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Instructional Practices of Teachers and the Academic Success of African American Males at the Elementary Level

Donna D. Lewis

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**INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES OF TEACHERS
AND THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES
AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL**

By

Donna D. Lewis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

at

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2014

ABSTRACT

The academic achievement gap is one of the most challenging issues in education. Despite the research that has been done and the various reform initiatives that have tried to reduce the gap, the underachievement continues for African American male students. There has been a lot of concern from educators and community stakeholders about the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students. This qualitative study will examine this issue from the perspective of African American male students and the teachers who teach African American male students. It will specifically focus on what instructional methods and overall beliefs contribute to the academic success of African American male students. In this study, a triangulation method was used as data were obtained through interviews of seven African American male students, interviews of three classroom teachers, and classroom observations in an elementary school. The data were organized into common themes for both teachers and students. Findings indicated that relationship building was a critical component contributing to the success of the African American male student at the elementary level. Relationship building is multifaceted and includes issues of self-efficacy, motivation, encouragement, and the home-school connection. Another key component was the importance of using culturally responsive teaching strategies. Differentiated instruction, with a focus on learning styles, visuals, and technology were some of the culturally responsive strategies that were determined to be best practices for teachers that would contribute to the academic success of African American males. Professional development for teachers should be implemented that focuses on both relationship building strategies as well as incorporating culturally relevant teaching strategies on an ongoing basis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For twenty years my life has centered around my career as an educator. I have always wanted the children I have taught or worked with to achieve academic success. It is my desire that this research will help educators incorporate best practices so that they can make a difference in the lives of the African American male student.

Numerous people have been influential to me during this research process. First and foremost, I must acknowledge the presence of God in my life. Without God, this dissertation would not have been possible. It is through my faith and belief system that I know God is who orders my steps and made the completion of this study possible. To Him, I owe everything.

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my own African American male child, Bryson William Lewis. Bryson is my only son. He has two older sisters. The research indicates that somewhere between 3rd and 5th grade our African American boys start falling off. They don't achieve as well academically as their Caucasian counterparts or even as well as their same aged African American female counterparts. The academic achievement gap starts to widen during these final years of elementary school and sadly, it continues to grow in middle school and high school.

I have that dual role. I am an educator but I am also a mother. I want the best for Bryson as his mother. I have been an educator for twenty years. I know what is considered good instruction according to best practices, but is it good instruction for my African American boy who is just starting third grade? I want him to achieve academically and feel successful. I don't want him to be another African American male student who has not achieved academically. I do not want him or any other African American boy to feel defeated, unmotivated, and not encouraged by the teachers they have. My desire is for Bryson as well as all other African American boys to achieve academic success so that the achievement gap will lessen and eventually disappear.

When I look at Bryson I see a future leader. I see a doctor, lawyer, teacher or engineer. I want all African American male students to feel that they can live their dreams. I want them to have significant relationships with teachers who care, encourage, and differentiate instruction to meet their individual learning styles and needs. So, I dedicate this research to my son, Bryson, and pray that he will develop his strengths, become successful, and make a significant difference during his lifetime!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The academic achievement gap is one of the most challenging issues in education. There has been a lot of concern from educators and community stakeholders regarding the achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students. This gap is even greater for African American male students (Colbert, 2011; Duckworth & Seligman, 2006; Howard, 2010; Hucks, 2011; NCES, 2009). This topic is chosen because despite the research that has been done and the various reform initiatives that have tried to reduce the gap, the underachievement continues. This study will examine this issue from the perspective of African American male students and the teachers who teach African American male students. It will specifically focus on whether some instructional methods and overall beliefs contribute to the academic success of African American males.

Problem Statement/Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into certain specific instructional practices that are used that may effectively meet the needs and contribute to the success of African American male students. These practices can then be shared in many different school settings as a possible solution to closing the achievement gap that exists for African American male students. Teachers can utilize this information to assist them in their instructional planning so more African American males are academically successful. Administrators can also utilize the data to determine what areas of staff development are needed as it relates to the academic success of African American males. In general, the data can be analyzed to determine a possible solution to closing the achievement gap. It is crucial to find solutions to close this academic achievement

gap. The gap can lead to numerous negative consequences for African American males (Howard, 2010; Hucks, 2011; Kinkaid & Yin, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

This is a qualitative study and therefore, an exact visual model is difficult to determine. However, the following general model demonstrates that the academic success of African American males at the elementary level is affected by the beliefs and instructional practices of teachers, the learning styles of students, and environmental issues such as race and culture. Numerous theories will be presented in the literature review that are used to explain potential reasons and causes of why the academic achievement gap exists.

Conceptual Framework Model

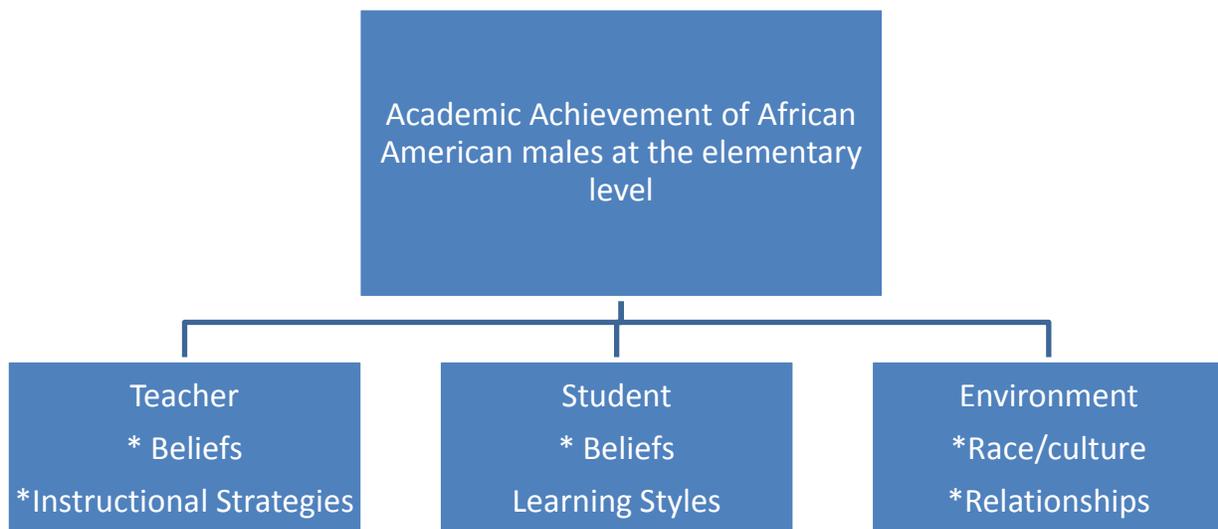


Figure 1

Definitions

For the purpose of this study it is important to define academic achievement gap.

The academic achievement gap is the discrepancy in educational outcomes between various student groups where one group of students is at the higher end of the academic performance scale. Typically it refers to the disparity in academic outcomes between African American, Native American, and Latino students and their Caucasian and certain Asian peers. (Howard, 2010, p. 10)

Learning style also needs to be defined. “Learning style can be defined as a way of perceiving, conceptualizing, and problem solving. It is a type of preference for the way of interacting with and responding to the environment.” (Polce, 1987)

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to answer the following question: What are the instructional practices as well as teacher expectations, beliefs, and attitudes that either contribute or do not contribute to the academic success of African American male students?

Overview of the Methodology

A qualitative research design was used in this study. This design was used because it offers a great amount of information about a smaller number of cases and people. The researcher in a qualitative study is able to examine selected issues in great depth by giving careful attention to the context and details (Patton, 2002). A collective case study approach was also used for this study. This can also be called a multiple-case design. In this type of study the students are the primary cases. Similarities and differences can be compared across cases and common themes can be analyzed and discussed. This approach was used because more insight can be gained about the academic success of African American males by concurrently studying multiple cases in one research study.

In this research study, seven fifth graders and three fifth grade teachers were interviewed and observed at Sunny Hills Elementary School. Purposeful sampling was used. This type of sampling involves specifying the characteristics of the target population and then locating the individuals who have those characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In this current study, students were selected based on academic achievement. They were grouped as either academically successful or unsuccessful based on fourth grade SOL assessments, current grades, and teacher recommendation.

Individual in-depth interviews with students and teachers as well as classroom observations were the types of instrumentation used to gather data (see Appendix E and F). Once approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received for a full review, the participants all signed consent forms. Teachers and students were interviewed individually using an open-ended format. Classroom observations took place after the interviews. Professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment, learning environment, and professionalism and communication were the general areas that were assessed. After all observations were conducted and the researcher determined that there was not a need for further information, the students were not interviewed again. If further information had been needed students would have participated in a focus group interview (see Appendix G). Data was analyzed using holistic descriptions. A coding procedure was used so that common themes could be identified by using a cross-case analysis approach. This triangulation of data helped the validity of the study by using data from multiple sources.

The results from this qualitative study provide insight into instructional strategies that can be effective in helping African American male students experience academic success. With this knowledge, possible solutions to closing the academic achievement gap can be addressed at the

school level by teachers and administrators. However, there are some limitations to the study. The small sample size makes it difficult to generalize the findings. Since the research was conducted at one school and with only seven students and three teachers, it is difficult to generalize the findings. Also, all teachers in the study were of the same race and gender, and there were no African American female participants to which the findings could be compared.

This study begins with a literature review. It will be followed by the methodology and analysis of data. It will then conclude with a discussion of the findings and a list of recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Achievement gaps in the quality of experiences and outcomes at all levels of U.S. public education is relentless and extensive. The victims are obvious, the causes are complex and debatable, and efforts toward remediation are still producing uneven results. (Howard, 2010; p. xvii)

One of the most pressing educational challenges of the 21st century has been the academic achievement gap. The disparity in academic outcomes between various student groups is an issue confronting our society. It is one of the single most complicated issues in education today and has become one of the most commonly used catch phrases in school reform over the past two decades (Howard, 2010). There has been extensive research about the causes of this achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students (Howard, 2010; Hucks, 2011; Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley & Cortina, 2010). On average, African American students attain lower academic outcomes on all academic areas and educational levels than their Caucasian counterparts (Lee & Burkam, 2002; Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley & Cortina, 2010). Despite various policy and school reform initiatives that have tried to reduce the academic achievement gap, the underachievement continues. This achievement gap is even greater for African American males (Colbert, 2011; Duckworth & Seligman, 2006; Howard, 2010; Hucks, 2011; Lee & Burkam, 2002; NCES, 2009).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the background information for this study by reviewing the literature related to closing the academic achievement gaps for African American males. Specifically, it will provide background information about the achievement gap, information about various theoretical frameworks related to the academic achievement gap, learning styles of African American males, beliefs African American males have about learning

and academic achievement, and instructional teaching strategies and beliefs of teachers towards these males. The role of culture, environment, and culturally responsive pedagogy will also be reviewed as it relates to the academic achievement of African American males.

Background Information about the Academic Achievement Gap for African Americans

African American students, on average, attain poorer academic outcomes on all educational levels and academic areas than their Caucasian counterparts (Lee & Burkam, 2002). Within the past ten years, another achievement gap has emerged. Researchers have demonstrated that girls tend to outperform boys. Girls often build stronger relationships with teachers, attain higher grades, achieve higher class rank and honors, progress towards higher levels of education and are less likely to be referred for remedial services (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). The schooling experiences of African American males may deserve special attention. African American males are disproportionately represented in lower tiered classes, find lowered teacher expectations, and experience more racial discrimination in the classroom (Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley & Cortina, 2010).

Data provided by The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2007) also confirms that there are more pronounced gender differences in African American and Latino populations than in other races. Recent data for 2009 from the NCES indicate two significant reading achievement gaps between African American boys and other student groups in the fourth grade (NCES, 2009). In this data, African American boys did not score as high as boys from all other racial backgrounds on national reading assessments. The reading scale that was used ranges from zero to 500. The average composite reading score for Caucasian males was a 227. The average composite score for African American males was a 200. African American males

had the lowest score. Secondly, the NCES data also revealed gender gaps in reading achievement between African American boys and girls. The data not only indicated a profound reading achievement gap between African American boys in the fourth grade and other groups of girls in the fourth grade, but it also demonstrated that African American boys in fourth grade performed lower than all of the other groups of girls (NCES, 2009). Students who are at “below basic” are able to follow brief written directions and carry out simple, discrete reading tasks. Students who are at “basic” are able to understand, combine ideas, and make inferences based on short uncomplicated passages (Howard, 2010). Fifty-one percent of African Americans scored “below basic” while only 22% of Caucasians scored “below basic”(NCES, 2011).

Literacy development, without a doubt, is extremely important to children’s academic success in all areas. Children who have strong literacy-related skills early in life become better readers and also show more progress in other areas such as math and science. Even before school begins, African American children tend to perform more poorly on assessments for reading, writing, decoding skills, and basic vocabulary than their Caucasian counterparts (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Matthews et al., 2010). The underachievement of African American boys in literacy has been documented in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades (NCES, 2006).

It is critical for students to develop strong literacy skills early because by third grade, many schools have stopped the explicit teaching of core reading skills such as phonemic awareness, decoding skills, phonics, vocabulary building, and comprehension skills. Students who struggle as readers in third grade will fall even further behind as they move to higher grades (Howard, 2010).

In a study of 12,385 kindergarten students, nationwide researchers evaluated the racial and gender gaps in literacy with a special emphasis on the literacy development of African American boys. Results from the study indicated that there was the existence of a race and gender gap in literacy even at the beginning of kindergarten. Both gaps increased in magnitude through the end of fifth grade. The results also demonstrated that there was a higher prevalence of behavior problems and lower levels of positive social and emotional skills among African American boys (Matthews et al., 2010).

