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# Pedagogy of Social Justice: An Inquiry into the Experiences of African American Adolescent Males

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PEDAGOGY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: AN INQUIRY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MALES

by

NATALIE ANN LAMBRIGHT

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

Using Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Richard Delgado & Jean Stefania, 2000; Solorzano & Yasso, 2002) as a theoretical framework, and critical narrative inquiry (Clendinin & Connelly, 1999) as research methodology, I explored stories from five eighth grade African American adolescent males in order to identify how home, community, and school experiences contributed to their academic success and social development. My passion for the inquiry was driven for my desire to foster a sense of agency for social justice and positive changes for the African American community.

Selection of participants was based upon reading and math scores in the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile range on the Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT). Social development was based upon the number of discipline reports. Data collection methods included individual and focus interviews. Important qualities of classroom teachers were determined by a ranking of qualities of effective teachers. The literature review included an examination of the educational history of African Americans, adolescents and racial identity, experiences of African American males, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Six findings resulted from this study. (1) A value system, work ethic, and self-discipline are noted for students who are academically and socially developed. (2)

Parental involvement is directly linked to positive academic outcomes. (3) A positive sense of ethnic/racial identity serves as a cultural motivator. (4) A connection to the community is limited or absent based on participation in community activities. (5) Some African American males are participating in their own educational marginalization by failing to recognize the significance of culturally relevant teaching. (6) An ethic of care and justice demonstrated by school personnel is significant to students.

The study will inform policymakers that it is of great importance for them to reconsider policies, such as zero tolerance, which disproportionately affect minority males. There is a demand for administrators to understand that they are the key in encouraging and supporting staff to acknowledge students' experiences and to incorporate experiences into culturally relevant teaching. The study informs parents of the importance to prepare their children to live in a society of discrimination, prejudice, and racism.

INDEX WORDS: Critical Race Theory, Critical Narrative Inquiry, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Racial/ethnic identity, Experiences of African American males

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

In memory of my parents, Alonzo (Boots) Lambright and Etta Eleanor Bennett Lambright. Dad, thanks for demonstrating public service and social justice. Mom, thanks for instilling the love of God. Together you taught me how to love, give, and live.

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“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13) carried me through this process. Thank you, Jesus.

To my brothers: Reginald, Dwight, Mark, and Reggie. Thank you for your unconditional love.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

What happens to a dream deferred?  
 Does it dry up?  
 Like a raisin in the sun?  
 Or fester like a sore-  
 And then run?  
 Does it stink like rotten meat?  
 Or crust and sugar over—like a syrupy sweet?  
 Maybe it just sags like a heavy load  
 Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes (1951)

Adolescence is most notably a period in which significant physical changes occur between ten-to-nineteen year olds, which often prevail upon a transition from childhood to adult status. In addition to physical development, “cognitive maturation results in a critical analysis of “the self,” “the world” and the quality of the self/other relationship” (Spencer, Dobb, & Swanson, 1988).

Although all adolescents share the stated common characteristics, the problems of African Americans are more prevalent. It is during this course of enrichment of the normative developmental psyche that African Americans are “thrust into the harsh recognition of systematic societal biases, diminished expectations for achievement, and, often, mistrust by the majority population” (Swanson & Spencer, 1991). Based upon the space that African American males occupy, it appears that these negative occurrences affect African American males more than females. African American males lead negatively in areas of education, unemployment, delinquency and crime. The problems of African American males have become so intensified that they have progressed from being “an endangered species” (Gibbs, 1984) to “endangered, embittered, and embattled”

(Gibbs, 1989). However, despite the circumstances and dismal experiences many African American adolescent males encounter, many others are successful in overcoming negative indicators and mature into well-adapted individuals (Garbino, Dubrow, Kostolny, & Pardo, 1992).

Researchers contend that in spite of the adversaries that most African American males are exposed to, a significant number have “the ability to bounce back, recover, [and] form successful adaptation[s]” (Zunz, Turner, & Norman, 1993). This research will focus upon the experiences of African American adolescent males, and how this group has become successful despite the given obstacles of racism, identity crisis, and influence of popular culture. Moreover, the success of this group is defined in terms of excelling academically and socially. However, until the majority of African American males are excelling academically and socially, justice has not been granted, and a search for social justice ensues. In an attempt to develop pedagogy for social justice for African American adolescent males, a critical race inquiry will be employed to capture the narratives of the experiences of five successful African American adolescent males in the suburban area of Atlanta, Georgia.

### **Context of Study**

On a daily basis, Americans proclaim that they are “one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.” A closer examination of those words implies that power should be equally divided among all people regardless of class, disability, ethnicity, gender, language, religion, or race. However, the statistics regarding African American males in areas of employment, delinquency and crime, and education reveal that justice is not for all. For example, unemployment for white males’ average about

4.4% compared to a rate of 10.6% for African American males (Keep Media, 2004). Yet, African American men are portrayed as the root cause of Americans' loss of jobs in which working class white males can no longer find employment to support their families (Fine & Weis, 1998). African American teens suffer even more with an unemployment rate of 30.2% (Keep Media, 2004). Indeed, the black-male unemployment rate has been in double digits nearly every month since the 2001 recession began (Morial, 2004).

Delinquency and crime statistics are more startling. Forty-nine percent of prison inmates nationally are African Americans compared to their 13% share of the overall population. African American adolescents who were born in 1991 (which is the age of the participants in this study) have a 29% chance of spending time in prison at some point in his life. The figure for white males is 4% (Mauer, 1999). Racial bias in response to crime, disparate enforcement of laws, the creation of criminal histories through racial profiling, racial bias in prosecution, and sentencing, all help exacerbate factors to criminalize African American youth (Smith, 2002).

Despite the advances made since the 1954 Supreme Court landmark decision of *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African Americans continue to suffer disproportionately within educational institutions. According to national statistics, approximately 22.4% of African-American males ages 20 to 24 leave school before earning a high school diploma. Nationwide while 75% of Caucasian students graduated from high school in 2001, only 43% African American males received diplomas (Edley & Swanson, 2004). Only 18.4% of African-American males ages 25-29 hold a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000).

Continuing, data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2003) indicate that the majority of African Americans in grades 4, 8, and 12 have not mastered grade level goals and objectives in reading, math, history, and geography. For example, recently released 2006 Georgia High School Graduation Test results revealed that in all four-subject areas (language arts/math/social studies, and science) there was a 5% increase for students from majority African American schools in the county in which I teach, yet overall African American students' scores continued to lag behind those of white students. ([www.fultonschools.org](http://www.fultonschools.org)). Even class privilege and the materials benefits that accompany it fail to inoculate Black males from low academic performance. When compared to their White peers, middle class African American males lag significantly behind in both grade point averages and on standardized tests (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

Consistency exists within special education. African American males are nearly three times as likely as white students to be labeled mentally retarded, and nearly twice as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed (Townsend, 2000). "This over-identification of minority students and the subsequent isolation, stigmatization, and inferior treatment received reconfirms the notion that education in America falls short of offering a level playing field for all" (Fattah, 2004). Whereas there is an over-representation on one end of the special education spectrum, there is evidence of under representation on the opposite end. This under identification of minority students for advanced placement classes is demonstrated by the dismal 3% placed in classes for the talented and gifted (Kunjufu, 2002).

Within the discipline cycle, African American males have the highest rate of detentions, suspensions and expulsions (Fuentes, 2003, National Center for Education

Statistics, 2003). Even though African American males composed 8.23% of the total student population nationwide, they received corporal punishment, were suspended, and expelled at rates over three times their percentage in the population (Chappell, 2005). In a study done by an expert on school safety (Skiba & Knestling, 2001), no evidence surfaced which proved that African Americans engaged in more serious misbehavior; rather African American students were referred more for judgmental reasons such as disrespect, excessive noise, and loitering. Even when considering all socio-economic indicators, the statistics were the same. Thus, today's prevailing criminal predator has become a euphemism for young black male (Barak, 1994). According to Gibbs (1984),

Educators have written them off as unteachable, the juvenile justice system has failed to rehabilitate them, the mental health system has virtually ignored or excluded them, and social welfare institutions seem ill-equipped to respond to their multiple problems. They are, in an irretrievable sense, rejects of the affluent society. (p. 6)

However, a large majority of African American males are employed and productive members of society. Adjectives that describe African American males under my instructional care are altruistic, aspiring, competent, creative, motivated, resourceful, and spiritual. According to Barbarin (1993),

More media interest and research efforts should be devoted to understanding African American children who live in nurturing but poor households and who experience emotionally supportive and stable personal relationship in "broken homes; who develop a positive ethnic identity in spite of rampant denigration of their race; who steadfastly pursue education even though its relationship to

gainful employment is uncertain; who abstain from addictive even though drugs are ubiquitous and life is unkind; and who avoid gangs, illegal activity, and incarceration in spite of pressure to belong and to make the fast buck. (p. 479)

The experiences of these students often go unnoticed and could easily provide the alternatives needed to improve the academic achievement and social development of more African American male students. “Manipulating the experiences of African American males in schools may be the treatment of choice” (Gordon, 1999, p. xiii). Not only may the analysis of their experiences improve academic and social skills, but exploring the school experiences may also lead to a better understanding of broader educational and social issues such as attending college, employment, and crime (Polite & Davis, 1999). Listening to the experiences of successful African American adolescent males provide a transformation from the traditional pedagogy of banking education (Friere, 2001) and silenced dialogue (Delpit, 1995) to subjects who are experts of their own knowledge. Critical race theory is used because like Gay (2000), the writer believes that racial preference permeates the “cultural fabric” of schooling. However, racial inequality is not linked to a single cause; the “nonsynchronous theory of race” conceptualizes that race must be linked to gender and/or class oppression (McCarthy, 1990). Listening to the voices of those who are not members of the racial preference group must be heard. This is the beginning of pedagogy of social justice.

### **Research Questions**

This study is designed to answer the following specific qualitative research questions:

- What home, school, or community experiences have contributed to African American adolescent male students' academic success?
- What home, school, or community experiences have contributed to African American adolescent male students' social development?
- What do African American adolescent males feel are the important qualities of classroom teachers?

The overarching research question is:

- How do the home, school, and community experiences of African American adolescent males foster pedagogy of social justice?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework chosen as the method of inquiry is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory was selected because issues of equality and democracy have been illusive for African Americans, and race is a factor, which cannot be discounted and should be evaluated in understanding the experiences of African Americans. In *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Bell (1992) posits that racism is a key component in the stability of this country. Bell believes that race is an unmovable fixture since it is “an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society” (p. xiii). For African Americans, one's blackness remains the hallmark of the various identities of every major aspect of social, economic, and political existence (Gates, 2004). In corroboration, Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong (2003) point out that race in a racist society bears profound consequences for daily life, identity, and social movements. The bottom line is that racial considerations shade almost everything in America (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Race should be discussed within the context of educational issues, yet schools generally retreat from a discussion of school experiences as they relate to race and gender. Critical Race Theory allows race to be discussed in schools in a theoretical manner. In addition to allowing discussion of race along with the intersectionality of racism, classism, and sexism, it allows scholars to ask the important questions of what racism has to do with inequalities in education, how racism contributes to the educational disparities, and how racism can be dismantled (Howard, 2003). This not only contributes to a greater understanding of African American adolescent males' school experiences, it also clearly details how African American males continue to be oppressed in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Racism is a defining feature of oppression, and two key themes emerge from the academic discussion of racism. First, racism stigmatizes and violates the dominated group. Secondly, racism functions through overt, conscious prejudice and discrimination as well as through the unconscious attitudes and behaviors of a society that presumes an unacknowledged but pervasive white cultural norm (Bell, 1997). This becomes significant when the majority of teachers of African American students are white middle-class females. Thus, through Critical Race Theory, the attitudes and behaviors that enhance racist tensions, which affect the experiences of African American males, can be thoroughly examined.

Critical Race Theory has its origins in Critical Legal Studies. During the Reagan Republican era, with primarily conservative federal judges appointed, the liberal legal scholars who remained in law schools believed that the system of law reflected the subjectivity of those in power and established a provincial platform of legal evaluation.

These theorists felt that the system of law could not have unbiased or neutral tendencies. Thus, they formed Critical Legal Studies with an emphasis upon classical and economic structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory, however, posited that race was more critical than classical or economical strata. The legal scholars of this thought (both African Americans and white) analyzed the slow movement of the civil rights era of the 1960s while taking note of the seemingly subtle forms of racism that were gaining ground in the current political climate. These theorists surmise that racial background determines people's perspectives of any and all experiences that are expressed and constructed. To simplify, the concept of race is much more than skin color; it is a complex construct of all aspects of culture (Crenshaw, Gowanda, Peeler, & Thomas, 1995; Olmsted, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory realizes that the eradication of racism is far more significant than the amelioration of ignorance or encouraging racial consensus.

Olmsted (1998), Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Crenshaw et al. (1995) surmised the various propositions of Critical Race Theory as having five basic insights. The first component addressed race as endemic, inherent, and normal in American life and therefore difficult to cure or address. Those critical race theorists view racism as ordinary and produces common, everyday experiences which most people of color encounter.

Secondly, both white and people of color support racism through a process of hegemony. Often referred to as "interest convergence" or material determinism, racism has advanced the interests of both white elites and working class people. "White elites will tolerate or encourage racism advances for blacks only when such advances also promote white self-interest" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. xvii). Therein lays the

justification as to why it is difficult for a large segment of society to have an incentive to eradicate racism. When analyzed, racism serves a purpose for the maintenance of the dominant group.

Agreeing with Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1996), Critical Race Theorists state that race is socially constructed; races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The categories are constructed with words, stories, and silence, which promote its own self-interest and everyday acceptance. To construct a different reality than the one created, Critical Race Theory “takes the form of storytelling in which writers analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably renders blacks and other minorities one-down”(Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii). The stories or counter-narratives generally challenge the dominant legal, political, ideology, and epistemological thinking about racial and power stratification within society (Parker, Deyhle, Villenas & Nebeker, 1998). Furthermore, Critical Race Theory not only highlights discrimination through the narratives, but also offers alternative visions, perspectives, and policies that are based on placing race and its partial intersections with other areas of difference, at the center of the remedies for changes in the current power relations in U. S. society (Parker et al. p. 5).

Finally, Critical Race Theory is committed to the advancement of social justice focusing on social opposition. Critical Race Theorists maintain that the individual life experiences of people of color should be recognized and made public as a unique voice. This “voice” brings additional power to the discourse aimed at racial justice because it is analyzing, appropriate, critical to understanding, legitimate, and teaches about racial

subordination” (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002). The vehicle for these voices takes on various socially artistic forms of expression, such as poetry, parables, personal anecdotes, chronicles, fiction, revisionist histories, counter-stories, and short stories, all with the goal of illustrating and sharing how minority persons suffer from existing law and the system of American justice (Olmsted, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 2000; Crenshaw et al. 1995).

As a result of Critical Race Theory being committed to social justice, it contains an activist dimension of analysis. Critical Race Theory “sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial line and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). Thus, CRT is committed to social justice because it seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power in association with cultural, economical, political, and social structures. CRT moves towards a greater understanding of marginalizing differences and facilitates greater interaction among racial groups. Critical Race Theory dedicates itself to the emancipatory imperatives of self-empowerment and social transformation (McLaren, 2003). Analyzing narratives of African American adolescent males through Critical Race Theory can bring about individual transformations caused by revelations from the examination of cultural, economical, and political structures that influence the overall understanding of the upbringing of African Americans.

Recently, several scholars in the field of education have applied critical race analyses to education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theory in education is characterized as:

A framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal positions and subordination of African American and Latino students. Critical Race Theory asks such questions as, what roles do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination? (Solórzano & Tate as cited in Jay, 2003, pp. 4-5)

Thus, issues pertaining to curriculum, assessment, discipline, and tracking can be addressed through racial lens. Using Critical Race Theory, Ladson-Billings (1998) perceived the official school curriculum as “a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White Supremacist master script” (p. 18). Since this curriculum serves to exclude the voices, experiences, languages, and discourses of others, it is an obstacle to the academic achievement of African American students. Rison (1992) was specific in identifying components of the curriculum that work against African American students. He stated that while blacks struggle up the hill to learn, coming down continuously from the top of the hills are water rapids, mudslides, huge boulders and other obstacles. Rison (1992) concluded by stating that these rapids, slides, and boulders are constructed via white teaching methods, text prepared for whites by white authors and publishers, a boring white curriculum, and test tidal waves. An injustice is served because these experiences work against African American students who are struggling for a diploma, an advanced degree, job availability, and a higher standard of living; all goals of which should not be determined by race or any form of diversity.

With respect to the area of instruction, Ladson-Billings (1998) alleges that instructional strategies are more for remediation, which presumes that African Americans students are intellectually deficient in understanding more advanced curriculum. Furthermore, Critical Race Theory reveals that assessments derived from intelligence tests have been used to legitimize African Americans' lack of skills for the differentiation of instruction and placement in special education. (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Hilliard, 1992) Critical race analysis sees that the use of intelligence testing serves not to diagnose nor remediate, but rather to serve as a ranking and classification system (Hilliard, 1992). Furthermore, different cultures have different life experiences and educational opportunities, thus standardized test are invalid and unreliable instruments of assessments (Hilliard, 1992; Mabie, 2000).

“Whether it is subtle or glaring, racism is plucking at the eyes, clawing at the flesh, searing at the psyche, and sucking the breath out of Africans in America” (Anijar & Humber, 2004, p.132). However, we must not become disillusioned and believe that there is no relief in sight. Relief will occur when a transformation forms within the canon of knowledge. With open hearts and minds, we must listen to the experiences of African American males. Those experiences can lead from a road of failures to unlimited possibilities of academic achievement and social development for African American adolescent males.

### **Autobiographical Roots**

My inquiry originated with my concern of the community. As a member of the Clayton County community, I am disturbed about the recent acts involving adolescents in the area. Within a three-week period during the month of April, eleven African American

adolescent males were arrested for different shooting incidences. Because of the number of occurrences over a short period, community leaders and policy makers advocated for stricter enforcement of curfew laws and more police on the streets (Nurse, 2005). These suggestions may be helpful, but I also view these strategies as possibly leading to the continued demise of the advancement of African American males. At a Clayton County community meeting following one of the incidences, individuals from across the county spoke and addressed their concerns and possible solutions concerning the state of Clayton County adolescents. From the evaluations on the nightly news, only one youth was shown addressing the crowd. Even though Clayton County African American male adolescents were the individuals most affected by the recent actions, their voices appeared to be most marginalized given the interpretation of the media reports.

Second, the caseload at the middle school in which I am employed currently consists of nearly 48 percent African American males. If the state of African American males is to change, my role as an educator must change. It is important for me to become more knowledgeable of the coping skills that African American males employ in the face of hardship. As an educator, my pedagogy should be inclusive of those factors, especially if the teaching is to be shaped to the needs of African American males, specifically those most at risk. This study presents a chance for “personal redefinitions” (Cummings, 1990). If I redefine my role within the classroom, the community, and the broader society, African American males who encounter me as a teacher will become mutually empowered. This project will also support my school in becoming a good American school. Good American schools strive for civic virtue and social justice (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000).

Third, in any profession, there should always be a manner in which one has an obligation of producing “a lasting impression.” As a researcher, I want my contribution to be that of returning human and passionate elements to the art of research. Researcher Janesick (2003) indicates that individuals have been de-contextualized and de-personalized. Since I have a “passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people” (Janesick, p. 71), I hope this research will enhance educational and human service practices. This research will be done through the exposition of these students’ experiences through their personal narratives.

As a researcher, I am also interested in the paradigm of research, which focuses upon appropriate pedagogy for African American students. There still exist too many missing links regarding the proper implementation and execution of educating minorities effectively. With the continued emphasis on “high stakes testing,” there must be a more prevalent significance than mastering goals and objective. Consideration must be given to appropriate strategies that result in academic achievement and social justice. Instead of continuing to harm students through teachers’ actions, I anticipate that this research will lead to the discovery of appropriate pedagogy that will ensure the success of more African American adolescent males.

Finally, I am proud to be a member of the African American family. I support the contention that when others in the family are experiencing difficulties, our “collective psychological antennae should shoot skyward, our hands should move out toward our fellow man, and our commitment to community and societal betterment should awaken” (Williams, Hill & Wilson, 2003). In the Covenant with Black America, a national plan of action designed to change the course of Black Americans, covenant

#2 is to establish a system of public education in which all children achieve at high levels and reach their full potential (Chappell, 2006). My position as an educator places me at the site in which I am able to take such action and do my part in implementing the plan.

### **Challenges of the Study**

This study is limited in the number of participants involved. Qualitative research can be cumbersome, and in-depth interviews require an extensive amount of time to both transcribe and analyze the responses and evaluations of possible correlations. Also in regards to those selected, two of the participants standardized scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were less than desirable.

The focus was only upon African American adolescent males who attend Bear Creek Middle School. Even though the information may prove valuable to those who experience similar situations, the results of the study may not be generalized to African Americans males living in predominantly white suburbs, attending majority white schools, nor in other schools within the South Fulton cluster.

An additional limitation may result from the fact that the researcher taught three of the participants in an inclusion class. Thus, students may have felt the need to shape their responses in ways that would please the teacher.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Children are the future of any community and “where African American youth are today...will ultimately determine the future of the black community –its prosperity or demise” (Joiner & Jones, 2003). For the preservation of the African American community and the success of African American males within the school environment, it

is of utmost importance that inquiries into the experiences of African American males lead to an enhanced pedagogy of social justice. Analyzing the inquiries of African American male adolescents can greatly aid educators in assisting all African American males to view “themselves as agents with choices rather than as victims swept into a corner of shame with no recourse” (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. 15). Only with this education impetus will the purpose of promoting social mobility and survival of its people become a significant reality.

The study is significant for all stakeholders of education: policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, and even the participants. From the voices of African American males, policymakers will be able to discover the impact that race and gender have on students as they develop into prepared and productive members of society. Policies, such as zero tolerance, which disproportionately affect minority males, will be considered on its merits and disadvantages.

Administrators generally enforce the agenda set forth by the superintendent and/or county boards. Understandably, superintendents and board members generally make decisions that affect the entire county as opposed to what might work best for individual schools. Fulton County is divided into South County, which is majority African American and North County, which is majority white. There are clear discrepancies, which lead to the conclusion that most county decisions are made which are favorable to North County. Listening to the experiences of adolescent African Americans may lead administrators of majority African American students to become risk takers. Instead of trying to enforce the agenda proposed by the county officers, these administrations must formulate an agenda similar to that proposed by Marion Wright Edelman of the

Children's Defense Fund. According to Edelman, in addition to becoming an active and effective advocate for ethnic children, it must be understood that no one is going to give children anything if it seems to take away from the mainstream children. The narratives from African American males may lead administrators to understand that education for all does not take anything away from anyone; it creates an inclusive curriculum that addresses the needs of everyone and reduces the danger of injustices, inequalities, and lack of social justice.

The significance of this study for teachers lies in greater understanding of students' experiences. Pedagogy for African American adolescent males rarely considers their experiences and the different factors that form their identity. Understanding the thought processes and experiences of African American adolescent males who are achieving academically can provide teachers with a conceptual framework that will improve the achievement of other African American male students. One asks the question, "Who speaks for the African American adolescent?" As indicated by Kunjufu (2002), "If you listen and observe children, they will teach you how to teach them" (p. 32). Consequently, their interpretations provide provocative details into the interactions within the classroom. All that is needed is a vehicle through which their voices can be heard.

The significance for parents rests in the fact that in addition to nurturing children and providing food, shelter, and values, African American parents must also prepare their children to live in a society of discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Termed racial socialization (Peters, 2002; McAdoo, 1992, 2002), parents must teach African American

children, especially males, how to survive in a world in which their race is devalued and associated with negative connotations. As espoused by McAdoo (2002):

African American children are the result of all of the experiences that they, their parents, and their ancestors have experienced. The concept of the village symbolizes the interrelatedness of all of the people, living and dead, who are invested in their wealth. (p. 47)

In other words, the experiences of parents become an aspect of the experiences of children. According to McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn (2003), children's experiences contain both socioemotional and cognitive components, which are never exclusive of each other nor separated by the home, school, and community. They contend "if... [African American] children are to have a chance at survival,...[African American] parents must become more aware of the psycho educational process and participate it in a meaningful way" (p. 137). Continuing, "it is only through this process that ... [African American] children can have a chance for a viable future and an opportunity to realize their potential as adults" (p. 137). Thus, the role of parents in listening to experiences is critical for the development of mentally and emotionally healthy African American males.

The significance of the study is also for the participants. Peer influence is a great factor during the enrichment of adolescent development. Upon understanding their experiences through narratives, the adolescents will hopefully learn lessons that can be espoused onto other adolescents. These lessons will influence others in a positive manner as well as provide a clearer picture of their success as they reflect upon their experiences.

There must be a collaborative effort in the education of minority children. Lee Bell (1997) contends that the goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to their needs. Together policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves can make a difference. Together a design for pedagogy of social justice can be achieved if all invested parties share the responsibility, do their part and listen to the voices of African American adolescent males as they narrate their school experiences and reflect upon their academic and social success.

Instead of being “displayed and dissected in the media as the *cause* of national problems...depicted as the *reason* for the rise in crime...embodying the *necessity* for reform, and sitting at the *heart* of moral decay” (Fine & Weis, 1998, p. 1), the voices of African American adolescent males must no longer be marginalized, silenced, or abandoned. Their voices should resonate in order that African American adolescents can become African American men who are not “socially fragmented, economically devastated, and politically disenfranchised” (Robbins, 2005), but are “caring individuals capable of using their minds to resolve conflicts, their language to communicate ideas, and their hearts to touch others” (White-Hood, 1991). The quest for social justice for African American adolescent males everywhere begins with examining the home, community, and school experiences that affect their academic achievement and social development.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I am an invisible man....  
I am invisible, understand, simply  
because people refuse to see me....  
When they approach me, they see only  
my surroundings, themselves, or figments  
of their imagination--indeed, everything  
and anything except me.  
Ralph Ellison (1972)

A review of the literature on the experiences of African American males begins with an examination of the historical context of African American education in American society. The literature also includes a discussion of adolescent identity formation and its relationship to academic achievement and social development for African American males. More compelling are specific examples of experiences African American adolescent males encounter in homes, communities, and schools. The literature ends with a discussion on culturally relevant pedagogy, and how it can enhance the experiences of African American adolescent males.

#### **The Educational History of African Americans**

Education serves many purposes. First, education affords an opportunity to secure a future and better lifestyle. Secondly, with the attainment of additional degrees, education assists in moving up in social status. Additionally, for African Americans, the purpose of education helps ensure the survival of a people (Wilson, 1992). Schools are the institutions in which education is transmitted, and schools have been conceived as having two primary functions: promoting and structuring the intellectual development of students, and socializing young people for their roles and responsibilities in society (Davis & Jordan, 1994). For African Americans, educational experiences have proven to be both beneficial

and detrimental. A better lifestyle has been granted to some, and has signified an augmentation in social status. However, the most important purpose of education for African Americans as espoused by Wilson, the survival of their race, has yet to be realized. Are the experiences African Americans encounter within educational institutions caused by the mis-education of the Negro (Woodson, 1998) or is it a result of “too much schooling and too little education” (Shujaa, 1994)?

### **Before the Civil War**

The early advocates of the education of African Americans were of three classes. First were the masters who desired to increase the economic efficiency of their labor supply. Second were the sympathetic persons who wished to help the oppressed; and third, zealous missionaries who, believing that the message of divine love came equally to all, taught slaves the English language so that they might learn the principles of the Christian religion and become productive citizens (Woodson, 1919). An example of an educational opportunity provided by the religious sector involved college training for selected African Americans.

Anxious to determine whether or not a Negro was capable of acquiring a college education, Presbyterians selected John Chavis...as an experimental subject and sent him to Princeton University. After graduation, he became a leading teacher in the South. However, once his school was established, Chavis was forced to make it available only to white children. He can be classified as the first Negro to act as the headmaster of Southern children of aristocratic parentage. Many of his students became great leaders in government and politics. (Bullock, 1967, p. 12)

Access to these educational opportunities was not possible for everyone. On plantations, free or household servants benefited. According to Bullock (1967), house servants learned through necessity of the task. Because of the demand for slaves trained as carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers, and seamstresses, and the higher prices received at auctions for slaves skilled in those areas, on-the-job training programs developed for those occupations. Children gained literacy through the “play schools” that grew out of social relationships with their owners’ children. A narration by Frederick Douglas indicated that his mistress taught him to read, and he used his playmates to perfect it.

The frequent hearing of my mistress reading the Bible aloud, for she often read aloud when her husband was absent, awakened my curiosity in respect to this mystery of reading, and roused in me the desire to learn. Up to this time I had known nothing whatever of this wonderful art, and my ignorance and inexperience of what it could do for me, as well as my confidence in my mistress emboldened me to ask her to teach me to read. With an unconsciousness and inexperience equal to my own, she readily consented, and in an incredibly short time, by her kind assistance, I had mastered the alphabet and could spell words of three or four letters. My mistress seemed almost as proud of my progress as if I had been her own child, and supposing that her husband would be as well pleased, she made no secret of what she was doing for me. Indeed, she exultingly told him of the alphabet of her pupil, and of her intentions to persevere in teaching me, as she felt her duty to do, at least to read the Bible. Master Hugh was astounded beyond measure, and probably for the first time proceeded to unfold to his wife the true philosophy of the slave system, and the peculiar rules necessary in the

nature of the case to be observed in the management of human chattels. Of course he forbade her to give me any further instruction.

Filled with the determination to learn to read at any cost, I hit upon many expedients to accomplish that much-desired end. The plan that I mainly adopted, and the one which was the most successful, was that of using my young white playmates, with whom I met on the streets, as teachers. I used to carry almost constantly a copy of Webster's spelling book in my pocket, and when sent on errands, or when playtime was allowed me, I would step aside with my young friends and take a lesson in spelling.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, I had earned a little money in blacking boots for some gentleman with which I purchased of Mr. Knight, on *Thames Street*, what was then a very popular schoolbook, namely, "The Columbian Orator," for which I paid fifty cents. I was led to buy this book by hearing some little boys say they were going to learn some pieces out of it for the exhibition. This volume was indeed a right treasure, and every opportunity afforded me, for a time, was spent in diligently perusing it. (as cited in Washington, 2005, pp. 127 – 128)

. Traveling through this "hidden passage" allowed many slaves to gain access to educational experiences as well as become leaders (Bullock, 1967). Examples of others who learned to read during slavery and later became leaders were P. B. S. Pinchback, Acting Governor of Louisiana; Lucy Laney, founder of an industrial school in Augusta, GA; and Bishop Henry Turner-the first African American chaplain in the federal Army (Washington, 2005).

Now able to read anti-slavery literature, many of the freed who became leaders remained in the South and used their knowledge against the regime of slavery. Others went north and joined the antislavery movement (Bullock, 1967). Educated Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner lead insurrections against slave masters. Fearing slave rebellions and to maintain illiteracy and ignorance as a means of continuing economic exploitation, Southern states legally outlawed the education of slaves (Spring, 2001). However, despite the fact that slaves were not allowed to speak using their native language, read, or write, slaves made a vast contribution in the area of literature. The “Br’er Rabbit” stories of Uncle Remus are recognized as the slaves’ contribution to folklore stories (Washington, 2005).

In other parts of the country, the social doctrine began to take on an attitude of emancipation, whereas education and training became the duties of citizenship (Woodson, 1919). This new attitude resulted in the raising of funds, the establishment of schools, and the compulsory of teaching slaves reading comprehension. These new opportunities provided means for rapid mental development. Negroes learned to appreciate and write poetry and contributed something to mathematics, science, and philosophy. (Woodson, 1919, p.7) Although this represented a small percentage of the African American population, it verified that the educational opportunities of African Americans during this time were unstable, yet in existence.

### **After the Civil War**

Slavery officially ended and amendments were ratified to establish firmly minority rights. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in 1865, certified the termination of the institution of slavery and was the first of the amendments to protect the equal status of

African Americans. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, restrained state governments from forbidding the rights of former slaves after the Civil War. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, prohibited federal and state governments from infringing on a citizen's right to vote because of race or color ([www.amcivilwar.homestead.com/documents.html](http://www.amcivilwar.homestead.com/documents.html)). These three documents became the United States' way of ensuring the education of African Americans, and gave freed slaves an opportunity to formulate their own experiences.

In *The Story of the Negro* (2005), Booker T. Washington reported that ex-slaves emerged from slavery with a strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write. "They got up before day and studied in their cabins by the pine knots. They sat up until late at night, drooping over their books, trying to master the secrets they contained" (Washington, 2005, p. 137). Likewise, they were the first to establish private schools for African American children and openly campaigned for universal state-supported schools (Anderson, 1988). This campaign continued full force until the beginning of the twentieth century whereas only half of the African American adolescent population attended schools. Of every age group who attended schools at this time, a full 86% received less than six months of instruction per year. Instead, along side their mothers, they "were breaking sod, planting seeds, and harvesting crops" (Anderson, p. 149) Not to be deterred by the suppression of their educational campaign, the commitment of African Americans remained. Taxing themselves, while at the same time paying local and state taxes for white schools, African American citizens made private contributions to finance schools for African American children. They deeded to the state their contributions of money, land, school equipment, and labor. Activities of labor included beautification of

the grounds, protecting the drinking water, providing fuel sheds, painting the school building every three years, and serving hot lunches. Even through the Great Depression, many of these practices continued because securing an education for their children was the “way to protect and develop their communities [and] sustain passageways to better times” (Anderson, p. 195). Despite the duress of political, economical, and social conditions, illiteracy rates in the African American community decreased drastically from 70% in 1880 to 44% in 1900 and 19% by 1910 (Anderson, 1988).

The ideology of northern industrial philanthropists became the chief architects of black education (Bullock, 1967; Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). The educational plan set forth by these architects at annual conferences in Capon Springs, West Virginia, created experiences that rendered social stability and economic prosperity, while at the same time maintaining white supremacy. According to Bullock (1967):

It was planned that the maintenance of Southern traditions as related to Negroes would come through a neat biracial arrangement of people and expectations. Negroes were to be kept socially isolated from whites by means of a rigid system of residential segregation; they were to be limited to special occupational pursuits by means of job restrictions; they were to be tailored in “Negro ways” through a rigid code of interracial etiquette; and they were to be reinforced in their obedience to caste rules through formal schooling. The point at which this biracial society began forming a way of life for Negroes, tailoring them into a particular social type, and utilizing the schools to serve the ends of segregation marks the beginning of Negro education as a traditional American institution. (p. 148)

For African Americans, the experiences provided by “institutions of learning” would not create racial equality, but would further perpetuate caste conditions. The introduction of this “special education curriculum” of manual, industrial, and agricultural education set forth by white architects only developed good work and moral habits and was just another method of controlling or framing experiences for African Americans (Bullock, 1967; Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). Within higher education, General Samuel Armstrong, chief ideologist of industrial education and founder of Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) utilized former slave/coal miner Booker. T. Washington to promote this ideology of civilizing freed slaves. Together with studying in the afternoon, male students’ experiences in the morning consisted of working in sawmills, on the school farm, as dishwashers and bus boys in the kitchen, as waiters in the dining room, and as houseboys in the living quarters. Likewise, the experiences of female students consisted of sewing, cooking, scrubbing, and plowing field on the school’s farm. The intent was for segregated schools across the South to follow this same type of curriculum. To implement these practices at the local levels, three major programs were initiated. State Supervisors for African American Rural Schools were appointed. County Supervising Industrial Teachers (commonly known as the Jeanes Teacher) were placed in counties, and county Training Schools, the most important mechanism for translating educational concerns in institutional action at the local level, were developed (Anderson, 1988).

Opposition existed to the limitation of experiences set by only being exposed to “a curriculum of servitude”. In *Souls of Black Folks (1994)*, born free, