrimental to their love for literacy and ultimately their learning. This is evident in the number of African American students underperforming when compared to their Caucasian counterparts (NAEP 2003-2008) and further seen in the enormity of African American students in special education. African American students comprise 17% of school populations but account for 41% of special education population. Are these students truly special needs or is it just an issue of alternative schema not recognized or prized by schools?

Although the achievement gap exists between ethnic groups other than African American and Caucasian students in areas other than reading, the present research focused on these 2 groups because the literacy gap is the greatest between these 2 groups (NAEP 2003, 2008). It is just not logical that almost an entire population of students struggle in schools across America on a year to year basis. Six areas of interest, or themes, emerging from the literature reveal: a) a need for culturally relevant literature, and b) a transition in schools culture and acceptance of language, and c) usage of Afrocentric literature, and d) teacher intentionality, and e) usage of the basal reading programs, and f) student access to Afrocentric text.

Culturally Relevant Text

Culturally relevant pedagogy empowers the whole (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Its foundation encompasses academic success, developing/maintaining cultural competence, and critical conscious awareness of society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students must

develop academic skills such as literacy and number sense regardless of the classroom environment. As students acquire these skills at different rates, it is imperative that their teacher positively reinforces their self image as this will positively impact their resilience and academic development. Furthermore, as students develop their academic skills they need to exude their own power. Students will identify abilities unknown to them; they need the freedom and support to assert these literacies in the classroom in order to fully develop their reading, writing and speaking abilities. Some of these abilities can include retellings, drama and kinesthetic movements. As students develop academic competence, they too develop cultural competence. Cultural competence is students' cultural identity coupled with academic excellence. It is imperative students' remain who they are while acquiring the skills and mental processes for who they are to become. These 2 should be developed simultaneously so students are not academically literate but culturally illiterate; one should not come at the expense of the other. Students increase their literate selves by interacting with others not just text. As students become part of the literate world, culturally responsive education asks them to critically examine this world (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students, with their teachers encouragement, have asked the hard questions to school districts and the public when their educational environment is subpar thus resulting in increased quality of tools and resources (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Richardson (2002) notes the internal struggle for these students as they face embracing the America's school population is diverse in nature; yet the average classroom instruction is geared toward a monochromatic crowd. African American students may not underachieve due to their own deficiencies; rather, the classroom may be deficient for the student.

Students must see themselves in print (Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tatum, 2000); this is very affirming to students' as they navigate through the educational process and is especially important as these students navigate their own place in society. McCellen and Fields (2004) cite the use of literature in the schools as the best way to bridge the achievement gap. Literature allows the learner to create a deep connection between home and school while providing a context in which the student can relate. Literature also has a positive impact on students' view of school; it creates a bridge necessary to assist students in their connection between home and school.

Since literature is such a powerful vehicle to propel student success, it is necessary to base literacy instruction on culturally relevant literature. Although reading subskills can be taught using any material, literature comprehension cannot. Culturally relevant literature encourages reader connection and engagement which impacts comprehension in a positive manner. In order to close the achievement gap, students must have access to literature reflecting their culture, their family life and their background.

Academic Implications and Basal Readers

Literature is one of the tools that connect home and school. For far too long, schools have not consistently connected with the home on a regular or consistent basis. This is evidenced by Irvine (1990), it was noted that students of color are not performing at the levels of their Caucasian counterparts. Since schools are measured against and evaluated on their test scores, underperformance in the classroom is trend with a glaring and far-reaching impact. Underperformance tends to result in lower test scores. Hedges & Newell (1998) found that African American students were underrepresented among the highest of test scores. Although this research was conducted prior to the 21st century, the

trend remains similar today. Horn (2003) notes non-White or non-Asian students as most at-risk for academic failure. Clarke (2001), based on the 1996 NAEP scores, noticed the average proficiency for White 13 year olds was the same as the level demonstrated by 17-year-old African Americans. The 2005 NAEP scores revealed a similar trend: African American 12th graders scored the lowest among all subgroups on the reading assessment (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2003). This trend is disturbing since the NAEP assesses reading from three different contexts (Flowers, 2003). The NAEP assesses reading for literary experience, reading for information and reading to perform a task. Additionally, the NAEP assesses abilities from four different aspects (Flowers, 2003). It measures general understanding, developing interpretation, making connections, and content/structure examination. All of the aforementioned factors are relevant to literacy success; however, they are central to achievement on standardized tests. In an effort to increase tests scores, school districts and ultimately teachers, gravitate toward programs, interventions and instruction geared toward the fundamentals of reading. Given the current era of accountability, the funding and all else hinging on student success, these programs provide previous results and security. Standardized tests and the reading programs are enmeshed; one is contingent upon the other.

Standardized Tests/Accountability Era. The standards and accountability movement of today has created a discrepancy between best practice and what is practiced in the classroom. As good intentioned as the No Child Left Behind Act (2000) was to increase achievement among all students, this initiatives intent has failed some students of color. First, the teacher accountability portion of the law creates a need for students to be assessed using standardized tests. These test scores are indicators of student

knowledge gained or lost; thus measuring the teachers' success. However, the African American students continue to underperform Caucasian students on the exams. The exams, however, have not been examined for cultural bias. The assessment used to measure the "success" of the students can be just as culturally foreign to students of color as the literature used to teach them. Furthermore, the exams create a watered-down, objectives focused curriculum for the school. Learning becomes a test-defined set of skills (Madaus & Clark, 2001) rather than an exploration of literacy to last a lifetime. Students see reading and literacy as a set of tasks to perform or something done at school for school purposes. When the focus in the reading classroom is high-stakes tests, students see very little value in literacy or pursuing literacy endeavors.

Ironically, the emphasis on high-stakes test scores is not shown to increase learning (Koretz, Mitchell, & Stetcher, 1996). Rather, they increase the likelihood students will drop out of school prior to graduation (Madaus & Clark, 2001). Instead of ensuring all students succeed, the act has increased failure among many students of color. Reading Next (2003) noted the achievement gap is more "glaring" and "consequential" especially for students of color (p.1). The report cited the minority groups being overrepresented in the number of students not receiving high school diplomas due to their inability to pass their states high stake reading test. In fact, the 1998 NAEP report indicated that the number of minority students scoring below as compared to their white classmates has almost tripled (Reading Next, 2003). Tatum (2000) stated that test-driven instruction results in low reading achievement. The test driven classroom embraces reading programs because they reassure the teacher that they will be able to do it all. The phrase "do it all" in this context refers to the teachers ability to expose students to

literature while completing exposure if not mastery to all state standards issued in the balanced literacy components. Since teacher jobs and in some cases salary depend on student achievement, the reading series program is a natural option to teach reading and reading skills.

Use of Basal Reading Series. Instead of the focused curriculum and skill set increasing students' abilities and closing the gap between students of Color and Caucasian students, Tatum (2000) found the gap is wider due to the minimum skills requirement. Minimum skills for literacy endeavors include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies. While these skills are important, as they account for half of the formula needed to comprehend, when reading is reduced to subskills including practice and drills of the subskills students lose interest in literacy. Additionally, water-down curriculum does not encourage students to excel. Implicitly, the teacher tells the student that he/she is not capable of greater depth or capable of more. The student does not feel the teacher has high expectations for him; the student feels alienated from the education process and seeks value and affirmation elsewhere. Additionally, it creates a disparity between students and teachers; students experience disconnect between themselves and the school. Test-driven classrooms and lessons make school a place where students feel they are alienated (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Ladson-Billings (1995) refers to students of color as "foreigners" in American schools. The immigrant feeling Ladson-Billings refers to could be related to using a reading program in the classroom. When a teacher adheres strictly to a reading program, students are only exposed to the literature within the program. Again, the basal can work if it features stories reflecting the ethnic composition of the classroom. However,

classrooms are so very diverse especially by geographical location and region that it is difficult to feature every ethnic group. Although the program may be excellent in its alignment to state standards, curriculum and research-based standards, it could miss the mark in providing culturally relevant literature to students on a daily or even regular basis.

Students can be successful reading both inside and outside the classroom when they have a text worth reading. Flowers (2003) noted an impact on student classroom performance when the student reads outside of class. Hughes-Hassell and Rodge (2007) noted high minority students enjoyed reading outside of school provided the materials were relevant. Both sexes concurred that magazines were the most popular choice given their mass cultural appeal. Males and females differed on the most relevant books; males prefer informational books while females choose realistic fiction. Consequently, the aesthetic aspect of reading has bearing on students. When the basal reader contains stories relevant to a student's background and experiences, assigning this reading for homework would interest students. In addition, the teacher can make recommendations to students of other books they would be interested in reading (Flowers, 2003). Consequently, the more students read the better they get. This cycle has a tremendous impact on reading development and esteem for all reluctant readers including reluctant African American readers.

Cultural Discontinuity

Conversely, when students do not possess culturally relevant literature cultural discontinuity can set in. Cultural discontinuity, or a clash between home and school culture, can perpetuate the achievement gap at an alarming rate. There is a stark

disconnect between the home and school which propels the failure for the student. The student is not “at-risk” because of academic inability; rather, the environment is “at-risk” because the school curriculum or environment is not set-up for their success (Sanacore, 2004). This is the direct opposite of the positive reading cycle noted above. Yet, it is very common in American schools today. Students experience cultural discontinuity when they are not presented with culturally relevant literature. The discontinuity is evident in the following areas: language, reader identity, and a student’s motivation/attitude toward reading. While the public would like to hold the parent or the teacher accountable for the students’ lack of achievement, the issue may not lie with either party. Rather, the issue may reside with the resources teachers have available to them.

In the current accountability era, teachers have immense pressure to ensure students performance; often this pressure is coupled with the teacher being required to use certain materials to produce student success. These materials, produced for the masses and driven by state standards, fail to take into account the demographics of a particular school or of the individual student. When students lack the cultural schema or prerequisites necessary to their skill acquisition and understanding, the breakdown begins. Students’ knowledge reflects what they have been exposed to and they crave relevant literature and information (Dressler, 2005; Purvis, 1973).

The accountability era and the increasing popularity of reading programs for instructional purposes contribute to the achievement gap. There are issues deeper than just the use of reading programs; there is a crucial component of literacy that the reading program ignores all together. The missing component is the stories use of language.

While literature is the key component to connect the student to a love of reading resulting in deeper reading comprehension, the text's use of language is critical to creating a connection between the reader, the school, and home.

Language and Culture

Culturally relevant text not only features characters that resemble the reader in appearance, but the story also mimics the language of the particular culture. One of the ways students feel alienated from school literature is by the literature's use of language. (Sanacore, 2004). Often, African American students are discouraged and often penalized for using African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the classroom where Standard English is the normal form. For students, AAVE is the most natural form of speech; it is connected to home, sense of self and with their affection.

A child's first teacher is its mother; consequently, the mother tongue is the child's first exposure to language and literacy (Richardson, 2002). When this form is valued and respected through literature and classroom affirmation, students are open to learning an additional form of speech in which they can effectively communicate with others; however, when this form is devalued, students feel their loved one is not valued which causes them to distance themselves from school and the teacher (Richardson, 2002; Sanacore, 2004). This language is the essence of how a student knows what they know; it is their window to the world and their vehicle for forming an expressive response. The school cannot choose to ignore lingual issues nor can it treat AAVE as an unacceptable practice since ninety percent of African Americans speak a type of AAVE.

Since verbal language is a child's first communication tool, teachers can communicate their care for students by providing an environment where classroom

discussions are valued and encouraged. When teachers communicate care and respect for the individual student through accepting language, the student is apt to learn other lingual forms to effectively communicate with others (Richardson, 2002). Teachers use discussion of textual language often in a reading/language arts class. Typically the exchange of ideas is done in a closed-off, interrogation style which is not conducive to student learning and involvement. The discussions usually occur during a shared reading format. However, the discussions are most meaningful when they are conducted in a small-group format (Sanacore, 2004). Textual discourse may be most appropriately suited for guided reading time as students explore the use of voice in the text. It is important that students make learning gains to demonstrate their proficiency on state assessments; however, it is most important to have lifelong learners. There does not have to be a trade-off between teaching a love for literacy and teaching for high test scores. When students are engaged in meaningful reading-writing tasks, they begin to see these traits as a valued, useful tool for communication resulting in positive gains in and outside the classroom.

For instance, students can write in AAVE to fully express their thoughts and ideas in the classroom; then, as part of the writing process, they can translate these ideas to their second language of Standard English (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This dual language classroom has a remarkable influence on students' education. Regardless of the task, resilience is the key to motivation and literacy learning. Teachers may use motivation/self-assessments to gauge readers' perceptions of themselves as a reader. As teachers begin to see students' self-perceptions, it is important to identify students with low resilience. It will assist the teacher in noticing who rebounds well and the student

who needs more encouragement to finish the task at hand (Sanacore, 2004). However, the aforementioned ideas run contrary to the test-driven, high accountability culture of the 21st century creating an achievement crisis for all but especially for students of color when at the core of underachievement is the lack of literacy development (Reading Next, 2003).

Language. The language difference may have an impact on a students' ability to comprehend text since language is based on the home and culture. Students can assimilate information more readily when it is in their native tongue. Consequently, if students' are fed a steady diet of text using language culturally different than their own they are at a disadvantage in comprehending the text. However, this disadvantage is not due to their own lack of ability; rather, it is a language barrier between the student and the text. For example, if a native English speaking individual is traveling abroad in Russia, the individual tries to communicate with the Russians as he travels, but he is unable to grasp what is being said. The American society would not consider this man to be cognitively challenged; rather, they would recognize the man's inability to speak Russian and the other parties' inability to speak English. They would refer to this case as one of cultural difference. There is limited difference between this little narrative and what is occurring in the classroom today; students may not be lacking in abilities. Rather, it is a communication barrier between the teacher and the student.

Soutu-Manning (2009) noted similar lingual issues in her classroom. Through the eyes of her case study, she shows the transformation in the education experience of African American students when communication is enhanced through the acceptance of AAVE. Finally, if the school prizes the child's native language whether it is African

American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Standard English, it affects the students' literacy experience in a positive manner.

The use or emission of language in a classroom also conveys value to students. Since Standard English is viewed as the language of "educated" individuals, students may feel devalued and conflicted when asked to choose on a daily basis between their native, mother tongue (AAVE) and Standard English. In order to excel in most school settings, they are forced to devalue their home language and embrace the schools' or risk sounding uneducated and retain a piece of themselves (Richardson, 2002). Conversely, when the students' native language is valued, the student themselves feel valued. Additionally, the language barrier is removed then students are free to truly embrace the text; there is a connection between the home literacy and the school literacy. Suddenly, the school literacy makes sense and school becomes a familiar, welcoming place. Furthermore, when students are writing in AAVE and translating to Standard English it allows students to see the words, the connection and the translation

Culture. The underperformance by African American groups could be attributed to these students not seeing themselves, their culture or their cultural norms represented in school literacy. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests inserting the students' culture into the school rather than schools culture into student's knowledge base. Schools can use texts that are culturally-relevant to the student; as the student engages with the words of the story they "hear" their own thoughts. If students can see an individual similar to them in text, then they more readily relate to the text. Additionally, if students' encounter situations in school similar to their home, they can relate to the school based issue. Irvine (1990) suggested the lack of "cultural synchronization" between teacher/ school

curriculum and the students as impeding students' success. However, the aforementioned feelings of failure do not have to occur. This ease of engagement will have a positive impact on their background knowledge, motivation and self-worth which ultimately impact love for literacy and time spent reading which positively affects their comprehension.

Literature is a powerful tool to create a change in the existent achievement gap (McCellen & Fields, 2004). However, it is imperative that the literature contains more than just story elements and illustrations. In order to overcome the achievement gap, schools must utilize culturally relevant literature which encompasses a student's culture and language usage. This allows the student to bridge the gap between home and school knowledge; thus, the student operates in the Third Space (Moje, 2007).

Afrocentric Literature

Since this study focuses on the usage of culturally relevant literature as a means of assisting in narrowing the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students, it is imperative to examine the elements and usage of Afrocentric literature. Asante (1991) defines afrocentrism as "a frame of reference in which phenomena are viewed from the perspective of African Americans" (p.17). Since schools are framed around a Eurocentric vantage point, Afrocentrism views the same events except from the Afrocentric vantage point. Nestled into Afrocentrism is African American text.

African American text is broadly defined as children's literature written by, for and about African Americans; this text type makes-up only a fraction of books on African American life (Brooks, 2006). As noted in Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) many of the texts placed in the hands of African American students do not depict African

American characters; if they do feature an African American they are depicted as an individual who is African American in appearance only. The aforementioned literature describes narratives where African American students' culture and language are not represented. Consequently, not all books featuring African American characters can connect with students in a real, meaningful way. In order to facilitate the affective aspect of reading, students need the highest quality of text in order to reap the benefits of Afrocentric text. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) note the amount of African American literature is on the rise; however, the literature only accounts for 3% of the total amount produced. This finding begs the question: What constitutes a high-quality text for African American students? Temple, Martinez, Yokota, and Naylor (1998) based their definition of quality on appeal, accessibility, and readability. However, Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) suggested a layered approach which includes general characteristics and specific characteristics. The general characteristics lie in the hands of the author and illustrator. In order to produce a quality text, these individuals have to have a high-quality craft.

Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) compiled several studies and found the following criteria to determine high-quality text. The following criterion provided insight into their thinking on the elements of quality African American text. The explanation by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) served as the rationale for coding in this study. First, the book should be memorable and feature characters similar to the age of the child. Next, the text should be sequentially organized and a carefully designed, exciting plot. If the text is aesthetic, then the students should actively predict and make connections. An efferent text should be crafted for the reader with problems and situations in which they

can relate. Thirdly, the text should be fluent and contain language which paints a bright picture for the student. This will allow them to get into the story and read it with excitement and emotion. When this occurs, students can read fluently and work on their literacy development. Additionally, the books theme is essential in making it worthwhile to the students. The illustrators' work should move the story along providing a vivid backdrop for which the students can interact. This will also assist with the students' visualization skills and add to their repertoire of vicarious experiences.

These general characteristics will be the hook that lures students in. Most of the time, when students are selecting a book it is the general characteristics that make the student pull the text off the shelf. If these features are missing, the student may not select the text for independent reading. Additionally, visualization is a much-needed tenet for adequate comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2003). Vivid illustrations, crafty word selection and appealing general features keep students engaged in making meaning long after the story is selected from the shelf. These features assist students in making a personal connection with the text. This personal connection fosters a relationship with the material essential to fostering students love for reading, enhancing their social identity/sense of self, and could assist students in solving problems effectively. Bishop (1982) identified "culturally conscious" literature whereby the authors depict real life for African American students. This literature denoted by recurring themes, systematic linguistic patterns, and accurate predictions are just some of the features that distinguish the text type (Vaughn-Roberson & Hill, 1989). Common themes include surviving racism; African American history/heritage, racial pride, and urban life are prominent in

this literature type. The aforementioned studies define a sub-component of the character portrayal domain examined in this study.

When an African American student chooses an aesthetic text, they attune to books where their experiences are noted, rhyme/lyrical language patterns occur, and humor is evident in the text. Students respond best when literature has themes and illustrations depicting their own lives (Davis, 2000; Smith, 1995). However, African American readers do not always feel valued by the text. Rather, at times, some can be disenchanted by the text because it does not depict their background/life experiences. Conversely, the use of Afrocentric text in the classroom fortifies students of European heritage (Dressler, 2005). The teacher builds background knowledge for the story thus affirming African American students and building schema for Caucasian and other students and then conducts the literature study. When the piece is truly Afrocentric, it allows for immense dialogue in the classroom. This is vital to the students overcoming certain cultural stereotypes as they read and respond to the literature selection. Using culturally relevant reading material in the classroom allows the shift from Eurocentric to Afrocentric education to occur (Durden, 2007).

Motivation and Attitude

When African American students engage in a literacy study using Afrocentric literature, it increases their motivation to read (Tatum, 2002). An essential attribute to reading success is motivation. Collier (2000) noted when students engage in text with characters similar to themselves it does more to enhance their skill and love for reading more than anything else. Based on this finding stated above, students' ability to see themselves in print may assist in overcoming the skill shortcoming they have. In addition,

students are able to connect with text and experience success breeds a desire to engage in reading more fervently. Thus, it facilitates the affective aspect of reading and fostering reading skills growth. Furthermore, if the text consists of individuals just like them it is likely the language will be consistent with the culture. Thus, this will assist with the lingual difference as well allowing the student to truly enjoy and comprehend the text since the barriers have been removed.

Readers' Identity. When students are motivated by Afrocentric text to read more, it will increase their reading level and comprehension. However, their identity as a reader is crucial to the students' desire and willingness to read text. The reader's sense of self is either reinforced or devalued by the text they are reading. Text is affirming to a child when he sees situations, people, problems and the like similar to what he currently experiences (Collier, 2000). This sense of self allows the child to see his place in the world. Collier (2000) noted literature provides a sense of identity and validation to students.

Bishop (1990) found that literature is a tool for student socialization; thus, it supports successful social identity and practices in adolescents. Literature is able to do this by providing a visual example societal values/identity, behavioral guidelines, and citizenship norms. Literature is a powerful tool for adolescents as they try to figure out their place in society. However, if students are exposed to a steady diet of literature whereby they are not represented in print, it can create an identity crisis whereby the student has no parameters and little connection to their own culture. Bishop (1990) argued if "African American adolescents fail to become readers, that failure is understandable; reading has little to offer them" (p.561).

Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) discovered as African American students enter school, they find few literatures selections including African American characters. When students encounter these characters, the distinguishing traits are merely superficial; the characters are African American in appearance only. As readers select book after book with no characters similar to themselves, frustration and devaluation result; some students will begin to wonder where they fit. Students must see characters like themselves, encountering situations similar to their current situation, and find merit in the way the character handles his/her dealings. After all, when children encounter a text they discover how to operate in the various roles of their developing life (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). These students will not be able to negotiate purpose or role in their given society due to the lack of text displaying and mediating it for them. When these students see characters, situations and encounters similar to their own it will reaffirm their personal value and fuel the pleasure of reading. The literature selections are a huge factor in making schools holistic, Afrocentric institutions for African American students. Consequently, a love of reading and love for oneself are developed in the process (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). The RAND group observed four differences between readers. However, the representation of students' culture in the text they are reading provides a powerful springboard for learning to read. Instead of always focusing on *how* African American students are reading, the focus should sometimes be on *what* they are reading and what is being read to them. The literature affirms that when the students have a quality, culturally relevant text then they improve how they read. Afrocentric text allows African American students to see themselves, their culture and their language all within the literacy context. This fuels their desire and motivation to read in and out of the

classroom. Afrocentric literature encompasses all of the literacy elements necessary to appeal and make a difference in the literacy learning of African American students.

Basal Reading Series

Basal reading series have a long history in United States schools. However, from their earliest days, questions have been raised about their ability to appeal to diverse student populations. Meriam (1928) studied the use of basal programs with Native American students; the researcher concluded that Native American students were disconnected to school and school subject matter because culturally relevant texts were not a part of the students' core curriculum. As a result, students distanced themselves from school and dropped out altogether. Fast forward to the 1970-80s and many people took notice of the basal reading series and began to examine its cultural relevance to various populations. Rehyer (1986) classified basal reading stories by racial identity; Caucasian characters appeared seven times more than other characters. The number of stories featuring Native American characters equaled the number of stories featuring Hispanic characters while stories featuring African American characters doubled that of their Native American and Hispanic counterparts.

Garcia and Sadoski (1986) investigated basal reading series published between 1979-1981. This study examined 3,389 stories in terms of socio-economic status, setting and character portrayal. The data showed a distorted view of the non-white characters in terms of location and positive character images. By 1992, more stories featuring non-white main characters were appearing in basal reading series; however, the stories were superficial and characters and plot lacked true cultural identity to the groups represented. White, middle-class values dominate the basal reading plot and settings (Shannon &

Crawford, 1997). The white, middle class domination creates deficiencies and issues in reading for those from a non-white, middle class background (Shannon & Crawford, 1997).

Quantity and Quality

Basal readers, as of late, have started to include selections featuring non-white characters; however, the stories lack realistic and authentic images of those groups.

Given the population shift in the last few decades, it is important for researchers to examine basal reading series again for cultures and cultural norms represented therein. The past studies for basal readers cite a lack of quantity and quality literature for non-white groups. This investigation focused on the quantity of stories featuring African American characters and illustrations. In reviewing the basal readers for African American characters, the researcher took note of all racial groups featured in the literature. The purpose of collecting data on all groups is to see if African Americans are being underrepresented, represented fairly or overrepresented in basal readers given current population norms.

Quantity is not the only issue; as noted above and throughout the review of literature stories must have certain qualities to appeal to students. Since this study focused on African American literature, the quality was noted in character portrayal, authentic language, and illustration authenticity and information accuracy. Students must connect with characters similar to them (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tatum, 2002). Thus, the researcher examined how the character is portrayed in the stories. Authentic language is vital to creating a connection to text; it can affirm or deny the students' voice (Richardson, 2002). Cultural identity is evident in the pictures represented in the text as

well as the words (Bishop, 1990; Collier, 2000). A rise in the quantity of culturally relevant texts within basal readers is not enough; the texts therein must be quality in order for the text to impact students in a positive manner.

The literature cites the need for culturally relevant literature in the basal reading series. Students have the desire to read text that appeals to them and is culturally affirming (Bishop, 1990; Collier, 2000; Dressler, 2005; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). Students will read texts outside of school for pleasure provided that the text-types appeal to them. This study does not examine the texts students' access outside of school or if the student has the ability to access print outside of a school setting. Rather, this study seeks to examine the reading materials used to teach students on a daily basis; the text that students have access to and put their hands on a regular basis.

Determining Quality African American Children's Literature

Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) reviewed primary grades African American children's literature for its quality. In order to review the quality of each story, the researchers utilized a 2-fold method. First, they examined each book for its general characteristics. General characteristics are traits which make any piece of literature quality reading for the primary grades. The general characteristics are outlined in Appendix A and drew upon Temple et al. (1998) work concerning traits of quality children's literature. The general characteristics include an examination of characters, plot, incorporate well-crafted language, and a trustworthy theme. However, Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) sought to dig deeper than the general characteristics; they defined traits specific to quality African American children's literature. They created these guidelines using the work of Banks (1991) and Bishop (1997) plus original interviews

conducted with African American educators to outline guiding principles of quality African American children's literature. Based on the research and interviews, Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) outlined the following principles for quality African American children's literature. First, the characters should be realistic; their setting, interactions and language should be authentic. Second, the characters' language should be authentic and real. Third, African American characters should be displayed authentically and in a genuine manner. The genuine nature encompasses the character as well as the setting the characters are portrayed in. Finally, the information in the text, if it is an efferent text, must be accurate.

Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) represented the aforementioned guiding principles in the Specific Characteristics of High-Quality African American literature [Appendix B]. The table encompasses four domains (character portrayal, language use, illustration authenticity, and information accuracy). Within each domain, a series of three to five questions are reflected upon to determine the degree of specific quality of the piece of literature.

Summary

In an effort to explore one of the possible factors contributing to the achievement gap, this investigation examined the basal reading series used in schools today on 2 levels. First, the researcher evaluated the ethnic identity of all major characters in three third grade basal reading series. The ethnic identity piece allowed the researcher to see the frequency of observed occurrences among African American, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic and Other groups compared to the frequency of observed occurrences using current population trends on the state of Tennessee and national levels as a marker.

Historically, basal reading series have catered to the white, middle class population but given the current era of accountability and achievement, it is important that the literature located within a basal reader feature and appeal to all race and cultural groups. The culturally relevant texts appeal to the readers' identity, schema, and motivation, all of which are crucial to reading achievement and success. A deficiency in any of these areas may cause students to become disenchanted and disengaged with school and the educational process.

The second part to this study focused on the African American subgroup. Since this researcher is especially interested in the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students, there is a focus on the stories featuring African American characters and illustrations in order to determine their quality. If the literature provided for students is not high quality, then it may not be that the students cannot read it; the curriculum may have failed to offer the students something worth reading (Bishop, 1990). The elements of quality literature examine the text in four areas: character portrayal, language use, and illustration authenticity and information accuracy. These four domains were selected by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) after they reviewed general characteristics of quality literature by Temple et al. (1998). Using the general characteristics as a foundation, Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) reviewed the work of Banks (1991) and Bishop (1997) coupled with original interviews of educators to define the specific domains and characteristics found in the Specific Characteristics of High-Quality African American literature [Appendix B]. In order to tighten the achievement gap and propel all students in their literacy endeavors, students must be able to access quality culturally relevant literature in their school curriculum.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Organization

Chapter 3 contains the following information regarding the study. First, a summary of the problem is stated again to allow for maximum clarity. Second, the study's purpose and research questions are stated again in order to create a context for the methodology selected for this study. Third, the researcher explains the research design and the rationale behind it. Fourth, the researcher discusses the sampling procedures followed by a discussion of the instruments. Lastly, the researcher analyzes the data.

Problem

The achievement gap between African American and Caucasian elementary students is narrowing at a slow rate. National, state and local education agencies cite the need for the achievement gap to close; these agencies advocate the need for skill-based reading techniques and standards-based education in classrooms in order to reduce the deficit between students' scores. Previous studies indicate the need for relevance and racial representation within literature (Gray, 2010). Students indicate realistic fiction as the preferred genre (relevance) and illustrations as primary motivation for engaging in reading (Gray, 2010). However, Hughes-Hassell et al. (2010) noted a lack of racial diversity in transitional text. This study sought to identify racial representation among basal reading stories. In addition, the stories within the basal reading series featuring African American characters were examined for quality.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the three basal reading series stories on the third grade level. The investigation was 2-fold. First, the researcher examined the racial identity of all major characters in the narratives. This study focused on the occurrences of African American characters in comparison to other ethnicities including Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Other. Other in this study includes major characters that do not ascribe to any of the aforementioned categories; this category also includes non-human characters.

However, the quantity of stories featuring African Americans was not enough; the second part of this study determined whether the elements of quality literature were evident in these stories among four areas: character portrayal, language usage, illustration authenticity, and information accuracy.

Research Questions

1. What is the ethnic representation of major characters in the three basal reading series?
2. How many pieces of African American literature contain the elements of quality literature as noted by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001)?

Research Design

Content analysis was used to examine the racial representation of all characters as well as quality of literature featuring African American characters in three basal reading series. The researcher selected this method because it is the most logical way to examine the text features including pictures and print. Babbie (2004) explains content analysis as “the study of recorded human communications” (p. 314). There are many different kinds

of communication falling within the realm of content analysis; Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) expound on this idea by explaining that, “All communication uses symbols whether verbal, textual or images” (p.23). The content analysis was 2-fold. First, each story in each basal reading series was analyzed for racial identity of the main characters. The second content analysis examined stories with African American characters for the elements of quality African American literature. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) noted all stories featuring African American characters are not equal; the stories must be examined in order to determine the degree of authenticity in four areas: character portrayal, illustration authenticity, language usage, and information accuracy. Brooks (2008) confers on the authenticity issue in regards to texts featuring African American characters. Both studies indicate it is not enough to have African American characters in appearance only (Brooks, 2008; Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001).

Sample

The researcher chose to use recent editions of three basal reader textbook series: 2008 Scott Foresman Reading Street series, 2005 SRA/McGraw-Hill Open Court Reading series and the 2007 Harcourt Trophies series. The researcher selected these three reading series based on the following: 1) current editions of each of the series; 2) each is published by a major publisher in reading education materials for elementary students; and 3) the series have been offered to districts around the state of Tennessee for adoption. The third grade was chosen for the following reasons. First, the content of the stories found in the third grade edition are denser than their kindergarten through second grade counterparts. Second, third grade is the transition year from learning to read to reading to learn. Third, third grade is the year when students are mandated to take state exams.

Since these exams are used to determine the extent that schools educate individual students and all subgroups, the third grade is an ideal place to begin examining the curriculum given to the students by the teacher. Fourth, the instrument used in this study was designed and tested on primary literature; the researcher could only use stories up to the third grade to make the instrument piece valid in this study.

Instrumentation

This study utilized the *General Characteristics of High Quality Primary Picture Books* (Hefflin-Barksdale-Ladd, 2001) [Appendix A] and *Specific Characteristics of High-Quality African American Children's Literature* (Hefflin-Barksdale-Ladd, 2001) [Appendix B]. The rating scales were designed, developed and tested by Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd (2001) as they studied high-quality African American primary children's literature.

General Characteristics

For this study, the researcher modified Appendix A from a 1 (low) to 5 (high) score to a 1 (low) to 3 (high) rating. This change is to eliminate the ratings of 2 (low-medium) and 4 (medium-strong). Although the change made the instrument less precise, this change occurred to fit the needs of this particular study. Additional changes include columns to note the publisher, story title, anecdotal notes, and ethnicity of major character.

The publisher and story title were recorded for organizational purposes. The anecdotal notes column recorded specific evidence from the story linked to the corresponding domain. For instance, in the character domain, the researcher collected evidence from the story detailing the character's age and memorable actions. This

allowed the researcher to rely on specific occurrences from the narrative to assign the rating for that particular domain.

The first rating scale adapted from the *General Characteristics of High Quality Primary Picture Books* [Appendix A] examines the text in the following areas: character, plot, theme, language, quality and usefulness of illustrations. In the data matrix used in this study [Appendix C], the area is noted in the column. There is a row identifying the publishers name and the story title. Then, in horizontal columns, the researcher noted the story domain as mentioned above. There is a row for the character, plot, theme, language, quality and usefulness of the illustrations. Anecdotal notes were taken here and in a final column the numeric score was assigned. The anecdotal notes were included to support the numeric decision and provide a basis for discussion and rationale for the researcher.

In the area of character, each story was analyzed to determine the age of the character. The next area of analysis, plot, allowed the researcher to examine the plot to see if it is written clearly, if it's sequential and easy to follow. In addition, the plot was examined to see if the story's problem was written where it could be easily understood and enjoyed by a child. Following plot, the story was examined for language. The researcher examined the language to see if it is vivid and clear as well as natural for the child to understand and follow. Another element of quality literature is theme. The researcher examined the story to determine if the theme was subtle and worthy; the researcher also noted whether the students could identify the theme by reading the story. When examining the illustrations, the researcher looked at the following 2 areas: quality and function. In the area of quality, the researcher looked for elements of design and style in fresh ways which would appeal to students. Finally, the illustrations were evaluated for

their function or the illustrations ability to clarify/enhance a text as well as enriching the story. The illustrations ability to demonstrate the stories mood, theme and ability to progress the plot were also noted by the researcher.

Specific Characteristics

The next instrument was adapted from Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001), *Specific Characteristics of High-Quality African American Children's Literature* (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001) [Appendix B]. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd created the instrument based on the work of Banks (1991) and Bishop (1997) coupled with original interviews of educators to define the specific domains and characteristics found in the Specific Characteristics of High-Quality African American literature [Appendix B].

Original Interviews. In order to determine the specific characteristics pertaining to quality African American children's literature, Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) utilized original interviews. This method is used in other studies as well and yields insight into reader preferences. Sims (1983) interviewed a 10- year- old African American female who was an avid reader. After the student had selected and read a wide variety of books, Sims interviewed her concerning the various texts. The student responded that although she loved to read, the “enjoyed reading most about little Black girls” (p. 26).

Tate (1998) used original interviews to include richer, more accurate details in her book concerning the South and specifically South Carolina history. In her interviews, Tate (1998) indicates the young women knew little about their cultural background from books. Additionally, the ladies were most interested in books featuring girls who mirrored themselves.

Brooks (2001) utilized literature discussions (using an interview question set) and student response journals to determine middle school students' thoughts as literature featuring African Americans was woven into their reading class. The study indicates students identify African American features in a given text. Furthermore, these African American features became vital to some students; their reading success depended on the characters and their interactions in the text. Finally, the students depended on their background knowledge in order to interpret and comprehend the text; they were able to use schema effectively because it directly aligned with the text. Dyson (2002) interviewed middle school students after they read culturally conscious books. Dyson interviewed the students in order to create a working definition of social action. Furthermore, he had the students identify social action or inaction within their own urban communities.

Rodgers (2004) interviewed adults concerning their school literary experiences; each interview lasted at least 2 hours and some lasted as long as 6 hours. During these interviews, Rodgers noted drop out age, reason, special education, and the participants reading ability. Furthermore, Rodgers distinguished the parents' involvement with the child's education. The interviews in this study provide insight into adult's reasons for not reading; many felt reading had nothing to offer them as students. They were unable to see themselves represented in print nor could they find their cultural norms represented in a text; consequently, they felt reading had nothing or very little to offer them. Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008) interviewed middle school girls following their reading of an African American literature selection. The females in the study indicated the various

ways they connected with the text; they identified with the character, the illustrations and the language used in the text.

An interview by Tatum (2008) indicated African American males are lacking a reason to read since so few books feature them or settings in which they are interested. Tatum (2008) indicated five areas which speak to African American males. They include: personal narrative, economic issues; social, culture, gender; community issues and national issues. The interview with Tatum (2008) coincides with Brooks (2009). Brooks (2009) conducted a case study with middle school students; the study indicated realistic fiction as the preferred text type among African American adolescents. Gray (2010) concluded a similar idea. This study concurred on the aforementioned ideas indicating realistic fiction as a preferred text type. However, from interviews Gray (2010) noted African American students must be emotionally attached to the books' characters.

McNair (2009) utilized original interviews to compile a list of classic African American texts that can be used in today's classroom. In order to form the list, McNair (2009) asked six scholars the following questions. First, they were asked to define the term "classic." Then, they were asked to list books they believed were African American classics published after 1950 until the present day. The researcher asked for post 1950s texts because they are currently in print; books written and published prior to this date are scarce. Finally, the researcher asked the panel to rate 2 books as classics or rate 2 books that will become classics. This interview yielded a useable list for teachers across grade levels.

The original interview yields insight into reader preferences by allowing the researcher to explore the mind of the reader. Although Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd

(2001) used this method to create Specific Characteristics of High-Quality African American literature [Appendix B], this study only used the data matrix [Appendix B] created by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001). This study included a discussion of original interviews in order to provide insight into how Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) derived the Specific Characteristics of High Quality African American Literature that are utilized in this study. The specific characteristics identified by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) were the elements of quality literature used to answer research question 2 in this study.

Instrument Development. The researcher used the criteria for quality African American children's literature determined by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) in a data matrix which evaluated the basal reading stories' appeal to African American students. The data matrix was adapted to meet the needs of this study. The data matrix noted the publisher and stories' title and featured columns headed with the elements of quality African American children's literature. Each element has an area for anecdotal notes; then a column for a code. Anecdotal records are written observations of viewed events or traits that are used at a later time by an individual to make a decision based on specific evidence only (Roe, 2005).

Anecdotal notes were used to gather pictorial or textual evidence from the story that either showed the absence or presence of the element in the story. When the researcher coded the domain, she relied on the evidence in the anecdotal notes. This allowed her to isolate the domain and review the specific features of the narrative to reduce bias when coding. The domain was assigned a 1 if the element is not present or 2

if it is present. The code of 1 or 2 was assigned to the domain based on the information found in the story and the anecdotal notes.

The first domain examined by the primary and secondary reader was character portrayal; this domain examines three aspects of characterization. Each aspect was coded with 1 (no evidence) or 2 (evidence present). First, the readers looked to see if the author identified the character as African American. If the author did not overtly state the character was African American then this aspect was coded 1. If the author stated the character was African American then this aspect was coded 2. Then, the raters studied the character(s) to determine whether the author portrayed African American character realistically and positively. If the author depicted the character in a real-life settings and situations and the character functioned and contributed positively then this aspect of character portrayal was coded 2. Finally, the characters were analyzed for current and accurate cultural references. If the character was current and contained accurate cultural references then this aspect was coded 2; if the cultural reference was not current nor accurate it was coded 1. This is consistent with the detailed analysis given by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) in their description of coding Duke Ellington. "The author presents a positive, realistic message about Duke Ellington's musical career" (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001 pg. 823). The evidence from the *Duke Ellington* which allowed Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd to make that determination was "the glories of dark skin, the pride of African heritage, and the triumphs of black people from the days of slavery to years of civil rights struggle" (p. 26).

Based on the example of *Duke Ellington*, the readers would code 2 for the author overtly identified the character as African American. In addition, the character was

represented positively for his impact on the music this evidence allows for a code of 2. Finally, the referent to the character's triumph lends itself to a positive cultural referent thus a coding of 2. Since the mode for the three aspects under the domain 'character portrayal' was 2 the researcher would assign this domain an overall score of 2.

The next area under examination was the use of language throughout the story. The analysis focused on the authenticity and realistic nature of the language; the language was evaluated on its ability to relate to the child in a natural, real manner. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) relayed the following example from their analysis of Duke Ellington: "Gonna play me that Piano Prince and his band" (p. 23). The author of Duke Ellington used dialect intermittently throughout the story; this use of dialect would result in the code of 2. If the story portrayed formal, stiff language free of dialect this aspect would be scored a 1. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) maintain narratives do not have to be completely written in dialect because it may make the story unclear and difficult to comprehend. For this study, the mode of the aspects under the language domain is assigned as the domains overall code.

The evaluation focused next on the authenticity of the illustrations. This domain examined the following areas as they pertain to illustrations: realism, physical features and character image. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) explained the following about the evidence in *Duke Ellington*: "The illustrations in the story reveal variety in African American physical features and coloring. For example, Duke is referred to as having 'honey-colored fingertips' while other characters appear to be darker in color--a reflection of reality" (p. 863). Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) added "the illustrations also present positive images of African Americans as in the scenes portraying New York

City's Carnegie Hall and the Cotton Club in Harlem” (p. 863). For this study’s coding purposes, based on the example from Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001), realism would be coded 2 because of Duke’s “honey-colored fingertips” and physical features would be coded 2 due to the characters’ appearing darker in color in the illustrations. Character image in this example would be coded 2 because of the positive images in the scenes noted above. For this study, the domain of illustration authenticity would be coded 2 since the mode of the three areas evaluated (realism, physical features, and character image) was 2.

Finally, the raters coded the stories in the domain of information accuracy. This domain explores the historical accuracy of the stories information if historical information was used in the story; if historical information was found in the narrative the researcher cross-checked it using online resources. If the information was consistent across three resources, then the element was coded 2. If historical evidence was not referenced in the narrative then it was coded one for no evidence. In addition, the researcher looked for the voice or worldview the story provided. If the character provided perspective or insight similar to the story of Duke Ellington the area was coded 2. If there was no voice or perspective then the area was assigned for one. For this study, the domain information accuracy would be coded 2 since the mode for information accuracy was 2.

Data Collection

Data collection began in the summer of 2011. The readers began by sitting down side by side reading *Duke Ellington*. The readers used Appendix B and Appendix D following the procedures as outlined above. After making their anecdotal notes and

assigning the code of 1 or 2, the 2 readers shared their findings with one another. Any discrepancies were discussed and they referred to the anecdotal record given by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) to assist with calibration. After the readers were calibrated, they began reading the stories in the third grade edition of each of the three basal reading series. The primary reader coded each story in the third grade edition of the basal reading series using Appendix B. The secondary reader noted the ethnicity of the characters in each story and coded it using Appendix B.

Before reading each story, the researchers noted the publisher and story title in the corresponding area in the data matrix. After that, the researchers read the story for the first time. Then the readers read the story again making anecdotal notations using the first data matrix [Appendix B]. After making the anecdotal notes, the researchers assigned the code of 1 (no evidence present) or 2 (limited evidence) or 3 (strong evidence). Anecdotal notes in which the researcher could not find evidence in the story or there is little occurrence were termed low were given a code of 1. If there is limited to adequate evidence, the domain was assigned a code of 2. If the domain had strong evidence it was coded three. The key piece of information derived from Appendix B was the ethnicity of the major character; this information was counted as “observed occurrences” in order to answer research question 1.

If the story featured African American characters, then the readers highlighted it in the data matrix. The highlighted marks determined the quantity of African American stories. After reading each story in one of the basal reading series, the readers consulted the data matrix noting the stories featuring African American characters. Then, the primary reader read through each story again making anecdotal notes concerning the

domains pertaining to quality African American literature [Appendix D]. The secondary reader randomly selected 25% of the stories featuring African Americans per publisher to code using Appendix D. After reading and making the anecdotal notes, the readers coded the particular aspects under each domain with a 1 indicating no evidence or 2 indicating evidence of the domain. The mode for each domain was used as the overall domain code. These steps were repeated for each basal reading series evaluated. The primary and secondary readers followed the above steps to ensure fidelity in data collection.

After the researchers had completed their examination of the stories, each rater submitted their codes per aspect not the overall domain code and Cohen's Kappa was used to determine the inter-rater reliability. The researcher chose Kappa because there are 2 raters and nominal data; Kappa also accounts for the ratings that align given to chance (Cohen, 1960.) The researcher calculated Kappa using statistical software SPSS. The researcher looked for a reliability score equal than or greater to .80 to establish inter-rater reliability.

Although Cohen's determines the inter-rater reliability, the coding indicated the number of stories displaying the elements of quality African American children's literature. Each element of quality literature represented in Appendix D contained 2 or three questions used to determine if the evidence was present. The primary and secondary readers coded each question or area under the domain heading. Then, the mode present in the particular domain determined whether the element was present in the piece of literature. The mode was used because the data was nominal. See Table 1 below.

Table 1

Analysis Used to Answer Research Questions

Question	Statistical Analysis
1. What is the ethnic representation in each of the three basal reading series?	Quantitative: Frequencies of observed occurrences versus expected occurrences
2. How many stories contain the elements of quality African American literature?	Descriptive: Content Analysis Nominal: Cohen's Kappa, Mode

Data Analysis

The data recorded on the data collection charts were analyzed using descriptive statistics; results were shown in both narrative and visual form for each basal reading series text. The quantity of African American stories within each basal reading series was charted as frequency of observed occurrences. The first frequency is observed occurrences or the number of stories featuring African American characters portrayed as major characters. Then, the researcher found the percentage of *N* stories featuring the particular ethnicity. After that, the researcher calculated the number of expected occurrences based on the 2010 population percent by ethnicity on the state of Tennessee and national levels. The expected occurrences were calculated due to the previous literature indicating the need for students to see themselves in print; the comparison examined if the sample reflected the population using it. Using population as the marker for cultural relevancy was used in Hughes-Hassel et al (2010). In the aforementioned study, the researchers calculated the percentage of stories by ethnic major character and contrasted it to the percentage (by ethnicity) of school-aged children. The frequency of

observed occurrences was compared to the expected occurrences to indicate story representation less than, greater than or equal to the actual student ethnic composition.

For the quality of the African American stories, the researcher used content analysis to examine the four domains (character portrayal, language use, illustration authenticity, information accuracy) among the stories. The researcher used the mode to determine the quantity of stories featuring the elements of quality African American literature; the researcher assigned an entire domain code based on the mode of aspects considered under that domain.

Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. First, this study did not examine every basal reading series used in every school district across America; thus the sample size is small. Nor did it take into account the racial demographics of each individual school district and its correlation to the ethnicities represented in its current basal reading series. This study calculated the frequency of observed occurrences by ethnic group and compared it to the expected occurrences based on geographic region. The study goes one step further and examined the quality of the stories with the variable African American.

In order to meet the requirements of this specific study, the instrument was modified from a 5 point scale (weak to strong) to a 2 point code (absent or present). The modification allowed for a more generous coding since “present” does not allow for varying degrees of evidence. This generosity allowed for the readers to find evidence of quality literature per domain in every story. In addition, the data matrix [Appendix D] developed by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) was utilized to determine if the

elements of quality African American literature were present; the researcher did not conduct any interviews during the course of this study.

The research design uses descriptive research methods along with a nonparametric statistic; thus, a great deal of power is relinquished using these methods. This study is only intended to take a snapshot at basal reading series stories' cultural and ethnic representation on the third grade level with a special focus on the elements of quality African American literature as identified by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001).

CHAPTER 4:

PRESENTATION & ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into 2 sections which describe the findings from the data analysis on the 2 research questions posed in chapter 1. The researcher offers descriptive data by basal publishing companies based on the variables in this study: major characters' ethnicity (independent variable) and the number of observed and expected occurrences (dependent variables) of these ethnicities within the basal reading series. The researcher's use of content analysis was 2-fold. First, the researcher tallied the frequency of occurrences of the independent variable and then calculated expected frequencies for each ethnicity. The expected frequencies were calculated by taking the percentage of students with a given ethnicity on the state of Tennessee and national level and multiplying it by N stories in the sample. This analysis provides insight into research question one which focused on the number of occurrences of African American major characters within the basal reading series text.

Second, the researcher examined the stories with the variable "African American" to determine whether the elements of quality literature as identified by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) were present; this presentation of results encompasses research question 2. Cohen's Kappa (k) was used to determine the degree of coherence between the 2 raters as they examined the text for the elements of quality African American literature.

Question 1: What is the ethnic representation of major characters?

Harcourt. Based the results of the frequency count of variable ethnicity of major characters featured in the Harcourt *Trophies* (2005) third grade edition, the researcher formulated Table 2.

Table 2

Observed & Expected Frequencies of Major Characters

	Observed Frequency of Occurrences (Major Character)	Percentage of occurrences based on the opportunities to occur (N=24)	Expected Frequency of Occurrences (based on percentage of TN school aged population)	Percentage of school aged population (state of TN)	Expected Frequency of Occurrences (based on percentage of US school aged population)	Percentage of school aged population (USA)
<hr/> Ethnicity <hr/>						
African American (n_1)	3	12.5%	9	38.3%	4	15.1%
Asian (n_2)	2	8.3%	<1	1.2%	<1	4.3%
Caucasian (n_3)	8	33.3%	12	53.1%	13	53.5%
Hispanic (n_4)	4	16.6%	2	8.2%	5	22.5%
Other (n_5)	5	4.2%	1	<1%	1	5.0%

The frequency of African American (n_1) occurrences ($n = 3$) accounted for 12.5% of the sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for African American (n_1) based on the percentage of African American students in the state of Tennessee school system multiplied by the number of stories ($N = 24$). In order for the population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of African American (n_1) occurrences is nine. When the expected number of occurrences was

calculated on the national level, the number of occurrences is four. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for an African American major character is lower than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of African American school aged children in both the state and nation.

The frequency of Asian (n_2) occurrences ($n = 2$) accounted for 8.3% of the sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Asian (n_2) based on the percentage of African American students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Asian (n_2) occurrences is less than one. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of occurrences is less than one. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for an Asian major character is higher than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Asian school aged children in both the state and nation.

The frequency of Caucasian (n_3) occurrences ($n = 8$) accounted for 33.3% of the total sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Caucasian (n_3) based on the percentage of Caucasian students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Caucasian (n_3) occurrences is 12. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Caucasian occurrences is 13. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for a Caucasian major character is lower than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Caucasian school aged children in both the state and nation.

The frequency of Hispanic (n_4) occurrences ($n = 4$) accounted for 16.6% of the total sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Hispanic (n_4) based on the percentage of Hispanic students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Hispanic (n_4) occurrences is 2. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Hispanic expected occurrences are five. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for a Hispanic major character is higher than the expected frequencies given the percent of Hispanic students in the state of Tennessee. Yet, 4 observed occurrences are lower than the expected number of 5 occurrences on the national level.

The frequency of Other (n_5) occurrences ($n = 5$) accounted for 20.8% of the sample. Stories included in Other featured ethnicities not included in above; Other includes stories including but not limited to Native Americans and non-human major characters. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Other (n_5) based on the percentage of Other students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Other (n_5) occurrences is 2. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Other occurrences is 5. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for an Other major character is higher than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Other school aged children in the state of Tennessee. However, an expected value of 5 for the nation indicated Other is adequately represented in this sample. In the Harcourt sample, Caucasian observed occurrences were greater than African American observed occurrences by almost a 3:1 ratio. If the sample

of stories were reflective of the society (frequency of expected occurrences), African American observed occurrences are still underrepresented at the state and national level. In this sample, Hispanic and Other have a greater number of observed occurrences than African American. In the Harcourt sample, African Americans are underrepresented.

SRA-McGraw Hill. Given the observed and expected occurrences of major character found within the text, see Table 3.

Table 3

Observed & Expected Frequencies of Major Characters

	Observed Frequency of Occurrences (Major Character)	Percentage of occurrences based on the opportunities to occur (N=37)	Expected Frequency of Occurrences (based on percentage of TN school aged population)	Percentage of school aged population (state of TN)	Expected Frequency of Occurrences (based on percentage of US school aged population)	Percentage of school aged population (USA)
<hr/>						
Ethnicity						
African American (n_1)	9	24.3%	9	38.3%	4	15.1%
Asian (n_2)	4	10.8%	<1	1.2%	<1	4.3%
Caucasian (n_3)	21	56.8%	12	53.1%	13	53.5%
Hispanic (n_4)	2	5.4%	2	8.2%	5	22.5%
Other (n_5)	3	8.1%	1	<1%	1	5.0%

The frequency of African American (n_1) occurrences ($n = 9$) accounted for 24.3% of the sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for African American (n_1) based on the percentage of African American students in the state of Tennessee

school system. In order for the population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of African American (n_1) occurrences is nine. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of occurrences is four. In this sample, the frequency of observed occurrences for an African American major character and the expected frequencies given the percentage of African American school aged children in the state of Tennessee indicate an adequate representation. However, the observed number of frequencies ($n = 9$) indicates African American occurrences are greater than the expected frequency of occurrences as the national level.

The frequency of Asian (n_2) occurrences ($n = 4$) accounted for 10.8% of the sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Asian (n_2) based on the percentage of African American students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Asian (n_2) occurrences is less than one. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of occurrences is less than one. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for an Asian major character is higher than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Asian school aged children in both the state and nation.

The frequency of Caucasian (n_3) occurrences ($n = 21$) accounted for 56.8% of the total sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Caucasian (n_3) based on the percentage of Caucasian students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Caucasian (n_3) occurrences is 12. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Caucasian occurrences is

thirteen. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for a Caucasian major character is greater than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Caucasian school aged children in both the state and nation.

The frequency of Hispanic (n_4) occurrences ($n = 2$) accounted for 5.4% of the total sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Hispanic (n_4) based on the percentage of Hispanic students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Hispanic (n_4) occurrences is 2. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Hispanic expected occurrences are 5. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for Hispanic indicates adequate representation given the percent of Hispanic students in the state of Tennessee. Yet, 2 observed occurrences are lower than the expected frequency of five occurrences on the national level.

The frequency of Other (n_5) occurrences ($n = 3$) accounted for 8.1% of the sample. Stories included in Other featured ethnicities not included in above; Other includes stories including but not limited to Native Americans and non-human major characters. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Other (n_5) based on the percentage of Other students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Other (n_5) occurrences is 2. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Other occurrences is 5. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for an Other major character is higher than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Other school aged children in the state of

Tennessee. However, an expected value of one for the nation indicated Other is higher than the expected frequency of occurrence in this sample. In the SRA-McGraw Hill sample, Caucasian observed occurrences were greater than African American observed occurrences on a 2:1 ratio. If the sample of stories were reflective of the society (frequency of expected occurrences), African American are adequately represented at the state level and above the expected frequency at the national level. In this sample, African American observed occurrences are greater than Asian, Hispanic and Other.

Scott Foresman. Given the observed and expected frequencies of major character in this sample, Table 4 was created.

Table 4

Observed & Expected Frequencies of Major Characters

	Observed Frequency of Occurrences (Major Character)	Percentage of occurrences based on the opportunities to occur (N=34)	Expected Frequency of Occurrences (based on percentage of TN school aged population)	Percentage of school aged population (state of TN)	Expected Frequency of Occurrences (based on percentage of US school aged population)	Percentage of school aged population (USA)
Ethnicity						
African American (n_1)	5	14.7%	9	38.3%	4	15.1%
Asian (n_2)	3	8.8%	<1	1.2%	<1	4.3%
Caucasian (n_3)	11	32.4%	12	53.1%	13	53.5%
Hispanic (n_4)	2	5.9%	2	8.2%	5	22.5%
Other (n_5)	8	23.5%	1	<1%	1	5.0%

The frequency of African American (n_1) occurrences ($n = 5$) accounted for 14.7% of the sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for African American (n_1) based on taking the percentage of African American students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of African American (n_1) occurrences is nine. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of occurrences is four. In this sample, the frequency of observed occurrences for an African American major character and the expected frequencies given the percentage of African American school aged children in the state of Tennessee indicate an underrepresentation. However, the observed number of frequencies ($n = 5$) indicates African American occurrences are greater than the expected frequency of occurrences as the national level.

The frequency of Asian (n_2) occurrences ($n = 3$) accounted for 8.8% of the sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Asian (n_2) based on the percentage of Asian students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Asian (n_2) occurrences is less than one. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of occurrences is less than one. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for an Asian major character is higher than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Asian school aged children in both the state and nation.

The frequency of Caucasian (n_3) occurrences ($n = 11$) accounted for 32.4% of the total sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Caucasian (n_3) based on the total number of stories in the sample multiplied by the percentage of Caucasian

students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Caucasian (n_3) occurrences is 12. When the expected frequency of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the frequency of Caucasian occurrences is 13. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for a Caucasian major character is less than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Caucasian school aged children in both the state and nation when compared to the representation in the text.

The frequency of Hispanic (n_4) occurrences ($n = 2$) accounted for 5.9% of the total sample. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Hispanic (n_4) based on the percentage of Hispanic students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected frequency of Hispanic (n_4) occurrences is 2. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Hispanic expected occurrences are five. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for Hispanic indicates adequate representation given the percent of Hispanic students in the state of Tennessee. Yet, 2 observed occurrences are lower than the expected frequency of 5 occurrences on the national level.

The frequency of Other (n_5) occurrences ($n = 8$) accounted for 23.5% of the sample. Stories included in Other featured ethnicities not included in above; Other includes stories including but not limited to Native Americans and non-human major characters. The researcher calculated the expected frequencies for Other (n_5) based on the percentage of Other students in the state of Tennessee school system. In order for the student population to be adequately represented in the sample text, the expected

frequency of Other (n_5) occurrences is 2. When the expected number of occurrences was calculated on the national level, the number of Other occurrences is 5. In this sample, the frequency of occurrences for an Other major character is higher than the expected frequencies as calculated by the percent of Other school aged children in the state of Tennessee. However, an expected value of one for the national level indicated Other is higher than the expected frequency of occurrence in this sample.

In this sample, Caucasian observed occurrences were greater than African American observed occurrences by a 2:1 ratio. If the sample of stories were reflective of the society (frequency of expected occurrences), African American observed occurrences are still less than the expected frequency at the state but above by one on national level. In this sample, Other has a greater number of observed occurrences than African American while Asian and Hispanic observed occurrences are less than African American.

Question 2: Do the stories featuring African American major characters contain the elements of quality literature as identified by Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd (2001)?

Harcourt. Based the results of the evidence pertaining to the presence or absence of the elements of quality African American literature featured in the Harcourt *Trophies* (2005) third grade edition, the researcher formulated Table 5.

Table 5

African American Literature Ratings by domain

Publisher	Story Title	Character Portrayal	Language Usage	Illustration Authenticity	Information Accuracy
Harcourt	<i>The Olympic Games</i>	2	2	2	2
Harcourt	<i>Allie's Basketball Dream</i>	2	2	2	2
Harcourt	<i>Stories Jullian Tells</i>	2	2	2	2
Harcourt	<i>Papa Tells Chita</i>	2	2	2	2

Of the four stories featuring the variable African American, all of the stories exhibit the traits of quality African American children's literature as defined by Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd (2001). The researcher utilized the nonparametric test, Cohen's Kappa (k) as the measure of agreement between the 2 raters. In this study, Kappa indicated strong level of agreement ($k = .88$)

Character Portrayal. In the domain of character portrayal, the sample was examined in relationship to the authors' identification of the character's ethnicity as well as cultural norms and positive portrayal of characters. The first aspect of character portrayal, ethnic identification, yielded the following. In the sample ($n = 4$), the authors did not identify the character as African American; an inference had to be made using the illustrations in the text. In all stories, the code of 1 (no evidence) was given since the author did not overtly state the characters were African American in the text.

African American cultural norms were present in *Allie's Basketball Dream*, *Stories Jullian Tells*, and *Papa Tells Chita*. In *Allie's Basketball Dream*, there is a strong family relationship as well as a strong connection between members of the community. Allie was encouraged to pursue her dream and achieve her dream of becoming a

basketball player with the aid and encouragement of her father. In *Stories Jullian Tells*, Jullian has strong family relationships and uses his gift of storytelling to pass on family traditions and history. Finally, the story *Papa Tells Chita* the father spends time telling stories and there was a strong focus on family. Given this evidence, a code of 2 was assigned.

The authors presented realistic and positive depictions of African Americans. In *The Olympic Games*, the text featured African American Olympic athletes. The stories detailed the athletes hard work leading up to the Olympic Games as well as their accomplishments at the Olympics. *Allie's Basketball Dream* depicted a hard working girl, Allie, who worked hard to achieve her goal of becoming a basketball player. She had support from her parents as well as her community as all offered words of encouragement as well as spent time coaching Allie at the basketball court. *Stories Jullian Tells* features a strong community of individuals who listen as well as provide encouragement to Jullian as he tells his stories. *Papa Tells Chita* features a father and daughter who spend time in conversation and reflection; Papa is a physician who goes out of his way to assist his community even when it was not financially advantageous to do so. This evidence allowed for the code of 2 to be assigned since evidence of realistic and positive depictions of African Americans was present. Given the aforementioned evidence similar to what is narrated above from each of the stories, each story in the sample was assigned an overall domain code of 2 in character portrayal.

Illustration Authenticity. The illustration authenticity domain examined three areas in regards to illustrations: illustration authenticity, realistic settings, and aesthetically pleasing characters. In regards to illustration authenticity, all of the

illustrators presented African American characters authentically; they were each different and had various features and skin hues when examining the illustrations. In addition, their facial features varied. In *Allie's Basketball Dream*, the neighborhood children's pigmentation, facial features and body shapes varied. For authentic characters, this area received a 2. Additionally, characters were in realistic settings such as neighborhoods, parks and urban homes. This area also was assigned a 2. Finally, the characters in all the stories were aesthetically pleasing. This area was coded 2. Given the mode of the ratings in this domain, the domain was assigned an overall code of 2 since like evidence was present in each story.

Language. The language element of the instrument examined three aspects of language: relatability, dialect, and ability for students to reflect on the language. When examining the language in the story, the language was relatable and could be easily understood by students. The language was natural and vivid. This area, included in the language domain, was assigned a code of 2 based on the evidence. However, in the sub-point under language none of the stories contained a dialect unique to the group represented in the story. The researcher indicated the authors did not use a dialect to portray their characters feelings, emotions, thoughts or interactions. As a result, this area was assigned a code of 1 since dialect was not present. The students, however, would be able to reflect on the characters language post reading. For instance, *Allie's Basketball Dream*, Allie states she will accomplish her dream. In *Papa tells Chita*, Papa explains to Chita that storms are not scary. Students are able to connect and replay these words over in their head post reading. Even though one area under the language domain was assigned

the code of one based on evidence, the code for the areas under language was 2. Given the code of 2, the language domain was assigned a code of 2.

Information Accuracy. The information accuracy domain included accurate reporting of historical events and a unique voice/worldview. Stories like *Olympics*, for example, were historically reliable when contrasted to the results on the 1996 Olympic games. This category was assigned a code of 2 for accurate information being present. The other three stories provided voice and worldview. For instance, *Papa Tells Chita* provides voice into childhood fears and looks at ways to overcome them. *Allie's Basketball Dream* adheres to the worldview that with hard work and practice one can achieve their dream. Given the presence of evidence of information accuracy the domain was coded 2. In the Harcourt sample ($n = 4$), all stories contained the elements of quality literature. Coding of 1 (no evidence present) and 2 (evidence present) allowed for varying degrees of evidence in order for the area to be assigned the code of 2.

SRA-McGraw Hill. Based the results of the evidence pertaining to the presence or absence of the elements of quality African American literature featured in the SRA-McGraw Hill (2005) third grade edition, the researcher formulated Table 6.

Table 6

African American Literature Ratings by Domain

Publisher	Story Title	Character Portrayal	Language Usage	Illustration Authenticity	Information Accuracy
SRA	<i>Teammates</i>	2	2	2	2
SRA	<i>The Boy Who Didn't Believe in Spring</i>	2	2	2	2
SRA	<i>Gloria Who Might Be My Best Friend</i>	2	2	2	2
SRA	<i>The Tree House</i>	2	2	2	2
SRA	<i>A Storm in the Night</i>	2	2	2	2
SRA	<i>A Story, A Story</i>	2	2	2	2
SRA	<i>Uncle Jed's Barber Shop</i>	2	2	2	2
SRA	<i>Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)</i>	2	2	2	2

Of the eight stories featuring the variable African American, all of the stories exhibit the traits by domain of quality African American children's literature as defined by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001). The researcher utilized the nonparametric test, Kappa (k) as the measure of agreement between the 2 raters. In this study, the raters had a strong level of agreement ($k = .88$)

Character Portrayal. In the domain of character portrayal, the sample was examined in relationship to the authors' identification of the character's ethnicity, cultural norms and positive depictions of African Americans. In the sample ($n=9$), only one story (*Uncle Jed's Barbershop*) overtly stated the characters were African American. This story was assigned a 2 in regards to character ethnicity. The other eight narratives did not overtly state the characters were African Americans; the lack of evidence in the story earned this area under the character portrayal domain the code of 1.

African American cultural norms were present in all the stories including *The Boy who Believed in Spring*, *Aunt Flossies Hats and Crab Cakes Later*, *Teammates* and *Uncle Jed's Barbershop*. In *Aunt Flossies Hats and Crab Cakes Later*, there is a strong family relationship as well as oral story telling in the piece. The children were fascinated by her hats and her stories. A warm interaction exists between family members. In *The Boy who Believed in Spring* the male character went in search of spring gathering evidence to insist others believe in it too. His determined, problem-solving spirit was evident throughout the piece.

The authors presented realistic and positive depictions of African Americans. In *Aunt Flossie's Hats*, the text featured a loving, older African American female who spends her time encouraging and loving younger women. The stories detailed the afternoons spend telling and listening to stories that accompany Aunt Flossie's Hats. *Teammates* depicted a hard working group who work hard to achieve their goal. They had to overcome struggles but stayed together and came out on top. The aforementioned evidence and similar evidence from all other stories allowed for the code of 2 to be assigned since evidence of realistic and positive depictions of African Americans was present. Given the aforementioned evidence from the stories, each story in the sample was assigned an overall domain code of 2 in character portrayal.

Illustration Authenticity. The illustration authenticity domain examined three areas in regards to illustrations: illustration authenticity, realistic settings, and aesthetically pleasing characters. In regards to illustration authenticity, all of the illustrators presented African American characters authentically; they were each different and had various features and skin hues when looking at the illustrations. In addition, their

facial features varied. In *The Boy who Believed in Spring*, the neighborhood children's pigmentation, facial features and body shapes varied. For authentic characters, this area received a 2. Additionally, characters were in realistic settings such as urban neighborhoods, parks and garden areas. This area also was assigned a 2. Finally, the characters in all the stories were aesthetically pleasing; they were easy on the eyes. This area was coded 2. Given the code of the ratings in this domain, the domain was assigned an overall code of 2.

Language. The language element of the instrument examined three aspects of language: reliability, dialect, and ability for students to reflect on the language. When examining the language in the stories, the language was relatable and could be easily understood by students. The language used in all the pieces was natural and vivid. This area, included in the language domain, was assigned a code of 2 based on the evidence. However, in the sub-point under language none of the stories contained a dialect unique to the group represented in the story. Only three of the stories, *Uncle Jed's Barber Shop*, *The Boy Who Believed in Spring*, and *A Storm in the Night*, portrayed an unique dialect. For example, the boy's usage of "ain't no spring" and "man I'm just sayin" are dialect and relatable. Although all the stories featured relatable language students would be able to relate to and interpret; consequently, the stories met the criteria in the domain of language. The 2 selections mentioned above were coded 2 in the area of dialect with the rest of the stories coded 1 in regards to dialect. However, all the stories in the sample contained language that is memorable to the characters. The warm interactions in *Aunt Flossie's Hats* along with the genuine interactions of the friends in the *Boy Who Believed in Spring*" are examples of the memorable interactions between characters allowed the

aspect of memorable characters to be assigned the code of 2 for evidence present. Given the mode of 2 in the domain, the language domain was assigned an overall code of 2.

Information Accuracy. The information accuracy domain was relevant to the sample in 2 pieces *Teammates and A Story, A Story*. These stories were verified using multiple online sources and the information contained within the stories was deemed accurate. The rest of the stories were realistic fiction pieces that did not refer to historical events. However, all the stories provided voice and worldview. For instance, *The Boy Who Believed in Spring* provides voice regarding childhood curiosity and seeking one's own answers. *Teammates* adheres to the worldview that with hard work and practice one can achieve their dream. Given the presence of evidence of information accuracy the domain was coded 2. In the SRA-McGraw Hill sample ($n=9$), all stories contained the elements of quality literature. Coding of 1 (no evidence present) and 2 (evidence present) allowed for varying degrees of evidence in order for the area to be assigned the code of 2.

Scott Foresman. Based the results of the evidence pertaining to the presence or absence of the elements of quality African American literature featured in the Scott Foresman (2007) third grade edition, the researcher formulated Table 7.

Table 7

African American Literature Ratings by Domain

Publisher	Story Title	Character Portrayal	Language Usage	Illustration Authenticity	Information Accuracy
SF	<i>My Rows and Piles of Coins</i>	2	2	2	2
SF	<i>Wings</i>	2	2	2	2
SF	<i>Fly, Eagle, Fly</i>	2	2	2	2
SF	<i>How My Family Lives in Africa</i>	2	2	2	2
SF	<i>Me and Uncle Rimie</i>	2	2	2	2
SF	<i>Leading the People to Freedom</i>	2	2	2	2

Of the six stories featuring the variable “African American,” all of the stories exhibit the traits of quality African American children’s literature as defined by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001). The researcher utilized the nonparametric test, Kappa (k) as the measure of agreement between the 2 raters. In this study, the raters had a strong level of agreement ($k = .88$).

Character Portrayal. In the domain of character portrayal, the sample was examined in relationship to the authors’ identification of the character’s ethnicity, cultural norms and positive depictions of African Americans. In the sample ($n=6$), the stories which overtly identified the characters as African American were *Leading the People to Freedom*, *Fly, Eagle, Fly* and *How My Family Lives in Africa*. These three stories were assigned code of 2 due to the author overtly stating the characters’ ethnic identity. The remaining stories were assigned code of 1 because the author did not overtly state their ethnicity; an inference had to be made given the illustrations in the text.

African American cultural norms were present in all the stories including *How My Family Lives in Africa*, *Leading the People to Freedom* and *Me and Uncle Remie*. These stories included focus on family and strong, positive interactions between characters. For example, in *Leading the People to Freedom* the character is shown the Underground Railroad signs and rooms people were placed in. Oral storytelling passed this story on within the family from generation to generation.

The authors presented realistic and positive depictions of African Americans. In *How My Family Lives in Africa*, the text featured family functioning in Africa compared to how the family functions in America. In both places the family had their daily routine: work, school, chores. In both instances, the kids were active in the family assisting and helping their parents as needed. The aforementioned evidence allowed for the code of 2 to be assigned since evidence of realistic and positive depictions of African Americans was present. Given the aforementioned evidence that each story portrayed, each story in the sample was assigned an overall domain code of 2 in character portrayal.

Illustration Authenticity. The illustration authenticity domain examined three areas in regards to illustrations: illustration authenticity, realistic settings, and aesthetically pleasing characters. In regards to illustration authenticity, all of the illustrators presented African American characters authentically; they were each different and had various features and skin hues when looking at the illustrations. In addition, their facial features varied. In *Uncle Remie* the family's pigmentation, facial features and body shapes varied. For authentic characters, this area received a 2. Additionally, characters were in realistic settings such as urban neighborhoods, parks and garden areas. This area also was assigned a 2. Finally, the characters in all the stories were aesthetically pleasing;

they were easy on the eyes. This area was coded 2. Given the mode of the ratings in this domain, the domain was assigned an overall code of 2.

Language. The language element of the instrument examined three aspects of language: relatability, dialect, and ability for students to reflect on the language. When examining the language in the stories, the language was relatable and could be easily understood by students. The language used in all the pieces was natural and vivid. This area, included in the language domain, was assigned a code of 2 based on the evidence. The next area under the domain of language is the presence of dialect. Three of the stories featured dialect. The stories featuring dialect are *Wings*, *Fly Eagle Fly* and *Me and My Uncle Remie*. An example of dialect from *Fly, Eagle, Fly* is “git on up there, git up!” These stories received a code of 2 given the use of dialect in the story. The rest of the stories coded 1 in regards to dialect. However, all the stories in the sample contained language that is memorable to the characters. The warm interactions in *Me and Uncle Remie* along with the genuine interactions of the family in *How My Family Lives in Africa* are examples of the memorable interactions between characters allowed the aspect of memorable characters to be assigned the code of 2 for evidence present. Given the mode of 2 in the domain, the language domain was assigned an overall code of 2.

Information Accuracy. The information accuracy domain was *Wings*, *Me and Uncle Rimie*, *How My Family Lives in Africa*, and *Fly, Eagle, Fly* were verified for their information accuracy; information in the stories was verified using cross-referencing of literature. *How My Family Lives in Africa*, for example, corresponded with other resources featuring life in South Africa. The remaining stories were realistic fiction pieces that did not refer to historical events. However, all the stories provided voice and

worldview. For instance, *Me and Uncle Remie* provides voice regarding childhood relationships and family ties. Given the presence of evidence of information accuracy the domain was coded 2. In the Scott Foresman sample ($n = 6$), all stories contained the elements of quality literature. Coding of 1 (no evidence present) and 2 (evidence present) allowed for varying degrees of evidence in order for the area to be assigned the code of 2. This concludes the Scott Foresman section of this study.

Conclusion

In order to determine the quantity of African American stories within the sample, this study compared the frequency of observed occurrences of African American major characters to the frequency of expected occurrences of African American major characters based on the population of African American school children on the state of Tennessee and national levels. Given the percentage of school aged African American students in the state of Tennessee and in the United States the data indicates a lower than expected frequency of occurrence by African American major characters in the Harcourt series. SRA-McGraw Hill contains an adequate frequency of occurrences for the state of Tennessee; however, the observed frequencies for the sample are greater than the expected occurrences at the national level. The level of observed frequencies in the Scott Foresman sample are greater at the national level yet are less than the expected frequencies given the African American student population in the state of Tennessee.

Upon further analysis of the stories featuring the variable African American, the data indicated the elements of quality literature according to Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) were evident in each story; Cohen's Kappa was used to determine inter-rater reliability ($k = .88$). Across the three basal reading series, the stories featuring African

American characters include an accurate and positive character portrayal. However, only 4 of 18 stories (22%) overtly identified the characters as African American. When examining the language authenticity in each story, the language was relatable and could be easily understood. Yet the majority of the stories (72 %) did not utilize a form of dialect within the story. However, the illustrations within the stories featured characters with unique and defining features and the stories' information was accurate when compared and contrasted against a variety of sources. Since this study coded each area included within each of the four domains and took the mode as the overall domain score, each story received a 2 for every domain.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, examines these findings in context with literature as well as implications for action and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER 5:

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of the major findings, findings related to literature, implications for action and conclusion. This chapter concludes with final thoughts from the researcher.

Major Findings

In order to determine the quantity of African American stories within the sample, this study compared the frequency of observed occurrences of African American major characters to the frequency of expected occurrences of African American major characters based on the population of African American school children on the state of Tennessee and the national level. Given the percentage of school aged African American students in the state of Tennessee and in the United States the data indicated a lower than expected frequency of occurrence by African American major characters in the Harcourt series. SRA-McGraw Hill contains an adequate frequency of occurrences for the state of Tennessee; however, the observed frequencies for the sample are greater than the expected occurrences at the national level. The level of observed frequencies in the Scott Foresman sample are greater at the national level yet are less than the expected frequencies given the African American student population in the state of Tennessee.

Upon further review of the stories featuring African American characters, the data indicated the elements of quality literature according to Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) were evident in each story according to both researchers ($k = .88$). Across the three basal reading series, the stories featuring African American characters include an

accurate and positive character portrayal. However, only 4 of 18 stories (22%) overtly identified the characters as African American. When examining the language authenticity in each story, the language was relatable and could be easily understood by students. Yet the majority of the stories (72 %) did not utilize a form of dialect within the story. However, the illustrations within the stories featured characters with unique and defining features and the stories' information was accurate when compared and contrasted against a variety of sources.

Findings Related to the Literature

Culturally relevant literature is one of the effective ways to bridge the achievement gap (McCellan & Fields, 2004). Since previous research notes literature as such a powerful tool, it is important to examine its usage in the classroom especially as it pertains to the achievement gap. Gray (2010) studied student responses to literature in the classroom; students wanted book selections where the characters resembled them. Brooks (2008) conducted a study in middle schools using three novels considered African American literature because of their reoccurring themes, linguistic patterns and ethnic group practices. Students responded positively to the texts; they found relevance and affirmation from the literature. The students also noted realistic fiction as their preferred genre because of their ability to make a connection with the piece. Hughes-Hassell et al. (2010) examined transitional texts for the racial identities of its characters and authors. They found that 75% of transitional (Fountas and Pinnell level J-M) books were authored by Caucasians and 81% of the texts featured Caucasian characters. The study contrasted these findings to the current ethnic data of schools; there is a disparity between trade book authors/characters and the students in today's schools. This study supports the work

conducted by Hughes-Hassell et al. (2010). The findings of this study indicate an underrepresentation of stories featuring African American major characters in 2 out of the three basal reading series used on the third grade level in schools which is consistent with Hughes-Hasell et al. (2010) findings where texts featuring African American major characters were absent on the transitional text series. Since the stories contained within the third grade basal reading series are included in the transitional level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1998), the data from this study indicates underrepresentation of texts featuring African American major characters in 2 out of three national basal reading series. There are simply not enough books featuring diverse characters on the transitional level (Hughes-Hassell et al, 2010). Although Hughes-Hassell et al. (2010) states 81% of transitional level texts feature Caucasian characters; the sample in this limited study indicates a lower occurrence (32.4% - 52.5%) of Caucasian major characters represented in the sample. In contrast, this study calculated an expected occurrence value based on the ethnic composition of students (by percent) in schools in Tennessee (2010) and another based on the ethnic composition (by percent) of America's school aged population (2010). This calculated frame of reference indicates what should be in basal texts books if they are calibrated to the population using them.

Ladson-Billings (1995) and Tatum (2000) study the effects of culturally relevant literature on non-white students. The students' motivation, attitude and ultimately test scores dramatically improved when the students were exposed to individuals who resemble them in thought, speech and appearance. In addition, literacy engagement increases for these students; they see themselves as members of the school and literate society. The data analysis of this study indicates the stories featuring African American

major characters that are relatable in thought, speech and appearance. This study examined eighteen stories featuring an African American major character and found that all eighteen contained evidence of the elements of high quality African American literature as identified by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001).

Rehyer (1986) classified basal reading stories by racial identity; Caucasian characters appeared seven times more than other characters. In contrast, this study indicated a decline in the frequency of Caucasian characters in stories; Caucasian characters in this study sample appeared as often as or less often than all other characters. Reyher (1986) stated the number of stories featuring Native American characters equaled the number of stories featuring Hispanic characters; however, this study indicated Hispanic characters occur four times as often as Native American characters. Rehyer (1986) identified stories featuring African American characters doubled that of their Hispanic counterparts; the data from this study indicated the same.

Garcia and Sadoski (1986) investigated basal reading series published from 1979-1981. This study examined 3,389 stories in terms of socio-economic status, setting and character portrayal. The data showed a distorted view of the non-white characters in terms of location and positive character images. By 1992, more stories featuring non-white main characters were appearing in basal reading series; however, the stories were superficial and characters and plot lacked true cultural identity to the groups represented. White, middle-class values dominate the basal reading plot and settings (Shannon & Crawford, 1997). The white, middle class domination created deficiencies and issues in reading for those from a non-white, middle class background (Shannon & Crawford, 1997). Although this study did not examine all the literature featuring non-white

characters, this study analyzed the stories featuring African American characters. The findings of this study contrast what Crawford (1997) identified. Instead, the sample of stories featuring African Americans feature characters rich in character and appearance. The stories feature noble and trustworthy characters and contain a meaningful plot that relates to students.

Conclusion

The current study indicated the basal reading series texts have changed from the reviews conducted three decades ago. Basal reading series texts from the past, dominated by Caucasian characters which appeared seven times as often as others (Crawford, 1997; Garcia & Sadoski, 1986; Rehyer, 1986), now feature more ethnically diverse characters since Caucasian characters appear twice as often, instead of seven, as other featured characters. However, observed Caucasian character occurrences are still greater than African American observed occurrences by a 2:1 ratio across all three basal samples. When comparing African American observed occurrences to the frequency of expected occurrences, African American students are underrepresented by 2 major publishers (Harcourt & Scott Foresman). If the basal reading series is the only material being used in the classroom today, then African American students are not seeing themselves adequately represented in literature. Since culturally relevant literature is one of the effective ways to bridge the achievement gap (McCellan & Fields, 2004) the consequences are to be noted. The underrepresentation of African American characters in Harcourt and Scott Foresman could contribute to the achievement gap in literacy. If the basal reading series is the only literature utilized in the classroom, the students could struggle due to the lack of culturally relevant literature in the classroom. Furthermore, the

absence of African American characters may lead to students not feeling affirmed by the literature and create a feeling of cultural discontinuity (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tatum, 2000). These feelings may cause students to disengage from school thus factoring into the achievement gap in reading.

Even though the frequency of African American occurrences is less than frequency of Caucasian occurrences, the stories within the sample contains the elements of quality African American literature as defined by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001). This indicates the publishers' include stories containing the elements of quality African American literature (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001) in the basal reading series. When students read the stories, they may be affirmed by observing characters, language and illustrations reflecting authentic people, interactions and scenarios.

Implications for Action

In order to provide an equal opportunity for all students to engage in and experience success in literacy, students need to see themselves reflected in the literature they read (Tatum, 2000). The results of this study suggest African American students are represented less than their Caucasian counterparts in three basal reading texts. The results of this study have implications for various educational stakeholders: classroom teachers, curriculum selection committees, and basal reading publishing companies.

Classroom teachers using a basal readings series may choose to supplement basal instructional minutes with trade books featuring African American characters in order for these students to see them adequately reflected in literature. In addition, African American students should be able to access books featuring African Americans within the classroom library or school library.

In addition, teachers and other school officials should examine the basal reading series for the ethnic composition of its characters and compare it to the demographic of their district or schools. The frequency of observed occurrences varies among the three basal publishers; the school district may run an analysis and select the basal reading series that most closely reflects the demographic of their constituents. This enhances the students' opportunity for success when stories in the basal reading series feature characters who resemble the student reading the text.

Finally, the publishers of the three basal reading series continue to note changes in the demographics of school children in the United States. As a result, the story selections included in the texts could transition in order to provide a more likely occurrence of culturally relevant literature for the students being instructed to read the text.

Furthermore, since the companies align their materials to state standards, they could also align their textbooks to meet the diverse needs of the state population. This study indicated disparity in the frequency of African American expected occurrences at the state level ($n = 9$) and the national level ($n = 4$). Consequently, the text for the state of Tennessee has different needs than other states in the nation. The companies can utilize the demographic data from the various states/regions by creating textbook with story observed frequencies resembling those of the expected frequencies based on the states' population.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study selected three basal reading series used in the state of Tennessee. The sample included 99 total stories analyzed for the ethnicity of the major characters.

However, when the 99 stories were categorized by publisher, the sample was too small to

employ nonparametric tests (Chi square and ANOVA). Replicating this study with a larger sample size would allow the researcher to employ nonparametric tests thus affording greater power. The larger sample size would include three-five grade levels of each publisher. This provides a larger sample size and allows the researcher to identify any trends.

Further probing into the teacher perception and usage of instructional materials would allow insight into teachers' utilization of the basal reading materials. The current study operates under the pretense that most teachers utilize the basal reading series as their primary instructional vehicle. However, this may not be the case. By investigating teacher perception, the researcher would be able to determine the extent the basal materials are used in the classroom.

A study identifying the characteristics of highly effective teachers provides insight into "what works" for students. This survey would examine instructional strategies, material usage, and classroom environment. This study would provide insight into other educational factors contributing to closing the achievement gap.

Concluding Remarks

The researcher walked through the library with a group of African American students as book after book was pulled from the shelf featured Caucasian children or Animals as major characters. When the group finally found books with characters that looked like them, their excitement for literacy grew. As they consumed these texts, their literacy level increased greatly. It was this experience that spurred the researcher's interest in culturally relevant literature. It is imperative students find themselves in literature; for when they find themselves in literature, reading finally speaks to them.

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Appendix A

Text Feature	Question	Rating
Character	Does the story contain a memorable character that is about the same age as the students?	1 2 3 4 5
	What is the race of the main character?	
	What is the race of the minor characters?	
Plot	Is the plot clear, direct and stimulating?	1 2 3 4 5
	Will the students understand the problems, events and issues?	1 2 3 4 5
	Will students be able to easily follow the sequence of events?	1 2 3 4 5

	Will students enjoy the story?	1 2 3 4 5
Well-crafted language	Does the story contain natural, vivid language?	1 2 3 4 5
	Do the words evoke clear, concrete images of characters and actions?	1 2 3 4 5
	Does the language reflect the mood of the story?	1 2 3 4 5
Worthy, subtle, and truthful theme	Is the story's theme one that the students will find worthy, subtle, and truthful?	1 2 3 4 5
	Will the theme interest the students?	1 2 3

		4 5
	Is the author's intended message understandable without being heavy-handed?	1 2 3 4 5
Quality of illustrations	Does the illustrator use elements of media, design and style in original and expressive ways?	1 2 3 4 5
	Do the illustrations feature African Americans?	1 2 3 4 5
Function of illustrations	Do the illustrations establish the mood, theme, and settings as the story unfolds?	1 2 3 4 5
	Do they add or clarify information?	1 2 3 4 5
	Do they enrich the story?	1

		2 3 4 5
	Do the illustrations feature African Americans?	1 2 3 4 5
Function of illustrations	Do the illustrations establish the mood, theme, and settings as the story unfolds?	1 2 3 4 5
	Do they add or clarify information?	1 2 3 4 5
	Do they enrich the story?	1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

Text Feature	Question	Rating
Character Portrayal	Does the author identify the characters as African American?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Does the author include current and accurate information about African American beliefs, traditions, shared values and other cultural referents?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Does the author present realistic and positive depictions of African Americans?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
Language Use	Does the dialogue correctly portray African American dialect?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Is the language authentic and realistic?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Will the students understand, identify with, and accurately reflect upon the characters' language?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
Illustration Authenticity	Do the illustrations reflect reality?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Do they reveal a variety in settings and are African American physical features and coloring or are characters merely colored brown?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Do the illustrations present positive images of African Americans in aesthetically pleasing ways?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
Information Accuracy	Does the story contain a motif or an authentic aspect of African American history?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Is the information accurate?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
	Does the story add a distinctive	1 (no evidence)

	voice or worldview?	2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)
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Publisher	Story Title	Text Feature	Question	Rating	Anecdotal Notes
		Character	Does the story contain a memorable character that is about the same age as the students?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			What is the race of the main character?		
			What is the race of the minor characters?		
		Plot	Is the plot clear, direct and stimulating?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Will the students understand the problems, events and issues?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Will students be able to easily follow the sequence of events?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Will students enjoy the story?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
		Well-crafted language	Does the story contain natural, vivid language?	1 (no evidence)	

				2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Do the words evoke clear, concrete images of characters and actions?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Does the language reflect the mood of the story?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
		Worthy, subtle, and truthful theme	Is the story's theme one that the students will find worthy, subtle, and truthful?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Will the theme interest the students?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Is the author's intended message understandable without being heavy-handed?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
		Quality of illustrations	Does the illustrator use elements of media, design and style in original and expressive ways?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Do the illustrations	1 (no	

			feature African Americans?	evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
		Function of illustrations	Do the illustrations establish the mood, theme, and settings as the story unfolds?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Do they add or clarify information?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Do they enrich the story?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Do the illustrations feature African Americans?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
		Function of illustrations	Do the illustrations establish the mood, theme, and settings as the story unfolds?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
			Do they add or clarify information?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	

			Do they enrich the story?	1 (no evidence) 2 (little evidence) 3 (strong evidence)	
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Appendix D

Publisher	Title	Domain	Question	Code	Anecdotal Note
		Character Portrayal	Does the author identify the characters as African American?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
			Does the author include current and accurate information about African American beliefs, traditions, shared values and other cultural referents?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
			Does the author present realistic and positive depictions of African Americans?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
		Language Use	Does the dialogue correctly portray African American dialect?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
			Is the language authentic and realistic?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
			Will the students understand, identify with, and accurately reflect upon the characters' language?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
		Illustration Authenticity	Do the illustrations reflect reality?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	

			Do they reveal a variety in settings and are African American physical features and coloring or are characters merely colored brown?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
			Do the illustrations present positive images of African Americans in aesthetically pleasing ways?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
		Information Accuracy	Does the story contain a motif or an authentic aspect of African American history?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
			Is the information accurate?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	
			Does the story add a distinctive voice or worldview?	1 (no evidence) 2 (evidence)	