Although reading is crucial to overall academic success, math also has importance. In math, the academic achievement gap is still present. For example, according to the NCES (2006), approximately 40% of fourth grade African American students, 32% percent of fourth grade Latino students, and 32% of fourth grade Native American students are below basic in math proficiency, compared to only 10% of Caucasian and Asian American students.

By grade eight, an even larger number of students of color have fallen behind in math. According to the NCES (2006), 58% of African Americans, 48% percent of Latinos, and 47% percent of Native American students are “below basic.” The data also shows that only one percent of African Americans and Latinos are reaching advanced levels of math. This lack of students of color at advanced levels of math may have some significance in explaining the dismally low numbers of African American, Latino, and Native American students on college campuses (Howard, 2010).

There is research that reveals that many African American males continue to have low test scores, high drop-out rates, and high crime and incarceration rates (Fryer & Levitt, 2006; Toldson, 2008). Historically, African American males have had to experience a painful history

of discrimination that continues to have societal effects (Hucks, 2011). They are the least employed, the most imprisoned, and the most oppressed. According to data from the United States Census Bureau (2003), 35% of African American males between 7th and 12th grades were suspended in 2000. The NCES (2007) also reports that in 2000, 15% of African American males between 10th and 12th grades dropped out of school. Finally, the U.S. Bureau of Justice (2000) documented that 50% of the prison population consisted of African American males in this same year.

These statistics clearly demonstrate that there is a need to provide solutions to the challenges African American males face in schools as well as society. Lags in early achievement can lead to negative consequences for future educational and social opportunities. The academic achievement gap can lead to serious negative consequences such as suspensions, expulsions, non-promotions, school dropout, unemployment, crime, and incarceration (Howard, 2010). There is also overrepresentation of African American males in special and remedial classes (Kincaid & Yin, 2011). The challenge of addressing the underachievement of African American males is a great one. It will require a level of engagement, investment, and accountability for all who will collectively play a role and have a stake in bringing about change for African American males (Hucks, 2011).

Educators, researchers, parents, and policymakers have given an extensive amount of attention to the academic achievement gap and the disproportionate number of African American males who are identified as underachievers (Joe & Davis, 2009; Hucks 2011). The achievement gap exists and has for many years. However, why does it exist? What are the causes of this disparity in education? In general, researchers find that the achievement gap is often connected to socioeconomic status, cultural environment, family background and/or school related issues.

Feelings of belongingness, of being singled out or discriminated against, parental involvement, cultural differences, expectations, and grouping arrangements can all influence the achievement gap (Hucks, 2011).

Some researchers suggest that the academic gaps that are most present in public schools are a by-product of gaps that exist in society at large and any attempts to place schools at the center of closing the gap are misguided (Anyon, 2005). There might be some truth to these statements, but education and educators have played and will continue to play a critical role in helping to address the closing of the achievement gap. Some scholars also say that it is not ethnicity at all, but low socioeconomic status that causes the achievement gap to exist (Anyon, 2005). This is based on the fact that students who attend schools and come from homes in higher socioeconomic areas perform significantly better than low-income students. However, when social class is held constant, African American, Latino, and Native American students still perform poorer than their Caucasian and Asian American peers (Ogbu, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

There are several theories and theoretical assumptions that are often used to further explain potential reasons and causes why the achievement gap exists. These theories will be presented chronologically as to when they were first mentioned in the research. One of the first theories to explain this achievement discrepancy is the Expectancy Model or Attribution Theory. This theory argues that learned helplessness develops early in life. Learned helplessness refers to the behavior and actions of children who easily give up when confronted with failure. They believe they have little or no control over aversive events. They believe there is nothing they can do to improve the situation or learn a particular skill, so they do not try at all (Dweck, 1975).

Thus, if African American males feel they have no control over what they are learning and how they are learning in the classroom, they will not strive to be as academically successful due to these feelings of learned helplessness.

The Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) suggested that a child's achievement relied on the values and expectations evidenced in his or her social environment. Taylor (1997) conducted three experimental studies with first and second grade African American boys to determine the impact of a structured social skills program. The results of the study suggested that if interventions are put in place early, some of the deficits in social skills could still be corrected.

The Cool Pose Theory developed by Majors and Billson (1992) suggested that African American males adopt a "cool pose" form of masculinity as a means of coping in an environment that is unfriendly and uncomfortable. This coping includes posturing as noncommittal, fearless and emotionless. One might even seem aloof. In school settings this posture leads to nonconformity and being seen as a troublemaker by others.

Steele and Aronson (1995) developed the stereotype threat theory. This is the belief that one's behavior will confirm an existing stereotype of a group with which one identifies. If an African American male has the stereotype of being less intelligent, then his performance on a particular test may be lower than it should be because of this belief. Stereotype threat reduces the performance of individuals who belong to negatively stereotyped groups. Individuals who are seen as belonging to an inferior group will experience far more pressure and will usually detach their self-esteem from school-related outcomes. Steel and Aronson (1995) conducted research with Latino and African American college students. It was discovered that these target

groups did poorer on an academic test when they were told ahead of time that they were taking a test that measured verbal ability. However, they performed better on the same tasks when they were not informed that the test would measure ability. Steele and Aronson (1995) concluded that the students' performance on the tests were lower because they were concerned about reinforcing the stereotypes about those in their racial group.

Another theory about the lack of academic achievement for African American males is the complexity theory suggested by Polite (1994). In his research he examined the social context of schooling of a cohort of 115 African American males from a high school graduating class. The results revealed that this theory is an effective way to explain circumstances related to the education of African American males. Events experienced by African American males may not seem important when considered independently of each other. However, multiple events such as suspensions, expulsions, and overrepresentation in remedial and special classes can have a negative effect on the achievement of African American males. It is the combination of the events that leads to the problems with low academic achievement, not the events in isolation of each other.

There are several schools of thought that involve the role of culture and race as the theoretical frameworks for explaining the achievement gap. The critical race theory and racial identity theory are used to explain the role that culture and ethnicity have in the foundations of learning and interactions with others (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2011). These theories are used to understand the self-esteem and identity components that are brought to the classroom by African American children.

Along with this theory there is also the Cultural Mismatch Theory (Boykin, 1994). This school of thought focuses on the belief that cultural characteristics that students of color possess may be at odds with cultural features of a largely, white, middle class teaching population and so a cultural mismatch is a main factor in the underachievement of students of color. Culturally diverse and low-income students are not cognitively deficient, but are just different in their cultural and cognitive abilities (Boykin, 1994).

A mixed methods study was conducted by Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2011) that explored the preferences of African American children toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons through a six-week series of history lessons. The findings revealed that African American children did prefer lessons that were culturally relevant. Another study, by Brown & Medway (2007), examined the roles of school climate, teacher expectations, and instructional practices in an elementary school that had high academic success for both poor and minority students. The findings suggested that one of the key factors in the instructional practices used by teachers was that there was a major emphasis on integrating multicultural instruction with the curriculum so that lessons were more culturally relevant (Brown & Medway, 2007).

According to research by McDougal (2009), many reading programs don't consider the culture and individuality of African American males as the basis for curriculum design and development. They also don't offer socially and culturally relevant strategies for teachers to differentiate their instructional practices to better meet the needs and interests of African American males. Cultural responsive teaching can assist in helping African American males be more academically successful.

Deficit-Based Thinking (Valencia, 1997) is another school of thought related to culture. This theory holds that poor schooling performance is based on students' cognitive and motivational deficits. So, students who struggle academically are seen as culturally, cognitively, or linguistically deficient. Teachers who practice this seek to strip students of their cultural knowledge and replace it with mainstream cultural norms (Valencia, 1997).

The last theory to be presented in this study is the opportunity gap theory (Anyon, 2005). Opportunity gap theory is the belief that the primary reason the achievement gap continues to exist is the limited access to important educational resources that have a significant influence on school quality (Anyon, 2005). Not having access to skilled teachers and quality curriculum can contribute to lower educational outcomes for African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This theory is based on the history of inequalities that have existed throughout history in education in the United States.

Student Learning Styles

Since there are increasingly large numbers of African American children who are not successful in school, Willis (1989) suggests that more attention should be devoted to developing ways in which they can effectively learn, achieve, and be empowered. One way to do this is by focusing on the learning styles of African American students (Willis, 1989). According to Willis (1989), African American children generally learn in ways characterized by factors of social/affective emphases, harmony, holistic perspectives, expressive creativity, and nonverbal communications. African Americans have been strongly influenced by their heritage and culture. Consistent with research from Willis, Webb-Johnson (2002), suggested that in general, African American students benefit more often from instructional activities that are highly

stimulating. They do not benefit as much from lectures and teacher centered activities. African American males in particular respond better in instructional environments that offer more energy, movement and interaction (Webb-Johnson, 2002).

Since African American life and cultural style are very holistic, an African American child's energy, spirituality, time perspective, and expressiveness are often involved in a learning situation (Boykin, 1983). Boykin described nine specific dimensions that are expressed by African Americans and have their origin in the African belief system that has influenced the learning style of African Americans. Some of these dimensions include spirituality, harmony, movement, energy, affect, communalism and expressive individualism (Boykin, 1983).

Work by Shade (1983) compared African Americans and Caucasians on various dimensions and differences. The learning styles observed by Shade (1983) were also similar to those that Boykin (1983) observed. African Americans had more of an affective focus as opposed to a physical focus. In social interactions African Americans focused more on the people and Caucasians focused more on the task demands of the situation. African Americans were also seen as more field dependent and Caucasians were more field independent, preferring external structure, being people-oriented, and thinking intuitively.

Shade (1983) looked at whether there was a difference in achievement for students with different learning styles. Shade found that high achievers were more field independent, object-oriented (focused on objects and things), and analytical thinkers. The low achievers were field dependent, person-oriented, and perceptual/sensory processors. Shade (1983) concluded that there seems to be a learning style that may facilitate school achievement. The more successful learning style is similar to Caucasian students' preferred style and the style of low achievers is

more similar to African American students' preferred style. Shade's work is consistent with Boykin's. This leads to many implications and questions about the role of instruction in the academic success of African American students.

Ford (et al., 1995) states that although individuality should also be taken into account, African Americans often differ from Caucasian Americans in cognitive abilities and cognitive styles (Ford et al., 1995). Research suggests that the following learning styles are typically evident among African Americans (Ford et al., 1995). These learning styles are also consistent with research by Shade (1983) and Boykin (1983).

- Preference of kinesthetic/tactile learning
- Preference for subdued light over bright light
- Greater reliance on visual rather than auditory input
- Positive response to music and rhythm
- Greater response to cooperative learning

According to research by Taylor (1997), individuals from certain cultures show a preference for certain learning styles over others and this preference can affect classroom performance. Schools must consider that students can have a preferred learning style (Taylor, 1997). Teachers need to alter their teaching methods so that they can accommodate for the various learning styles of African American male students. It is also important to do a learning styles inventory and devise lessons that will motivate the African American male learner. "The use of the contextual learning strategy is a learning style that fits African American children who perceive the world holistically. It is used by children who place great value on interpersonal dynamics" (Ford, et.al., 1995)

Kunjufu (2005) also indicated that African American males have different learning styles. According to his research it was suggested that many African American males are right brain learners, kinesthetic learners, more impulsive responders, and can benefit from cooperative learning.

Taylor (2005) conducted a study which explored the perceptions of African American male students about the instructional strategies used in the middle school classroom. Utilizing focus group discussions and questionnaires, Taylor was able to determine common themes that emerged as a result of the interviews and questionnaire results. African American students preferred lessons that were fun and exciting. They preferred hands-on activities that addressed kinesthetic and tactile modalities. They also liked to work in a cooperative group setting rather than a competitive one. Students also made reference to the importance of teachers breaking down ideas into smaller components when teaching a skill.

This same learning style was referenced in a study by McDougal (2009) as well. McDougal called it the “Break It Down” style. In this method teachers break down the steps into understandable language and show how to do a particular task, rather than just orally explain it. The participants in this study had a strong preference for practical, demonstrative explanations of new concepts and information that are directly related to their everyday realities. Teachers should use a hands-on method and provide students with a constant explanation of what the students are learning. Findings suggest that students would benefit from problem-based strategies and culturally relevant instructional techniques.

Student Beliefs

In addition to the research presented about preferred learning styles of African American males, there is also an abundance of literature about the beliefs African American male students have about learning and academic achievement. It is important to gain insight about the perceptions African American male students have about themselves and what they believe can assist them in becoming academically successful. In the study conducted by Taylor (2005) the majority of the participants wanted teachers to connect the importance of the curriculum to real life. This was also suggested in a study conducted by Hollins et al. (1994) in which the instructional methods that were most successful were those that focused on making meaning out of content. In the study by Taylor (2005) all participants felt that they needed motivation and encouragement from their teachers to succeed. There are teacher qualities that will help African American students perform well academically. Teachers should use a friendly, firm and calm manner when informing them of expectations and procedures. Students should also be given feedback and praise in order to encourage them (Ford et al., 1995). Obiakor (1994) also suggested that teachers should help students discover their intrinsic motivation and give feedback to students.

African American students also felt that either being a role model as well as having a role model to look up to was also an important factor for academic achievement. Some participants had an internal feeling of motivation when they discovered they were role models. They felt encouraged when they knew someone was watching them (Taylor, 2005). Many participants in this study also expressed that they felt school was boring and a waste of time. They felt that teachers did not explain material to them in an understandable way. They believed that teachers moved too quickly to the next concept and often talked too fast and not clearly enough. They

feel like there's a lack of trust and teachers often try to belittle or embarrass students. The teachers' attitudes affected students' attitudes (Taylor, 2005).

As pointed out earlier in the literature review, reading continues to be a significant area of concern for African American males. It is interesting to point out that boys and girls often have different beliefs about their reading preferences (Husband, 2012). Boys prefer action, non-fiction, scary fairy tales, super heroes, and humor. Most children's literature used in most early childhood and elementary classrooms doesn't embody themes and characters that boys prefer. African American boys aren't reading as much at school because they don't have access to texts that appeal to them. This is yet another potential factor contributing to the reading underachievement in African American boys. They don't read texts available to them because most are socially and culturally irrelevant and inauthentic. They don't reflect African American males' social and cultural backgrounds. This in turn leads to disengagement (Husband, 2012).

When it comes to reading, teachers and schools should try to increase the number of culturally relevant reading texts available for African American males. Teachers need to integrate nonfiction texts with African American males as the main character. Teachers should also look for and integrate literature with African American boys that present concepts and events from the perspectives of other African American people (Husband, 2012). Teachers, administrators, and other school officials need to work together to create new strategies and new structures for reversing and eliminating the trend in reading underachievement for African American males.

Another belief that is prevalent in the literature by African American males is that many teachers already have low expectations for African American males and their academic

achievement (Haddix, 2009). Thus, a “failure” perspective is often emphasized. Teachers who hold low expectations toward African American males are likely to teach in ways consistent with low expectations (Steele & Aronson, 1995). They will rely more on lower-level texts, worksheets, and drill and skill rather than on higher-level texts and instructional strategies during instruction.

Another key point is that African American males who are removed from class or school on a consistent basis due to suspension may not acquire the reading skills needed to become proficient readers. Thus, it is the belief of many African American males that teachers should be willing to adopt culturally responsive literacy approaches that center on high expectations, use active teaching methods, and offer positive perceptions of students’ cultural backgrounds (Callins, 2006).

Research by Taylor (2005) suggests that African American males are concerned about teacher attitudes. They want teachers to show more patience when teaching and demonstrate concern and care by letting them know they support their academics. They also want to have a meaningful and personal relationship with their teachers. Research conducted by Colbert (2011) suggests one of the most important factors in the success of African American males in elementary school is the emphasis placed on building a relationship between the teacher and student.

Instructional Teaching Strategies and Teacher Beliefs

“Teachers need to use a variety of instructional strategies and learning activities which offer students opportunities to learn in ways that are responsive to their learning styles” (Hopkins, 1997). According to Ford et al. (1995), there are four specific traits teachers should

possess if they are going to teach African American children (Ford et al., 1995). The first trait is to have self-understanding. The teacher should see herself as part of each child's life. The teacher should maintain awareness and control of his/her own prejudices. The second trait is to be child focused. The teacher should like working with children, praise them, make expectations known, and enhance their self-worth and self-esteem. The third trait is to have professional knowledge. The teacher should know the subject being taught and be able to relate it to the child's life experiences. Finally, the last trait is to be culturally sensitive. The teacher should draw upon cultural experiences of the child and family to include authentic cultural perspectives in the curriculum. The teacher should use the child's culture to help create meaning and understanding of the world.

Obiakor (1994) suggested that teachers should help minority students develop positive self-concepts. They should identify traits that help students understand who they are, what they believe in, and how to set goals that are realistic. Teachers should find and develop students' intrinsic motivation to help them aspire to work hard to reach their goals and take pride in their successes. Mental frameworks need to be changed so that minority or at-risk students can achieve their goals and objectives. Having high expectations is the one most important element in increasing African American achievement in school (Obiakor, 1994).

Research conducted by Ford et al. (1995) suggests the learning activities presented by the teacher when instructing African American males should be divided into three groups. These groups are interactive activities, mnemonic activities, and movement for learning activities. These activities reflect the learning styles of African American males. Interactive activities include computer, manipulatives, hands-on, kinesthetic and group learning activities.

The mnemonic activities involve repeating information orally and using acronyms or acrostics to stimulate recall. Mediated learning also falls under this heading and involves matching associated images to information to provoke recall. Iconic learning activities use pictures and figures of important data to assist with memory recall.

The final group of activities are movement activities and involve theatrics, rhythmic, locomotion, and creative content construction. Activities such as, stepping, clapping, singing, and dancing promote creativity.

As teachers prepare to teach African American students, cultural sensitivity must be addressed. Understanding students' lives allows the teacher to increase the importance of lessons and design examples that are more meaningful. When cultural sensitivity is made a priority teachers appreciate and positively accommodate similarities and differences as it relates to the student's culture and race. (Ford et al., 1995).

According to Ford et al. (1995) effective teachers should draw upon cultural experiences of the child and family in order to include cultural perspectives in the curriculum. They should possess a list of varied teaching styles and adjust them to accommodate individual learning styles. Teachers should also maintain a high rate of academic engagement and help children appreciate and deal with differences. Teachers must take a culturally responsive teaching approach. This means incorporating the daily experiences and culture of students into the context of the learning environment. Teachers need to become researchers of their students and their communities in order to align the curriculum and instruction with the culture of the students (McDougal, 2009).

Based on a study conducted by Colbert (2011), it is important for teachers to differentiate the curriculum to make it appropriate for all levels. The instruction should be differentiated to meet the needs of all students. Instruction, when appropriate, should be individualized and culturally relevant. Teachers should also build relationships with African American males in order to authentically engage them. It is important for teachers to understand the impact of race and the obstacles race creates for African American males. Teachers should understand the socio-economic conditions of students as well as the learning styles students possess. Teachers must use this information to determine how to effectively engage students. Respect and concern must be shown. Teachers should not make statements that would indicate they don't see the race of a student. It is extremely important that teachers see the race of students and align instruction so that it is culturally relevant.

Cooperative learning has also been documented in the research as an effective teaching strategy to use with African American students (Ford et al., 1995; Haynes & Gebreyesus, 1992). African American students do well in cooperative learning situations because this approach is consistent with the cultural norms, social learning values and reward structures of their homes and communities (Haynes & Gebreyesus, 1992). In a qualitative study conducted by Wilson-Jones & Caston (2004) the effect of cooperative learning on the academic achievement of elementary African American males in grades three through six in a rural school in Mississippi was studied. The results suggested that almost all participants indicated they preferred to learn by working in groups. This method of learning appeared to be the most conducive for academic achievement for this group of African American students.

Brown & Medway (2007) conducted a study that examined the roles of school climate, teacher expectations, and instructional practices in one elementary school in South Carolina.

This school in South Carolina was selected because it had been very effective in overcoming the educational barriers faced by the poor and minority children. The findings suggest that teachers can best meet students' needs by working to create mutually supportive educational environments, using flexible instructional strategies, encouraging a close working relationship with parents and families, and advocating for additional professional development in the area of diversity. The teachers at this school had a sense of collegial cohesiveness. They also used an interactive and hands-on approach to curriculum instruction. The teachers believed that all students can learn and communicated this message that all students will be successful. The teachers at this school had high expectations for all and believed parents played a vital role in student success.

Culture and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

What role does culture play with the academic achievement of African American males? Culture is important because it shapes all aspects of daily living and activities. Culture includes our values, norms, customs, and the way a social group survives (Howard, 2010). It is important to determine how culture plays out in schools and connects to various types of knowledge. It is the mainstream academic knowledge that can be problematic for culturally diverse students.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that for low-income African American students, academic struggles are often attributable to the disconnect that exists between their own cultural knowledge and that of the one valued at school. In a study conducted by Delpit (1995) it was found that many students from culturally diverse backgrounds felt they must suppress their own racial identity or cultural knowledge in order to achieve academic success in school.

Culturally responsive pedagogy has gained increased attention over the past ten years as a way to rethink the instructional practices teachers use in an effort to improve the educational performance of those cultural groups, such as African American males, who are not performing well academically (Gay, 2000). Culturally pedagogy is more than just a way of teaching. It is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, and family. It is a framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural knowledge that is brought to our schools. Developing a greater awareness and comprehensive understanding of race and culture can improve educational outcomes (Howard, 2010).

In a study conducted by Sampson & Garrison-Wade (2011), both culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons were administered to students in an ethnically diverse high school in Colorado. Study results revealed statistically significant findings for African American children's preferences for culturally relevant lessons. Recommendations were made for educators to promote academic achievement through the use of culturally relevant lessons and curriculum.

Summary

This literature review clearly demonstrates the historical background of the academic achievement gap. There are various theories provided to explain why the achievement gap has been in existence for African American males over the past twenty years. Despite current programs and policy initiatives African American males continue to be overrepresented on most measures of school failure.

This literature review provides insight into the current research about how learning styles, teacher and student beliefs as well as specific instructional strategies can have a positive effect on the academic success of African American males. The research suggests there are specific learning styles African American males prefer. When teachers adjust their instructional strategies so the learning styles of African American males are at the forefront, academic success can be possible. Educators must value the importance of culture and the use of culturally responsive teaching to educate African American students. In schools where African American male students are successful, culturally relevant teaching practices are evident.

The next chapter will focus on the methodology for the study. The study will focus on the instructional practices and beliefs both students and teachers have about the academic success of African American male students at the elementary level.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the instructional practices as well as teacher expectations, beliefs, and attitudes that either contribute or do not contribute to the academic success of African American students. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the specific practices that effectively meet the needs of African American male students at the elementary level. This study used a qualitative research design and a collective case study approach. Ten students and three teachers at an elementary school located in central Virginia were the participants in this qualitative study. The methods section will first provide information about the research design and rationale for this type of study. It will be followed by information about the participants, the instrumentation/measures, procedures, and data analysis. The methods section will conclude with a discussion on the limitations of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research methods can offer an abundant amount of specific data about a smaller number of cases and people (Patton, 2002). When using qualitative methods the researcher can examine selected issues in great depth by giving careful attention to detail and context (Patton, 2002). In general, qualitative researchers study a phenomenon in an open-ended way. There are no prior expectations and hypotheses and theoretical explanations are based on the interpretations of what the researcher observes (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Qualitative researchers see human behavior as dynamic and changing. They believe in studying human behavior in depth and over an extended period of time (Johnson & Cristensen, 2012).

This qualitative approach applies to this study because there were a small number of participants who provided in-depth and detailed information related to the research question. More specifically, a collective case study design was used in this study. Students were the primary cases. However, in order to also gain insight from the teachers' perspectives three teachers were also interviewed as a part of this study. Case study research is a form of qualitative research that is focused on providing a detailed account of one or more cases (Johnson & Cristensen, 2012). A case is defined as a bounded system. It can be a group, a person, a classroom or even an organization. Not only can it be an object or entity, it can also include an event, an activity, or a process (Johnson & Cristensen, 2012). The collective case study is also called the multiple-case design. It is used when the researcher believes he or she can gain more insight into a research topic by concurrently studying multiple cases in one research study (Johnson & Cristensen, 2012). The qualitative data from this study will be able to provide direct quotations about people's personal perspectives and experiences. Detailed, thick description will also be provided. The researcher will have direct contact with and be able to get close to and establish a relationship with the people, situation, and phenomenon under study.

Another reason for using this approach is that there are other researchers who have also used this type of research design when studying similar questions related to the academic success of African American male students (Brown & Medway, 2007; Colbert, 2011; Hucks, 2011; Kincaid & Yin, 2011; Taylor, 2005). The researchers in these studies used either in-depth interviews, observations, focus group interviews or a combination of these methods to obtain data from students and/or teachers about their perceptions about the academic success of African American males. For example, in the Brown and Medway (2007) study, the roles of climate, teacher expectations, and instructional practices were examined by using teacher interviews and

classroom videotaping. The data was then analyzed and coded. The results from the study suggested that engaging instruction, high parent involvement, and multicultural instruction were key aspects as to why the school produced high achievement outcomes for poor and minority children.

In the Taylor (2005) study, interviews and observations of 12 African American males, two teachers, and school administrators in a middle school setting were used as the instrument measures. A multiple case study approach was used to examine the student's perceptions and beliefs about learning styles and instructional strategies. The results from this study suggested African American males have specific learning styles that, when used, can improve their academic success. The research also suggested that teachers need to use a variety of instructional strategies that will match the needs of their African American students. The detailed information that can be learned from observations and interviews is the reason why this study will also be qualitative in nature. When there is direct contact with the participants, a valuable trusting relationship can be established between the participants and the researcher.

There are several advantages to studying more than one case. The first advantage is that a comparative type of study can be conducted in which several cases are compared for similarities and differences. Secondly, it is easier to test a theory by observing the results of multiple cases. The third advantage is that a researcher is more likely to be able to generalize the results from multiple cases than from a single case (Johnson & Cristensen, 2012). Thus, it is the belief for this study that more insight can be gained into the instructional practices that affect the academic achievement of African American males by using a collective case study approach.

Participants

An elementary school in central Virginia was selected for this study. This school will be assigned the pseudonym of Sunny Hills Elementary School to maintain the confidentiality of teachers and students. Sunny Hills is located in a city in central Virginia. Sunny Hills has an enrollment of 468 students. It serves students from pre-school to fifth grade. Twenty-nine percent are Caucasian, 48% are African American, 7% are Hispanic, 9% are Asian, 6% are two or more races and 1% is Native American. The majority of students are considered economically disadvantaged. Ten percent of students receive special education services. There are 22 classroom teachers, four special education teachers, four resource teachers (art, music, library, and P.E.) one technology specialist, one social worker, three reading specialists, one reading coach, one guidance counselor, four support staff, eight teacher assistants, one assistant principal, and one principal. The teaching staff is predominantly Caucasian. There are only four teachers who are African American.

Sunny Hills Elementary is considered a Title I school-wide assisted school. It is accredited with warning according to the state's accreditation status and considered a focus school. Results from the 2013 Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessment indicated that the percentage of all students in grades 3, 4, and 5 who passed English was 73%. Seventy-seven percent of Caucasian students passed and 49% of African American students passed. The math results decreased drastically throughout the state of Virginia for the 2012 as well as 2013 SOL assessments. At Sunny Hills Elementary 58% of all students passed, 69% of Caucasian students passed, and 38% of African American students passed.

Sample size and sampling strategies are based on prior decisions about the unit of analysis to study (Patton, 2002). The units of analysis for this research included the viewpoint of teachers and students. Previous case studies related to this research topic have used African American male students as the participants from the upper elementary to high school age range (Brown & Medway, 2007; Colbert, 2011; Kincaid & Yin, 2011; Taylor, 2005). This study used purposeful sampling to select participants. In purposeful sampling the researcher specifies the characteristics of the targeted population. Then the researcher locates the individuals who have those characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

The targeted groups for this study were three 5th grade teachers and seven 5th grade African American male students at Sunny Hills Elementary School. For the purpose of accessibility and convenience all participants in this study were from the same school. Fifth grade was chosen as the targeted grade level since this grade is an upper elementary grade level. This coincides with the age level of participants of the other studies shared previously in this section. There are only three 5th grade general education teachers at Sunny Hills Elementary School. The students selected for the study were instructed by at least two of these teachers during the school day. All three fifth grade teachers were Caucasian females. Two teachers had taught less than five years and one teacher had taught more than 30 years.

According to Johnson & Cristensen (2012), collective case studies of around ten cases are common. The cases are more instrumentally rather than intrinsically studied. This means that a researcher selects several cases to study in order to see the effects of the phenomenon in several settings. In this study ten African American male students were selected as the student participants. The principal of Sunny Hills Elementary asked the 5th grade teachers to identify five academically successful and five academically unsuccessful African American students by

looking at overall achievement, most recent grades and most recent results on various student assessments. The teachers made the determination of who would be selected to participate in the study.

Before research could begin with the participants, the researcher had to obtain the necessary documentation and approval from the institutional review board (IRB) at the college in order to work with both teachers and children. A full review needed to be secured due to the age of the student participants. Once this was obtained, all student participants and their parents received a letter about the study and were asked to sign a consent form, agreeing for the student informant to participate in the study (see Appendix A and Appendix C). The consent form also explained the study procedures and ethical issues. Selected participants were made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could discontinue participating at any time.

The participants were told that the study would not cause them any mental or physical risk or harm. They were also informed that their grades would not be affected by the information that was shared during the study. Also, the information shared from teachers would not be shared with the building principal or used as a part of their annual teacher evaluation. It was discussed with all participants that their participation would contribute to improving the education of African American males. Once the consent forms were returned there were only seven students who could participate. All of the academically successful students were able to participate. However, only two of the selected students from the unsuccessful group could participate. Two of the parents indicated that they did not want their child to participate in the study and one parent never returned the form. Thus the number of student participants in this study was only seven. Five of the students were considered academically successful and two

were considered academically unsuccessful. All three teacher participants gave their consent to participate.

Instrumentation/Measures

Individual interviews with students and teachers and observations were used to generate discussion about the instructional practices and beliefs that affect the academic achievement of African American males at the elementary level. The interview questions used are tools to help the participants reflect on their own personal experiences as they relate to the research questions. The main purpose of interviewing is to gain valuable information about the other person's perspective (Patton, 2002). In order to gain this insight it was important for the researcher to establish rapport and trust with the participants by having discussions with them even before the interview began.

The three fifth grade teachers were interviewed to learn their opinions and beliefs about the strategies and instructional practices they have used with African American male students. An interview guide, adapted from a study conducted by Taylor (2005), was used to guide the interview with the teachers (see Appendix E). An open-ended eleven question format followed by nine specific questions about learning style was used to encourage the student participants to openly discuss their opinions, feelings, and knowledge. This guide is located in the appendix (see Appendix F).

The students were interviewed once. The interview was an individual interview prior to an observation. The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed for accuracy. Thirty minute classroom observations of the participants were also conducted to determine which instructional strategies teachers used and how the students responded to the instructional

strategies and materials used by the teachers. If further explanations were needed the researcher was prepared to conduct focus group interviews with the participants. According to Patton, (2002), a nonthreatening environment is created when focus group interviews are used. In a focus group setting, students often support one another and this can make it easier for students to respond openly (Patton, 2002). However, due to the wealth of information provided in the student interviews the researcher determined that the focus group questions would be repetitive and not offer any more new information to the study. Thus, focus group interviews were not used in this study. However, the guide for the focus group questions is located in the appendix (see Appendix G).

Procedures

The participants were selected based on the criteria described in the participant section. Once the participants were selected they completed participation consent forms. Due to the age of the student participants, parents also had to complete consent forms for their children to participate. Once the forms were completed the first set of interviews were conducted. All three teachers were interviewed using the teacher interview guide. Next the seven student participants were interviewed. After the interviews were conducted classroom observations took place. The classes that were observed were those led by the teacher participants in the study during the times that student participants in the study were in their classes.

Analysis of Data

In this study, a triangulation of data approach was used. Using information from teacher interviews, student interviews, and classroom observations provided the researcher with data from multiple sources. Triangulation helps in the validity of the study. It helps the researcher

have a better understanding of the findings. “Studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks” (Patton, 2002, p.248).

The data was analyzed using holistic descriptions. The researcher searched for common themes that existed from the interviews and observations that related to the research questions by using a cross-case analysis approach. A coding procedure was used to sort, organize and identify common themes of the research. The data and themes from the observations and interviews will then be presented in the results section of the study.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is the sample size. Since the research was just conducted at one school and with only seven students and three teachers, it is difficult to generalize the findings. It is also a limitation that even within this small sample size, there were only two students identified as low achievers while there were five students representing the high achievers group. More balanced groups would have been the preference. However, consent for student participation was the parent’s decision. Another limitation was that there was no data obtained from African American females in order to determine if gender made a difference with the findings. It should also be taken into account that one of the disadvantages of studying multiple cases is that the depth of analysis has to be sacrificed. When just one case is studied, a deeper understanding of the case is gained than when multiple cases are studied. Therefore, even though you can get comparative information you have to reduce the amount of time you spend on each case.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter represents the data collected from the teacher interviews, student interviews, and classroom observations conducted at Sunny Hills Elementary School. The purpose of the collection of data is to respond to the research question for the study, “What are the instructional practices as well as teacher beliefs, expectations, and attitudes that contribute to the academic success of African American males at the elementary level?” Common themes related to this research questions were identified after an in-depth analysis of the data was conducted.

Findings

The findings from the teacher interviews are presented first, followed by the findings from the student interviews and then the classroom observations. The data from the interviews is arranged by the questions that were asked of the participants. Common themes that emerged within the responses to each question are presented in this section. An overall summary related to the teacher interviews and the student interviews is given after the individual question response data is presented. Finally, data is presented to identify the common themes of best practices that emerged by observing in the classrooms of the teachers in the study. The behaviors of the students in the study as well as the instructional strategies presented by the teachers were observed.

Teacher Interviews

Teacher interviews were conducted on three separate occasions with the three 5th grade teachers at Sunny Hills Elementary. The interview guide used for the teachers is presented in Appendix E. Basic teacher demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Teacher Demographics

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Years of Teaching Experience</i>	<i># of schools</i>	<i>Other Background Information</i>
<i>Teacher A</i>	Caucasian	Female	4	2	Likes working with economically disadvantaged, wanted to be in a Title I school, grew up in a racially diverse environment, has travelled to numerous countries
<i>Teacher B</i>	Caucasian	Female	38	2	Has only been at one other school, worked at Sunny Hills for 37 years, taught DISTAR reading program for one year, has taught all grades, all subjects, all levels of students
<i>Teacher C</i>	Caucasian	Female	1	1	First year teacher, has lived in 18 places in 16 years, very aware of other cultures, has worked as a teacher's aide and as a behavior specialist counselor

Question 1

Describe your background and experiences in education.

The answers from this question are displayed in Table 1. There is no central theme.

However, it should be pointed out that all teachers in the study are Caucasian females with

varied years of experience. Two of the teachers did comment that they have lived in numerous places around the world and feel that they are very aware of other cultures and races.

Question 2

How do you describe your philosophy of teaching?

Every child can learn. Teacher B explained that every child can learn although it may not be at the same pace or at a set pace. She emphasized that every child deserves to learn and that you cannot just write kids off at ten years of age. Teacher C also commented that all children can learn and that the key is catering to their individual needs and finding out how each student learns best. “It’s all about them and how they learn.”

Lessons must be meaningful and practical. The teachers in the study generally felt that lessons should be meaningful and practical and related to daily life as much as possible. It is important to begin the school year focusing on character traits and how to build good character. This is a real skill that is extremely important in your daily life. Teacher A shared that teachers don’t only teach for academic purposes, but for character building as well. “In the beginning of the year, especially, I focus on what character traits will make you the most successful for 5th grade, middle school, high school, college, and beyond into the work environment.”

Students need to develop reasoning skills. Basic math worksheets are not enough. Teacher A commented, “It is important to teach kids how to think through a word problem in math. They have to be able to decide if the answer actually makes sense.” The lessons that are delivered need to relate to what students already know. Developing strong background knowledge is also key. Using inquiry based learning is practical and student centered. Teacher C said that if she can present a lesson that is more hands on that she will always rather do that than have students just look or listen because it is more practical and meaningful.

Both teachers and parents play a huge role in a child's education. The relationship that is established between a teacher and a student is an important part of the success that a student may achieve. It is important for a teacher to encourage children and not give up on them. However, a teacher is just one component of a child's learning. Teacher B said that the parent and the home environment also play a huge part in a child's education.

Question 3

Describe the type of school you are/were working in, including the demographics, population and ability level of the students.

Lower Socio-Economic Status. All three teachers in the study commented that Sunny Hills School had a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. There was a high percentage of African American students at the school and it was felt that many of the African American students lived in single parent homes.

Mixed Ability Levels. All three teachers had students of all ability levels in their classes. They had on level, above level, and below level.

Question 4

What is the challenge or difference in teaching African American males? Give an example of a challenge or difference.

Low self-efficacy. Several of the responses indicated that when African American males get frustrated and are having a difficult time with an issue or a problem they often shut down and decide not to even try. According to teacher A many believe that they are never going to be good at completing certain tasks, so they give up and don't even try. The belief in one's own capabilities and abilities is just not present for many of the unsuccessful African American males. Thus, she felt that her role is to empathize and talk it out and continue to develop a

relationship of trust with her students. Teacher C also pointed out that some of the African American males will shut down when they are not comfortable or not interested. She did not really see it as a difference, but more of a challenge and that it is her job as a teacher to work hard to meet all of her children's needs, no matter the race or gender.

Home/school connection. Home life plays a major role in the success of the African American male. Teacher A said that outside influences are often brought into the classroom. She shared that drama at home or at the bus stop can often be continued in the classroom and when this does happen it can offset the entire day. Teacher B indicated that home to school communication is a big challenge. Getting in contact, maintaining contact, following through, making sure homework is done, and sending back responses is very difficult for some of the parents.

Question 5

Explain the types of instructional strategies you have utilized and administered within the school that have impacted African American student achievement levels.

Grouped Instruction. All the teachers in the study have used some form of grouped instruction successfully. Teachers have used small group instruction during reading and math, cooperative learning groups, and paired grouping as an instructional strategy. Teacher A does a lot of small group instruction. She likes to make heterogeneous groups, especially in math, because she wants her students to have the opportunity to teach each other. Talking out why an answer is correct or not correct helps the students learn the material. Teacher C does a lot of cooperative learning. She has read a lot of studies that indicate that cooperative learning groups work well for African American males because they are given the opportunity to work with others to solve problems and discuss issues. Teacher C also said that the small group instruction

has had good results. She pointed out that she does small guided groups in reading and math using a workshop model. According to her, the African American boys seemed to enjoy it and they really got into it. Teacher C felt that it has been pretty effective.

All three teachers have used the think-pair-share strategy and also feel that this is a highly effective strategy for African American males as they are able to learn from each other.

Daily Assessments. Quick assessments are often used daily to assess if a student has mastered the skill or if they need to go back and review it. The teachers in the study use white boards, every pupil response techniques, exit tickets, daily assignments, and entrance tickets to assess their daily growth of skills. All found these daily assessments to be effective in helping the African American male be successful on a daily basis.

Student Directed Learning. According to the teachers in the study, providing the African American male with choices has had an impact on achievement. This strategy puts learning back in the hands of the students. They have ownership of their learning and what tasks they are going to complete. Many of the teachers use independent work stations as a choice for students during reading and /or math lessons.

Remediation helps. Teachers need to constantly reinforce the lesson with students. It is also important to give second chances and do-overs. If a student did not master the criteria for success it is the job of the teachers to reteach the material until it is mastered. Teacher C shared that if a student has not mastered the skill he/she is put on the list to have one-on-one or small group remediation. She commented that remediation is usually done once or twice a week. Teacher B stated that she has a lot of patience and perseverance and will have remediation groups during recess, lunch time, and after school. She feels it is important to constantly

reinforce things and to give second chances and do-overs in addition to what has already been carefully thought out in the whole group class activity.

Incorporate all types of learning styles. Lessons need to be planned to allow for student differences and to allow for students to use their different modalities. Lessons should be designed to appeal to the hands-on learner, kinesthetic learner, auditory learner and visual learner. According to teacher B, “Generally when I plan a lesson I am thinking about the different modalities so I am making it something that’s visual, auditory, and something that’s tactile. I try to do that in every lesson for every period.” Teacher C commented that she does a lot of hands on learning and a lot of visual learning. It is important to appeal to all of the types of learners in a classroom.

Question 6

What influenced your decision to implement those teaching strategies?

Past teaching experiences. The teachers in the study relied on past teaching experiences to help them determine more effective strategies to use when working with African American males. Teacher A commented that during her first year of teaching she had more difficult students. She learned from that year to always ask herself the following question, “Do I want the work completed and done correctly, or do I want them to look like they are doing it correctly?” Teacher A shared that after that year she now allows her students to choose if they want to sit or stand when doing their work and that she now bases many of her decisions on how to teach students, especially African American males, according to their learning styles.

Research based strategies. Research can be a valuable tool for teachers when determining what will work best for their students. Teacher A has relied on Dr. Wong’s book, *The First Days of School* (Wong & Wong, 2001). She has used this book to guide her in

implementing some of her strategies for her students. The main strategy that has helped is the importance of providing options for students. You provide them with choices. They must choose from what you have determined to be acceptable. Teacher C completed her master's thesis on cooperative learning and thus, had read numerous research studies about the impact on using cooperative learning with African American males.

High expectations. Having high expectations for African American males is important. The teachers in the study all have high expectations and want the African American males to succeed. Teacher B said the following, "I believe in holding their toes to the fire. We have to hold kids accountable. Expectations are in place and kids are accountable for those expectations and our job is to make sure it happens. So do whatever you need to... So remediate, let them fix it, let them redo it, give second chances so they can get it. This is the way life is. You should have a second chance." Teacher B also commented that a teacher's job is to make sure kids complete their work and to give them extra help when needed so they can succeed.

Question 7

What type of resources or information did you use in helping with deciding what remediation instructional strategies to include?

Teacher/Student relationship. The interaction between teacher and student helps the teacher decide what type of remediation strategies will work the best. Teacher B commented that what she has learned in small group interaction with a student is crucial. Although assessment data is important there is no substitute for human interaction. Teachers can match their objectives and expectations with their daily interactions with students.

Assessment Data. All teachers shared the importance of relying on assessment data to determine what needs to be the focus for remediation lessons. Interactive Achievement data, iReady data, exit tickets, entrance tickets, and many other numerous forms of formative assessment data drives the remediation instruction all teachers incorporate into their weekly lesson plans.

Question 8

What instructional strategy has had the greatest impact on African American males' student achievement?

Teacher student relationship. Each teacher in the study gave a different answer for this question. However, after careful analysis of the answers one central theme did emerge. All three answers involved the teacher student relationship. In each case the teachers put the student first and identified what the student needed in order to be successful. A relationship has to be present for a teacher to know what would work best for their students. Teacher A said that providing choices for African American males had the greatest impact. She felt that it is important to put the learning in their hands. When African American male students are allowed to be creative and make learning their own they are more passionate about learning and tend to achieve more. Teacher B felt that a teacher should never give up on students or let them shut down. Giving a second chance and providing remediation along with encouragement that success is achievable is crucial. Teacher C felt that the small group instruction helps teachers really get to know their students and provide more intense student centered instruction.

Question 9

How have African American males benefited from these strategies the most, least and why?

Higher self-efficacy. When students have more ownership and are provided with choices related to their learning they feel more confident about their learning. According to teacher A students feel that they have a say so about their learning. They don't feel like victims and are encouraged to be leaders. Teacher B said that if she had not given second chances to some of her students they would have failed. Remediation and repeated re-teaching helps to build confidence. The students feel successful and realize that the teachers have not given up on them. Teacher C shared that students have gotten more excited about learning when they are able to talk and interact with one another in cooperative groups. This also builds confidence and helps the African American male students look forward to class and the activities and feel more successful. Teacher C additionally stated that her students like small group instruction like that provided in the math workshop format. The grades for all of her students, including the African American males, started increasing when more small group instruction was implemented.

Question 10

Tell me what types of documents you analyzed to determine if the teaching strategies had been implemented.

Formative assessments drive instruction. All teachers in the study used various forms of formative assessments to determine if the teaching strategies had been effective and what needs to be altered so that students can be successful. Teacher A shared that she uses exit tickets, homework checks, independent work samples, finished writing products, and many teacher made tests. Teacher B stated, "I constantly assess on a daily basis. I spend a lot of time every night, every weekend, grading papers, and staying on top of what is needed to be checked and evaluated." She uses assessments such as state and local assessments as well as teacher made

ones like exit tickets and quick checks. Teacher C also uses exit tickets, homework assignments, tests, and quizzes to assess and determine if the teaching strategies have been effective.

Question 11

What time span do you think is appropriate to administer these techniques before seeing results?

Students learn at their own pace. Each teacher gave a different answer to this question. The overall theme is that each child is different and learns at his/her own pace. With some strategies you see immediate results and some strategies have to be in effect longer before you can see results. Answers ranged from daily, weekly, to monthly.

Question 12

List the pros and cons you feel are a result of these interventions.

Relationship building. There was an overall theme that there are more positive relationships between students and students, students and teachers as well as parents and teachers when these interventions are implemented. Teacher B said, “The kids realize you want to help them and you want them to do better. Parents realize you are helping their child to be successful by giving second chances and extra remediation.” Teacher C commented that children like learning from each other and that children of mixed ability can learn from each other.

Excitement about learning. Another theme was related to the excitement students have when they are able to work in cooperative groups and small guided groups. According to the teachers in the study, the students have more confidence and interest increases when they are given the opportunity to learn from each other.

Staying on task. This would be a con as a result of the interventions. One of the drawbacks with having students work in small groups is that sometimes the conversations can start to stray and they are not on task. Teacher C commented that it is sometimes hard to rein them back in and make sure that everyone in the group is on task the entire time.

Question 13

If you could design or implement an instructional strategy that would influence the academic achievement of African American males, what would it be?

Create a connection. All teachers said an answer that was tied to creating some form of a connection. Teacher A pointed out that students need to take more ownership of their learning. Creating project based assignments and connecting more with technology resources would be a way to increase academic achievement of African American males. Teacher B said that teachers need to create an incentive or reward system that was tied to something the students could truly connect. For example, teacher C stated that creating a bond with a positive role model is needed. Students need to know that there are good rewards available when you work hard and make good choices. A role model can help with creating a connection that is good and fulfilling.

Question 14

Have you participated in cultural diversity training?

Socioeconomic status is significant. All teachers had participated in cultural diversity training. All had completed it through their school divisions and one had also participated in training during college. All three teachers said that the significant differences among individuals were more about socioeconomic status than race. All teachers participated in a poverty simulation activity. Teacher A commented that this was a worthwhile experience. "It is easy to

shut off that side of things as a teacher. You need to do your work and that is what I expect...the end... to feel the anxiety the parents and kids go through was a game changer...just to be appreciative of the fact that we just about get all the homework turned in every day is big when life is crazy in some of the neighborhoods the kids are coming from.” In regards to the same simulation activity, teacher B shared that it was an enlightening experience. The activity showed her how hard life is when you don’t have resources, education, guidance or money. “It is not really about black and white. It is about socio economic status.” Finally teacher C added that the simulation experience was very eye opening.

Question 15

How would you rate your knowledge about different cultures and ethnic groups?

High Cultural Awareness. Teachers A and C explained they had lived and traveled in numerous places across the world and felt they were very aware of diversity and different cultures. Teacher A shared she had been to places such as Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, England, India, Turkey, and Mexico. She said she grew up in a very diverse city and didn’t really realize racism existed until she went to college in a city in the south. During her first teaching job she taught in a school that had a global theme and incorporated culturally related activities on an on-going basis. She commented that she often uses her travels as a way to establish relationships with her students. “Using my experiences and other kids who have traveled really takes our conversations to the next level.” Teacher C commented that she would rate her knowledge of other cultures as very high. “Because of the army I moved 18 times in 16 years.” We lived in many different places. We were not necessarily living in poverty, but we were pretty close to it. I can relate to some of the students who are lower income.” Teacher B felt that she was not very strong about the knowledge of other cultures.

Question 16

How do you identify students' learning styles?

Relationship Building. The overwhelming theme with all three teachers was that although an interest or learning styles survey can be somewhat helpful, it is what is learned through the teacher student relationship that is the most important when identifying student's learning styles. Teacher A commented you know how your students learn best by working with them, observing them, and establishing a relationship. Teacher B said there is no real test. It is all about watching them and interacting with them. "It becomes clear very soon... who is strong visually, who is auditory, who needs to move, and who needs to touch. So I plan lessons with all these styles in mind." Teacher C shared that although she does give her students a survey in the beginning of the year, it is really an intuitive thing. It is by just getting to know the kids that you learn how they learn best.

Question 17

How do you build relationships with students from other cultures?

Show true interest. All teachers felt that building relationships with students from other cultures is no different than building a relationship with any student. The key is to establish a relationship by showing students you are sincerely interested in them. Teacher A said, "Talk to them about their beliefs. Use reading time and vocabulary time if appropriate to let students share their background experiences." Teacher B said she does not do anything unique. She just takes time to discuss items or ask questions during recess or lunch. Teacher C commented you have to get to know them. Try to know what is going on in their lives. It is important to know their backgrounds.

Question 18

Is incorporating culturally responsive instruction a part of your weekly lesson plans?

Differentiation of Instruction. The teachers in the study discussed more the importance of differentiating the lessons to address all levels as well as the importance of knowing the needs of the students when planning a lesson. At times, this might lead to a more culturally diverse lesson or activity. However, there was not a lot of emphasis on selecting specific culturally related materials. It was stated that they are required to use the stories in the reading series so they do not have as much choice in this area. However, many of the stories have diverse families and themes in them. Teacher B stated, “Yes, so I won’t be offensive or single any one out, but not specifically by picking out something like a book or activity for someone’s culture.”

Question 19

How often do you incorporate the following instructional strategies in your lessons? (think-pair-share, differentiation, performance-based assessments such as skits, speeches, and presentations, culturally related activities, and cooperative style interactions)

Daily interventions. All teachers in the study said they incorporated differentiation in their daily instruction. They were able to answer this quickly without any hesitation.

Weekly interventions. According to the teachers in the study both think-pair-share as well as cooperative groups are done at least two to three times each week.

Rarely/Seldom used interventions. Performance-based assessments as well as specific culturally related activities are not done on a regular basis. Teacher A shared she would like to incorporate more performance based assessments. She indicated she will have students make things and do numerous hands-on projects but not oral presentations. Teacher A also felt she is not able to incorporate as many culturally related activities due to the time factor and the

pressure to follow the school's pacing guide. Teacher B commented because she teaches math she tries to communicate to them that math is really a universal language because all cultures follow the same rules and guidelines for math. Again it was brought up during the interview that all teachers must use the reading materials provided for them as part of the reading series and so they don't have the choice to pick other books and stories that might be more culturally relevant to a particular culture.

Question 20

What do you believe is the most important thing educators can do to help close the academic achievement gap for African American males?

Relationship building. All teachers in the study discussed the importance of building a relationship. Teacher A commented that teachers need to establish relationships. They should get to know their students and visit them in their neighborhoods. Teachers must get to know their students so they know how to teach them so they can be successful. Teacher A said:

The boys see me a lot outside of school and so they forget I am the big bad evil teacher. I know they don't really think that. The first couple times they were like what is she doing here, then everyone is asking questions, but now they say why weren't you here this week?, when are you going to come see us again? I think it hits home for the kids in the whole grade level that I am not just here. I am truly invested. .. I promised five of the boys in this study that I would go to one of their games per sport because they invited me. I was like, yeah, I will be there. I think it makes a difference. It shocks them that a teacher wants to see them outside of school... just because. I never really thought of it until the younger kids say I have seen you in the neighborhood. I really do value who they are going to become, not just are you an A, B, C, or D student.

Teacher B also emphasized the importance of relationship building by stating the following:

Just getting to know the students and getting to know what they need. Not all African American male students in the smaller groups are going to be the same, so it's just absolutely getting to know them and what their home life is like, so you can kind of cater your demeanor towards what they need.

Encouragement. Another prevalent theme among the three teachers was the importance of providing encouragement and believing in the students. Teacher A shared it is all about getting the boys to truly believe they have the ability and they can be successful. Teachers need to be their cheerleaders. We have to teach them not to give up on themselves. Teacher B pointed out the most important thing is just not to give up. She said:

I mean I just get very disheartened especially in elementary school when there is a prevailing attitude of they are just never going to. They are not gonna, they can't, they won't, their momma didn't before them, their grandma didn't, Cause I can certainly think of the examples of kids who can certainly rise above their circumstances if they are given the right opportunities.

Teacher C said we should have expectations for the African American males and not lower them. We need to encourage them to meet the expectations.

Engagement. It is all about making learning meaningful, fun, and engaging. According to teacher C teachers need to do whatever it takes to engage students and make learning fun and interesting. Teacher C said:

I have no problem making a fool of myself in front of kids. I try to be humorous. If there is something I can do to try to engage them more I will do it. I don't care what it is. I am

willing to do whatever it takes. I just have fun when I am teaching. If I think it's boring then they will think it is boring too.

Home School Connection. The parental piece is a big component to the success of students. Both the school and the parent have to work together for students to achieve success in most cases. Teacher B stated the following:

The parental piece, the parental involvement, and the parental expectations are big. The high achievers' parents are in communication with me unsolicited. They have expectations and they monitor versus the other end of the spectrum who I rarely hear from.

Question 21.

What other information do you feel should be included in this interview?

This question did not offer any central themes as the information shared was already addressed in previous questions.

Teacher Interview Summary

Common themes emerged from the teacher interviews related to the research question. The themes are from the perspective of the teachers. The next section will provide the data from the student interviews and the common themes that emerged from these interviews. The recurring themes as they related to the instructional practices and beliefs of the teachers in this study who work with African American male students are as follows:

General Beliefs of Teachers:

1. Every child can learn, but at his/her own pace.

2. Lessons must be meaningful, practical, and engaging.
3. The home school connection is important. Teacher and parents play a huge role in a child's academic progress.
4. High self efficacy is important. If a student believes he can do it he will be more successful.
5. Low self efficacy and low achievement are related.
6. Cultural awareness is important.
7. Understanding poverty is crucial.
8. Teachers must have high expectations for all students.

Instructional Practices of Teachers to benefit the African American male student:

Teachers currently:

1. Differentiate instruction.
2. Create meaningful connections with students/relationship building.
3. Assess students daily and weekly through formative assessments.
4. Incorporate learning styles.
5. Remediate on a daily basis.
6. Use student directed learning.
7. Use past teaching experiences.
8. Use research based strategies.
9. Engage and excite students.
10. Use small group instruction.
11. Use cooperative groups and think-pair-share.

Student Interviews

The 5th grade teachers were asked to select 10 African American male students to participate in this research study. Of the ten selected, five were considered high achievers and five were considered low achievers. Only seven students were given parental permission to participate. All five students from the academically successful group participated. Only two students participated from the academically unsuccessful group. Two did not have parental permission and one never brought the form back even with numerous parent contacts. During the interviews they were asked to provide background information as a part of question 1. The data will be organized by the questions, followed by the central themes for each question. There will be a student summary provided. The information from the class observations will be the last set of data reported in chapter four. The basic demographic information for the student participants is included in Table 2.

Table 2

Student Demographics

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Likes to do</i>	<i>Wants to be</i>	<i>High or low achiever</i>
<i>Greg</i>	11	5th	Basketball, football	NBA player, engineer	high
<i>Marcus</i>	11	5th	Basketball, video games	NBA player, engineer	high
<i>John</i>	11	5th	Basketball	NBA player, surgeon	high
<i>Xavier</i>	11	5th	Basketball, soccer	NBA player, doctor	high
<i>Robert</i>	11	5th	Basketball, football	NBA player, technology	high
<i>Damion</i>	11	5th	Football, basketball	NFL player, scientist	low
<i>Nick</i>	11	5th	Sports, Xbox	Football player, not sure	low

Question 1

Tell me about yourself by explaining your grade, age, things you like to do, what do you want to be when you grow up?

Sports is important. The central theme that emerged in relation to this question, was that sports was important to all seven boys. There was no difference between the high achievers and the low achievers. All seven boys indicated that they currently play sports and would all like to be a professional basketball or football player later in life. All students wanted to go to college, but still wanted to play a sport professionally as their career goal. When asked about other goals if sports didn't work out, two said engineer, two said doctor, one said scientist, and one said a career related to technology. Nick shared that he wanted to be a wrestler. Sports is a definite high interest activity for all the boys.

Question 2

Describe the type of classroom you enjoy and have been successful in learning.

Technology. Three of the students commented on the importance of technology. Xavier commented, "I like computers, iPhones, and tablets. I also like the Smart Board." Nick stated, "The Smart Board helps me be more successful. The Smart Board helps me. They use it for language arts and games. I like jeopardy on the Smart Board."

Fun and engaging. The students in the study liked lessons that were fun and engaging. When asked about what made the lessons fun, Xavier commented they had different events for reaching their goals and that made the lessons fun. Several of the boys mentioned how they enjoyed conducting experiments and making various items. Robert said the classroom he likes is one in which the teacher wants you to learn and to succeed but also enjoys throwing in a little bit

of fun. Robert also pointed out science is fun because of the experiments one of his teachers does on a routine basis.

Hands-on. Lessons that require a hands-on approach were definitely the preferred method of learning for most of the boys in the study. Several of the boys mentioned how much they liked science experiments and being able to use their hands to complete various tasks. Using computers, tablets, other forms of technology, conducting science experiments, and even writing were some of the hands-on activities mentioned. Xavier shared some examples. He said, “In math we did 3 D shapes with marshmallows and toothpicks. In science we did an experiment with vinegar and baking soda in a bottle. We put a balloon over top of it and shook it. That was cool.”

Question 3

Describe the types of things that have motivated and helped you learn.

Family. All of the boys from the higher achieving group reflected on the important influence family members had on them. They wanted to make their family members proud of them and their accomplishments. It should be noted the two students from the lower achieving group did not mention any family member as a source of motivation for them. Marcus stated:

My mom, my dad, they push me extremely hard to go to college and get a good education. My brother will tell me to keep trying and I will understand sooner or later. He’s done a whole lot of things with his life and he just turned them around. He wants me to do well.

John commented that his parents motivated him and they want him to also do well. Robert talked about his uncle. Robert shared, “I only have one uncle who went to college. Every time I do my work, I think of him. He is an inspiration. He is a teacher. The subjects come easy to me,

but my parents still push me to study so I can be successful.” Xavier talked about not wanting to make his mother upset if he did not do well. “My mother... she is my mom and I care about her and I don’t want to see her cry.”

Teachers. All of the boys in the study, except for Damien, shared that teachers are motivators for them as well. Marcus said the following, “The teachers can be motivational too. If you mess up and feel like you are going to give up they will tell you to keep trying and you will understand sooner or later.” Robert commented that his third grade teachers use to always tell him that you should always try to be better than what you used to be. Overall, the boys felt like the teachers were encouraging. The teachers believed in them and didn’t let them give up.

Internal Motivation. The five boys from the successful student group had an internal motivation. They were all motivated by themselves. They all wanted to do well for themselves. They all showed high self-confidence and had their own goals they wanted to reach. So, getting good grades and being on the honor roll were expectations they had for themselves. Greg said:

I think what helps me and motivates me to do something is if there’s always a goal to reach like something you want to get to, you have to do really hard work to achieve it.

That’s the type of thing that like helps me and motivates me to do my work and like try to make all A’s. Like, just a goal or something that you know you really want if you do a really good job. That’s the thing that motivates me. I have made all As my entire letter grade career.

John explained that he felt disappointed in himself when he doesn’t do as well as he wanted. He also felt that he was not only letting himself down, but his parents as well. This is in contrast to Damian, from the lower achieving group, who only listed extrinsic motivators, such as chocolate, food, chips, and football as motivators to help him complete work successfully.

Question 4

List some teaching strategies that you like and have helped you learn. Why do those things help you learn?

Hands-on activities. All seven study participants commented on how much they liked hands-on activities. The boys explained that it was easier to learn something if they were able to create or make something as opposed to just seeing it or hearing it. They also shared that because hands-on activities were usually more fun, attention was maintained and they were able to stay focused and on task. For example, Greg said:

I'm like a hands-on learner. So, I like strategies where they let me actually work. Like not just hearing or visually seeing. Seeing helps but I like to be doing it while they are explaining it to me. Cause I think I learn when I am doing on my own, but not exactly on my own, because groups work too, because I am a hands-on learner. That's just how I learn.

According to John, hands-on activities help you learn the information better. He gave an example of a science lesson. He shared, "Science is more hands-on. One time we had two cups and saran wrap and we put pepper on it and cupped our hands. We were talking about movement and sound. Sound can move stuff!"

Using visuals. The boys in the study, both high and low achieving students, felt that using visuals as a way to teach was helpful. Having graphic organizers, maps, signs, charts, and pictures as parts of lessons helped students make connections and retain information better. The students liked how Smart Boards are used for this purpose in their classrooms. Some students stated that visuals were even more powerful when they were combined with other modalities.

Working Independently. This was a strategy only liked by the high achieving students. The low achieving students did not like working by themselves but really liked cooperative groups and/or working with the teacher. The high achieving students were bothered when they were paired with students who were talkative, unfocused, and could potentially cause them to get in trouble. They didn't seem to mind group work if they were placed in a group with other members who would contribute equally and stay on task. They also liked the idea of being more in control of their learning and making their own choices as to what independent task they had to complete rather than being told to do the task only one way. Robert shared:

Yeah, I like cooperating, but I also like doing things independently. I prefer independent because when I do my work, I like to see what I can do without other people helping me. I also don't like working with kids who are not focused.

Cooperative Learning. As discussed previously this strategy was not preferred by the majority of the students in the high achieving group. They felt it worked better if they could pick who they wanted in their groups. However, the two students from the lower achieving group both liked this strategy. They pointed out they did not like working independently and this way, they could get help and they viewed it as more fun to work with others. It also, in their view, does not take as long to complete work. Another advantage is they can talk with others about their assignments and tasks.

Think-Pair Share. This strategy was liked by two students from each group. Students enjoyed being able to turn to a partner and discuss their answers and thoughts before having to answer the teacher or put an answer on paper.

Fun and engaging lesson. Students expressed the need to have lessons that were engaging, exciting, and helped them stay focused. Depending on the individual student's needs,

this was accomplished in a variety of ways. Using technology, making projects, doing creative writing, being able to get up and move or dance and having a teacher who taught the lesson in an exciting of different way were some of the ways students commented that their lessons were fun and engaging. Greg said, “I like doing projects ‘cause I think it is a way that not only are you learning stuff, but it helps you to really understand how to do certain things.” Nick stated that he liked to get up and move and go to stations. He was also very aware of which classes provided these opportunities and which classes did not. Finally, as another example, there was Damian. Damian talked about being able to do free writes. He said, “In writing , we can make up stuff. I can write about things I like. I write about superheroes and sports.”

Question 5

List the teaching strategies you dislike that are used in class. Why do you dislike them?

Auditory Lessons. There was a central theme from the boys in the study that they did not like lessons that were only auditory. If auditory was combined with other modalities, then it was fine, but by itself was not liked at all. Greg stated the following:

Well, I’ll just say this. I do not like it when all a teacher does is talk. They don’t try to write it out , they don’t use technology or anything like that. All they do is talk. That is not a very good strategy. Because sometimes I just zone out...that’s like the number one strategy I cannot stand!”

Robert commented, “I don’t like when they do the whole class. I mean I don’t like when they are just talking to the whole class the entire time.” John shared his dislike as well:

I don’t like when they just talk in front of you and then they tell you to just write in your notebook what was said. I don’t really get that because it doesn’t help my mind learn. It is harder to get my mind focused on that. I cannot picture in my head what is going on.”

Working Independently. This was not liked by the two students in the lower achieving group. These students preferred to work in a group. They preferred to get help from others as well as their teacher. Damion shared, “I don’t like having to do stuff individually because it takes longer. And when you don’t get finished you will get in trouble for it. It is harder.”

Question 6

How do you feel about learning and school?

School is important. The boys in the study all realized the importance of school and getting an education. The higher achieving students all shared that school is needed for future goals such as college or a good job. Greg stated:

Learning is a very important thing because if you don’t know anything and you go out in the real world you’re not going to make it, just gonna be honest, you’re not going to make it. You have to have certain skills, if you are better in something you might want to enhance that more but if you can get a career in it, or if you want to learn something else and you are lacking in it, you should do certain activities and programs and stuff to help you strengthen that. Yeah, I think school is a very important thing. I know for a fact that it will help me in the long run.

School is enjoyable. Five out of the seven said they liked school. They felt their teachers were nice and made learning fun. Not everyone liked having to get up early to come to school, but they still enjoyed it. Marcus commented, “My teachers are very nice. They try to make everything we do as fun as possible.” John said, “I feel really great about school. If we didn’t have school we wouldn’t know anything or have any information in our brains.”

School can be too fast-paced. The two low achieving students felt that the teachers have so much to teach that they teach too fast and sometimes it is hard to get caught up. It can also be difficult to finish assignments on time because there is not a lot of time.

Question 7

What things would you change about class activities that would help you learn better?

Pace of lessons. The students pointed out the need to slow down the pace and not move to the next topic so quickly because everyone might not have it. One student talked about the need to have more brain breaks and also to allow the students to make some of the choices as far as working independently or with a group. Marcus stated, “Well, one of my teachers teaches kind of fast. She is like, okay you don’t have it, well we have to go to the next thing, we don’t have enough time.” Greg shared, “Every now and then you feel like you are learning too much and I just need a break. I need for my brain to rest so it doesn’t go on overdrive.”

More visuals and more hands-on activities. Students commented that it would be helpful to have more presentations and special speakers. Experiments and more computer time would be a positive change as well. John said:

I would want to put more posters up in our classrooms to help us learn about stuff and help us to remember stuff. I would have more electronic stuff to help us remember better like the Smart Board.

Nick also said, “We need to do more of our class work on computers.”

More help/remediation. The two students in the lower achieving group wanted more help. They wanted to have more small group time with their teachers. They wanted to spend more time reviewing the information with the teacher. They also shared they liked having some station

learning time because they like being able to get up and move. One of the students also would like to have less homework.

Question 8

How do you feel about completing assignments as an individual, working in groups, creating projects, and open discussions?

Independent assignments. Four of the five students from the higher achieving group preferred to complete assignments as an individual. These students felt that it was easier to get tasks done quickly and correctly when working by themselves. They felt good and confident when working independently. Marcus stated “I feel like when I work individually I will get it done. Sometimes I will ask the teacher for help and she will help me and then I am back on my own.” One of the students from the lower achieving group commented, “Doing work independently is frustrating.”

Group assignments. The two students from the lower achieving group preferred working with a group. It helped them get their work done and they liked the time to talk to others. Three of the five higher achieving students didn’t mind working in groups as long as they were working with others who were focused and didn’t get off task. Greg said:

In a group it all depends. It is not just you on your own. It is the knowledge of everyone around you. So sometimes it can be really challenging and other times it can just work and you go with the flow. It all depends on who you are paired with. Friends might talk to you too much. But, you don’t want to be around people you don’t like. You have to balance it out.

Classroom Discussions. Four out of the seven students liked having classroom discussions with classmates and the teacher. John stated, “Oh yes, I like the turn and talks... I

like discussing about stuff, about the story. Sometimes we have to make Venn diagrams and discuss what is different and what is the same about them. We made one today.”

Project-based learning. Three of the seven students liked creating projects. The three students were all from the higher achieving group. The students felt like creating projects puts the learning in their hands. Greg commented, “I like creating projects. I think it is a really good way to learn ‘cause I am more of a hands on learner. So, creating projects I think is a really good strategy to challenge you and help your brain grow.”

Question 9

How and where do you prefer to sit in your classroom?

Seating is based on focusing. There was not one place that all the students preferred. Where students preferred to sit is different for all of these students. Some preferred back, some middle, and some the front. Some preferred in rows and some liked a group format. The overall theme was that five out of the seven students chose to sit where they could focus more, be closer to the teacher, and get their work done. Only two students chose a seat that was near their friends. This included one student in the high achievers group and one in the low achievers group. Marcus shared, “I like to sit in the front so I can focus and not get into trouble with other people.” John liked sitting on the carpet in one of his classes. He commented, “I usually don’t use my desk a lot. I sit on the carpet. The closer I am to the board the more I can learn and see.” Robert added, “I like sitting by myself. I like to sit in the middle of the class. This way I am close to the teacher but I don’t want to be too close to the teacher.” Damian explained, “It helps me to focus if I sit in the front. I don’t talk as much or get into as much trouble.”

Question 10

Tell me about your favorite teacher and why they are your favorite?

Relationship building. All seven students shared that their favorite teacher had a strong connection with them. The teachers bonded with them. They were nice, caring, encouraging, straight forward, trustworthy, and got to know them individually. Two of the students also shared that they had taken time to try and develop a strong relationship with their parents as well. Greg said:

My favorite teacher had a really strong bond with the kids. She was a good teacher. She connected really well with the parents. I know she has a strong bond with the parents with the stuff she talks about and the way she explains how your child is doing. She always tries to have our parents look on like the bright side of things and how they have improved and if they haven't improved how hard she knows they are working to improve.

Robert added, "...will push his students to be better than what they could be. Then it turns out they can achieve more than what they thought they could." He also shared that another favorite teacher from a different year also believed in pushing the students. "She pushes us to be better than what we can be. She encourages us and never puts us down. She is never negative."

Fun and engaging. Lessons by favorite teachers involved hands-on activities, technology, visuals, songs, music, and often cooperative learning. The teachers were excited and liked teaching the students. Damian shared that his favorite teacher was from a previous year. He said, "She would go through everything step by step. She did a lot of visuals. She likes to sing. She sang songs and danced. She let us dance and stuff. She let us do lots of hands on things." John shared that his favorite teacher uses the Smart Board a lot and one time they did this project on how to make a circuit with batteries, some wire, and a light switch. Xavier stated,

“She was always here and she was just fun. I had her in 3rd grade and 4th grade. I liked having her for two years in a row. Everything she did was fun.”

Competent. Students liked teachers who knew what they were teaching and how they were teaching it. They liked teachers who would take their time and break things down in steps. They also liked teachers who were competent with technology. Greg commented, “She knows what she is talking about. She knows what is good for students and what is not. She has wisdom on her side for sure.”

Offers incentives. Five out of the seven students commented that they liked when their teachers offered rewards or incentives for completing various tasks. John stated, “She really wanted us to read a lot. She wanted us to take AR tests and get points. She wanted us to earn the field trip.” Xavier said that his favorite teacher had a hamster and turtle. As an incentive, the hamster and turtle could be held by students if the students got their work done.

Question 11

What other information would you like to share for this interview that will be helpful with teaching others about how to better teach you?

Relationship building. Each student, if he chose to add something, shared an additional item and the items shared all fit in with the theme of building relationships. These are some of the statements the students made:

- I like my teachers and teacher styles, no real complaints.
- My teacher gets to know me and the way I want to be taught.
- Teachers give assessments to see what we know so they know what we need to improve on. They gave us a survey about what we liked.

- My teachers have helped me control my temper this year. This has helped me have better grades and a more successful year.
- My parents talk with my teachers at conferences. They help make sure my homework is done.

Questions 12-20

Questions 12-20 are follow-up questions related to learning style. These questions are located on the interview guide in the appendix. Students were given 2 to 5 multiple choice answers from which to select. This information related to the questions will be grouped by the most common themes that emerged from the questions.

Learning time preference. Four out of the five African American males preferred to learn in the afternoon. Some commented that they were not morning people and were usually still tired in the morning.

Ways to learn. Students varied over their favorite ways to learn and how they learn the best. There was no central theme. However, six out of the seven students did prefer to see the whole idea first before understanding the parts. Four of the students preferred to discover new information and ideas rather than using existing information. This ties in with the need for some of our African American male students to take ownership of their own learning and be creative in their independent projects. Three of the students said they could stick with an activity for a long time and three students said it depended on what the activity was before they could answer. One student shared that he could only stick with an activity for a short time span. Five students prefer to do a hands-on activity to help them remember the information. Students will stick with activities longer if they are fun. Most students would like both exact directions and written

materials to help them learn and finally, all students shared that they could tell by themselves how they were doing academically.

Student Interview Summary

The student interviews provided an abundance of information about what students believed were the important strategies and teacher beliefs that contributed to their academic success. The data from these interviews was coded until centralized themes for each question were discovered. The following is a summary of those common themes as it relates to the academic success of African American male students. The themes have been divided into three groups. These groups are general beliefs of students, instructional strategies, and preferences of students.

General Beliefs of Students

1. Relationship building between teachers, students, and parents is key.
2. School is an important place.
3. School is an enjoyable place.
4. Sports are important to students in this study.
5. Family members and teachers help motivate students.
6. Teachers must be competent.
7. Teachers using a reward and incentive system in the classroom is effective.
8. Auditory teaching by itself is not effective.

Instructional Strategies

These are the types of lessons/instructional strategies the research suggests are beneficial for African American males:

9. Lessons that are fun and engaging.
10. Lessons that incorporate technology.
11. Lessons that involve hands-on activities.
12. Lessons that involve visuals.
13. Lessons that offer remediation for those who need it on a routine basis.
14. Lessons that are broken into steps so the pace is slowed down.

Preferences of Students

15. Successful students had more self-motivation.
16. Non-successful students preferred extrinsic motivators.
17. Successful students preferred independent activities.
18. Non-successful students preferred cooperative group activities.

Classroom Observations

The third component of the data are the centralized themes that were present during the classroom observations conducted after both sets of interviews. The purpose of the observations was to observe the interactions between the students in the study with the teachers in the study as well as to determine what instructional strategies were being used in the classroom to assist in the academic achievement of the African American male students. The researcher based the observation on the following key areas: professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment of learning, learning environment, professionalism and communication, and student progress. Four classroom observations were conducted all on the same day. Although there were only three teachers in the study one teacher's classroom was observed twice in order to make sure all students in the study had an opportunity to be observed.

In all classrooms teachers were professional and mutual respect was evident. Rules and procedures were in place. The teachers communicated the directions clearly and the lessons were planned to address the appropriate grade level standards. The first observation was done in a math classroom that had three of the high achieving students in the class. The teacher used a combination of instructional strategies throughout the lesson. Information was presented visually and auditorily. She incorporated the Smart Board throughout the lesson. One part of the lesson included a short math video that had some singing and music in it. There was whole group and paired learning used during the lessons. Students had to complete various assignments. They had to answer questions orally, share answers with a partner if they chose, write answers down, complete an assessment, and complete a hands-on activity using various math tools. The teacher monitored and gave feedback. The high achieving students were on task, volunteered to answer questions and when given the opportunity to work independently or with a partner, two of them worked independently and one worked with a partner.

The second classroom observed included one student from the lower achieving group. This student was also completing a math lesson. The student sat near the front of class and was quiet and worked on his project at his desk. He followed directions and was on task during the lesson. This lesson was a review and was mostly whole group instruction. Students were completing a hands-on project at their desks. Directions and a visual to look at to guide students with their own project was displayed on the board. There seemed to be good rapport between the teacher and the African American male students in her room. After students completed their project they participated in class formative assessment activity. They used their fingers to indicate if an answer was a,b,c, or d by holding up one finger for a, two for b, three for c, and four for d. The question and choices were displayed on a Smart Board for all to see.

The third classroom included the high achieving students. Most of the lesson was whole group. Students were reviewing vocabulary words from their story for the week. Since most of the lesson was whole group followed by independent work time by all, some of the students were not as engaged and were talkative. The teacher used whole group, visuals, and the Smart board as instructional strategies during the lesson. To explain some of the vocabulary words, the teacher acted out some of the words for students. Once she did this and reminded the class of the rules, the behavior improved.

The fourth classroom was a language arts class and included two of the students in the study. One was in the low achieving group and one was in the high achieving group. During the lesson the teacher used whole group instruction, small group, think-pair-share, independent work time, and a hands-on activity. The low achieving student that was in the study had a very difficult time with staying on task and focusing. The student was talkative to others and could not stay focused or in his seat until the teacher talked to him. Once he began working on a hands-on cut and paste activity he seemed to enjoy it and got back on task. The high achieving student worked at a small guided reading group table with his teacher. He was focused and contributed to the discussion.

The teachers in the classrooms had well planned lessons and incorporated a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the students. Students from their interviews expressed the need for hands-on activities, more visuals, and more technology. All teachers, including the student teacher, did incorporate all of these strategies in their lessons that were observed. Teachers used a combination of whole group, class discussions, partner work, and independent work throughout the various classrooms. There were not any observations made of culturally related lessons or cooperative learning taking place. During the student interviews

students shared that their teachers rarely incorporate culturally related activities in the lessons. Teachers also indicated in their interviews that they had not done a lot with culturally related lessons either. Although not observed in these lessons, cooperative learning groups, as indicated by teachers and students are used quite often in the classrooms. Relationship building is one of the central themes that kept emerging. During the observations it was evident that the teachers knew their students needs and had established positive relationships with the African American boys in the study. In the next chapter the data will be summarized, discussed and conclusions and recommendations will be made in reference to the research question.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

As a review, the purpose of this study is to answer the following question: What are the instructional practices as well as teacher expectations, beliefs, and attitudes that either contribute or do not contribute to the academic success of African American male students? Sadly, the achievement gap for African American male students continues to be an issue in our society. As pointed out previously, African American students, on average, attain poorer academic outcomes on all educational levels and academic areas than their Caucasian counterparts (Lee & Burkam, 2002). Previous research as presented in the literature review provides some insight into potential best practices that could contribute to the academic success of the African American male student.

Discussion

The data that was presented in chapter four will now be discussed in an attempt to answer the research question. The first part of the research question that will be addressed is what must teachers believe if they want African American male students to be successful. The second part is to focus on the actual instructional strategies that need emphasis. To answer this, data from both sets of interviews and classroom observations require analysis. The themes that were summarized in chapter 4 can be grouped into even broader themes or categories. These categories are as follows:

1. Relationship building is critical to the academic success of African American male students.
2. Understanding and using culturally responsive teaching strategies is critical to the academic success of African American male students.

The research suggests that establishing effective relationships between teachers and students and parents and teachers is critical to the academic success of the African American male student. Before instructional strategies are implemented or considered, it appears imperative a relationship must be formed. The relationship piece is huge and includes so much of the belief system of both teachers and students. In this study the three teachers who were interviewed and observed established good relationships with their students. Even the students themselves were self-aware and commented on how well their teachers knew them, knew what they liked and how to teach them.

The biggest difference between the high achievers and low achievers in the area of relationships was more related to the home school connection piece. The teachers had a more difficult time following through with parental support and communication for the low achievers. However, both sets of students had bonds with all their teachers and appeared to recognize how much their teachers cared. Having an effective relationship means you recognize the learning styles of the students as well as cultural differences and are willing to differentiate and provide meaningful instruction with a focus on culturally responsive instructional strategies. The data presented in chapter four demonstrates the importance of relationship building, learning styles, culturally responsive instruction, differentiation, encouragement, and self motivation when it comes to the academic success of African American male students.

It is important to point out that culturally responsive instruction is not just about understanding and incorporating the culture of a student into your lessons, but it includes all of the following (Sampson and Garrison-Wade; 2011):

Culturally Responsive/Relevant Teaching Strategies

- Learning styles dominate; student-centered instruction
- Teachers have expertise, but students can and do learn from each other
- Teaching is bi-directional—teachers can and must learn from each other
- Students also learn from each other
- Lectures, debates, discussion, and other teaching methods are used to teach and reinforce learning
- Lecture, discussion, activity, reinforcement, then testing/assessment; several assessment options
- Flexible grouping prevails based on students' skills and interests
- Interdependence and cooperative learning are valued and encouraged among students
- Family-like atmosphere is promoted
- The instructional style is concrete to abstract, with examples, stories, and visuals/graphic organizers, to make learning relevant
- Student success is shared
- Collaboration is essential for students' success

These components of culturally responsive teaching match with a large amount of the data from this study. Teachers at Sunny Hills Elementary have incorporated many components of

culturally responsive instruction in their daily instruction. The numerous instructional strategies already discussed in chapter four as effective ways to help with the academic success of African American males are also a part of culturally responsive instruction. It is basically about knowing your student, their needs, how they learn, catering to this need, and differentiating. The fact that all of the teachers in the study had gone through diversity and poverty training is a strength. It was also a strength that two of the teachers in the study had traveled to numerous countries and thus, felt very comfortable with their level of culture awareness.

The one area which appeared weakest was ensuring culturally related literature and activities were incorporated in the classroom on an on-going basis. Students noted their teachers did not do much of this. This could be an area of improvement. Although some of the students said it didn't really matter to them, it must be noted, this was a small sample size. There could be larger numbers of African American males in other schools who could benefit from culturally aware literature and activities. This is also about relationship building. If teachers take the time to get to know about students and their cultures, the teacher student bonds are strengthened. When this bond is strengthened, along with incorporating instructional strategies catered to the students' learning styles and learning preferences, academic success is on the way and actually becomes an attainable goal for African American male students.

The other area that bears discussion is the emphasis on cooperative learning. Even within culturally responsive instruction, cooperative learning is the preferred method of instruction. Research also implies for African American male students, cooperative learning is a very effective instructional strategy. However, in this study, cooperative learning was not the preferred method for the academically successful students. The students did not like it if they felt like they were paired with others not willing to do the work or stay focused. This may be

because these students had to assume the bulk of the work while others did not contribute.

However, the students who were not considered successful preferred this method of instruction.

This study demonstrates African American males can be successful. The importance of a true, meaningful connection between teacher and student is critical to the success of the African American student. When students feel good about themselves and have a teacher who cares about them and encourages them, that is the first step. Parents need to be brought on board as well, so that the home school connection is reinforced. Once these on-going relationships are established, then the focus can be on the instructional strategies presented in Chapter Four.

Another key factor for educators is the importance of professional development in the areas of relationship building and culturally relevant teaching strategies. If teachers are not provided on-going staff development in these areas, then not all teachers will realize their importance and how much they contribute to the academic success of African American males. It is therefore the job of building level administrators to provide staff members with the professional development that is needed.

Recommendations for Future Research

The participants in this study provided insight into what beliefs and strategies are needed to help African American males achieve academic success at the elementary level. This is a starting place, however further research needs to be done. One suggestion is to conduct a similar study but with a larger sample size for the unsuccessful students. The limited number of unsuccessful students in this study is a significant limitation. Then both studies could be compared with one another.

It would also be beneficial to do a similar study but with a larger sample size for both groups of student participants. To do a larger sample size, it would probably require a change in

methodology. A quantitative method involving a survey could be used to answer similar questions. The drawback is that the depth of the answers would not be there. Another recommendation would be to conduct a longitudinal study that would address the academic success of all the students who participated in this study in both middle and high school. And finally, a study researching the effect of cooperative learning on African American males who are already successful compared to African American males who are not successful would also be beneficial. In this current study, the data suggested the successful students did not prefer cooperative learning, so it would be interesting to investigate this further. With continued research and concentrated efforts among educators to implement best practice strategies and instruction there is no doubt we will see more positive results for our African American males in the public schools of the United States.

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Appendix A**Invitation to Participate**

Date, 2014

Name
Address

Dear Name,

I am a doctoral student at Lynchburg College. I am in the process of collecting data for my dissertation study. The purpose of my study is to learn more about what contributes to the academic success of African American males at the elementary level. The purpose of the study is to get your thoughts and opinions about what makes you feel academically successful. The information you share will help determine what instructional strategies benefit African American male students the most. These interviews will be confidential. The interview should be at least 30 minutes long. If needed, I will also interview you with other students in a small group setting at the conclusion of my study to ask follow-up questions related to your answers from the individual interviews. I hope you are willing to participate. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Donna D. Lewis

Appendix B
Informed Consent Agreement- Teachers

Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the research study.

Project Title: Instructional Practices of Teachers and the Academic Success of African American Males at the Elementary Level.

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to gain insight into the specific instructional practices that are used that effectively meet the needs of African American male students and contribute to their academic success.

Participation: You are being asked to participate in this study in a voluntary nature because you are a 5th grade teacher who has African American students in your classroom. You will be asked to answer questions in a one-on-one interview with me in an empty classroom, resource room or in the cafeteria. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. It will last approximately 30 minutes. At least one classroom observation will be conducted over the span of three weeks. This observation will not be shared with your principal.

Time Required: Your participation is expected to take about three weeks. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The focus group session will last approximately 30 minutes.

Risks & Benefits: “There is minimal foreseeable risk or discomfort for participants. The following steps are taken to minimize risk: (1) for the teachers –teachers will be advised that the interview records will be stored separate from and not considered in connection with employment-related performance evaluations; the teachers’ responses and decisions on participation will not impact their performance evaluations or any other aspect of their employment; and teacher interviews will take place in a neutral space such as an empty classroom, a cafeteria, an auditorium, a resource room, etc. and not in the principal’s office and (2) for the students – the interviews will take place in a neutral space such as an empty classroom, a cafeteria, an auditorium, a resource room, etc. and not in the principal’s office; and to minimize potential stigma for selected students called out for interviews, the teachers will be notified ahead of time to make sure that the dismissal does not interrupt the class and/or bring unnecessary attention to the student. .

The study is expected to benefit you by informing you of what instructional practices help African American male students become more academically successful. In addition, the study is expected to benefit the field of education in general because this information can also be used to determine possible solutions to closing the academic achievement gap that exists for African American male students. In addition to these reasons, the study can also provide information about what types of professional development needs to be implemented for teachers that will help African American males be more successful.

Compensation: You will not receive any compensation.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. You also have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. If you want to withdraw from the study please tell the researcher. Also, as the researcher, I have the right to end your participation in the study at

any time if needed. One example of this would be if you fail to show up for your scheduled interview session.

Confidentiality: All information obtained during the study in interviews, observations, and focus groups will be confidential. In order to preserve the confidentiality of your responses, your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number as well as all audiotapes will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list and audiotape will be destroyed after three years. Your name will not be used in any report. The information obtained from this research will only be used for educational purposes.

Whom to Contact with Questions: If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at 434-238-0958 or lewisdd@lynchburg.edu. You can also contact my faculty research sponsor, Jeri Watts at wattsjh@lynchburg.edu. The Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. You may also contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Sharon Foreman Kready at Lynchburg College at 434.544.8327 or [irb-
hs@lynchburg.edu](mailto:irb-hs@lynchburg.edu) with any questions.

Agreement: I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation in this research study answered. By signing below I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study described above and verify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness _____ Date _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C
Informed Consent Agreement- Parents

Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to allow your child to participate in the research study.

Project Title: Instructional Practices of Teachers and the Academic Success of African American Males at the Elementary Level.

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to gain insight into the specific instructional practices that are used that effectively meet the needs of African American male students and contribute to their academic success.

Participation: You are being asked to give consent for your child to participate in this study because your child has been selected as a potential participant and is under the age of 18. Interviews for this study will take place in an empty classroom, resource room, or in the cafeteria. Your child will be asked to answer questions in a one-on-one interview with me in one of these settings. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. A focus group interview at the conclusion of all individual interviews might occur if further clarification is needed.

Time Required: Over a three week period, your child's participation will involve an individual interview (lasting approximately 30 minutes) and possibly a focus group interview (lasting approximately 30 minutes.)

Risks & Benefits: There is minimal foreseeable risk or discomfort. In regards to any minimal foreseeable risk or discomfort, the following steps are taken to minimize risk: The interviews will take place in a neutral space such as an empty classroom, a cafeteria, an auditorium, a resource room, etc. and not in the principal's office; and to minimize potential stigma for selected students called out for interviews, the researcher will previously notify the teacher to make sure that the dismissal does not interrupt the class and/or bring unnecessary attention to the student.

Compensation: You will not receive any compensation. Your child will not receive any compensation.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. Your child has the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. Your child also have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. If your child wants to withdraw from the study please tell the researcher. Also, as the researcher, I have the right to end your child's participation in the study at any time if needed. One example of this would be if your child failed to show up for his scheduled interview session.

Confidentiality: All information obtained during the study in interviews, teacher observations, and focus groups will be confidential. In order to preserve the confidentiality of your child's responses, your child will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your child's name to this number as well as all audiotapes will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list and audiotape will be destroyed. Your child's name will not be used in any report. The information obtained from this research will only be used for educational purposes.

Whom to Contact with Questions: If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at 434-238-0958 or lewisdd@lynchburg.edu. You can also contact my faculty research sponsor, Jeri Watts at wattsjh@lynchburg.edu. The Lynchburg College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. You may also contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Sharon Foreman Kready at Lynchburg College at 434.544.8327 or irb-hs@lynchburg.edu with any questions.

Agreement: I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation in this research study answered. By signing below I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study described above and verify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____

Signature of Researcher _____

Date _____

Signature of Witness _____

Date _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix D
Informed Assent Agreement

Please read this assent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the research study.

Project Title: Instructional Practices of Teachers and the Academic Success of African American Males at the Elementary Level.

Introduction: My name is Donna D. Lewis and I am a student from Lynchburg College. I am asking you to participate in this research study because you are a 5th grade African American male student.

Purpose: In this study, I am trying to learn more about what helps 5th grade African American males be successful at school. I want to get **your** thoughts and opinions about what makes you feel successful at school.

Participation: This study will take place here at Sunny Hills Elementary School. You will be interviewed in a room in the building. It will not be in the principal's office.

Time Required: You will participate in one interview session with me. It will last for about 30 minutes. At the end of all of the interviews you may be interviewed with other students in a small group if I need to ask you more questions. That will last about 30 minutes. All of this would take place over no more than a 3 week period.

Risks & Benefits: The interview will take place in a space such as an empty classroom, a cafeteria, or a resource room. It will not take place in the principal's office. I do not want you to think you are in trouble for having to go to the principal's office and I don't want you to be called out of your class and miss instructional time. To prevent this I will let your teacher know ahead of time so the most appropriate time will be used for the interview. This study will benefit you because you will learn about what helps you become a successful student.

Payment: You will not get paid to participate in this study.

Voluntary Participation: I have already asked your parents if it is okay for me to ask you to take part in this study. Even though your parents said I could ask you, you still get to decide if you want to be in this research study. You can also talk with your parents, grandparents, and teachers (or other adults **if appropriate**) before deciding whether or not to take part. No one will be upset if you do not want to participate, or if you change your mind later and want to stop. You can also skip any of the questions you do not want to answer. If you want to stop participating just tell me.

Questions: You can ask questions now or whenever you wish. If you want to, you may call me at 434-238-0958.

Agreement: Please sign your name below, if you agree to be part of my study. I will give both you and your parents a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness _____ Date _____

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Teachers**INTERVIEW GUIDE (Teacher)**

INFORMANT NAME: POSITION:

LOCATION: DATE:

1. Describe your background and experiences in education.
2. How do you describe your philosophy of teaching?
3. Describe the type of school you are/were working in, including the demographics, population and ability level of the students.
4. What is the challenge or difference in teaching African American males? Give an example of challenge or difference.
5. Explain the types of instructional strategies you have utilized and administered within the school that have impacted African American student achievement levels.
6. What influenced your decision to implement those teaching strategies?
7. What type of resources or information did you use in helping with deciding what remediation instructional strategies to include?
8. What instructional strategy has had the greatest impact on African American males' student achievement?
9. Describe how the African American male students have benefited from these instructional strategy the most, least and why.
10. Tell me what type of documents you analyzed to determine if the teaching strategies are successful and are achieving its goals.
11. What time span do you think is appropriate to administer these techniques before seeing results?
12. List the pros and cons you feel are a result of these interventions.
13. If you could design or implement an instructional strategy that would influence the academic achievement of African American males, what would it be?
14. Have you participated in cultural diversity training?
15. How would you rate your knowledge about different cultures and ethnic groups?
16. How do you identify students' learning styles?
17. How do you build relationships with students from other cultures?
18. Is incorporating culturally responsive instruction a part of your weekly lesson plans?
19. How often do you incorporate the following instructional strategies in your lessons? (pair-share, differentiation, performance-based assessments such as skits, speeches, and presentations, culturally related activities, and cooperative style interactions)
20. What do you believe is the most important thing educators can do to help close the academic achievement gap for African American males?
21. What other information do you feel should be included in this interview?

Appendix F: Interview Guide for Students

INTERVIEW GUIDE (Students)

INFORMANT NAME:

GRADE

LOCATION:

DATE:

1. Tell me about yourself by explaining your grade, age, things you like to do, what do you want to be when you grow up?
2. Describe the type of classroom you enjoy and have been successful in learning.
3. Describe the types of things that have motivated and helped you learn.
4. List some teaching strategies you like and have helped you learn. Why do those things help you learn?
5. List the teaching strategies you dislike that are used in class. Why do you dislike them?
6. How do you feel about learning and school?
7. What things would you change about class activities that would help you learn better?
8. How do you feel about completing assignments as an individual, working in groups, creating projects, and open discussions?
9. How and where do you prefer sitting in a classroom and why?
10. Tell me about your favorite teacher, and why they are your favorite.
11. What other information would you like to share for this interview that will be helpful with teaching others about how to better teach you?

Questions about Learning Style:

12. When are you most ready to learn?
 - mornings
 - afternoons
13. What is your favorite way to learn?
 - by myself
 - in a small group
 - one-to-one with an adult
 - one-to-one with classmate
 - in a large group
14. How do you learn best?
 - by reading books and other printed items
 - by listening
 - by looking at visuals like pictures
 - by doing things with my hands like making pictures
15. When you are learning, do you
 - learn the parts first to understand the

whole idea?

need to see the whole idea completed first?

16. Which would you rather do?

use facts and information to do practical projects

gather information and write it

use facts and information to do group projects

discover my own new information and ideas

17. When you are doing an activity, can you stick with it for a

long time

short time

18. What helps you stick with an activity?

holding something in my hand

writing

having something in my mouth

the fun involved

19. Which do you need to learn?

exact directions and examples

written materials and lecture notes

both of the above

20. Can you tell by yourself

how well you are doing or

do you need someone to tell you

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Appelbaum Training Institute (2002)

Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

Follow-Up Questionnaire for Focus Groups

1. It is important for teachers to relate the material to the real world so I can understand how I will use the information later.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
2. One of the main reasons that I would be doing well in school is the encouragement I get from my teachers.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
3. I enjoy working on lessons in class that have a lot of activities done with my hands.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
4. I help teachers know if I understand the lesson by participating in class and asking questions.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
5. I learn better when teachers give homework that relates to what we are learning.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
6. School should start later in the morning so I can concentrate better on my work.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
7. I understand the purpose of school and learning and see how it will help me in the future.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
8. I think I could learn better if the classes were a two-hour block, rather than 50 or 55 minutes.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
9. Most of the time I feel good about how I am learning in school.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree
10. If I think the teacher cares about me, I will work harder to be successful.
 Strongly agree Agree Not sure Disagree
 Strongly disagree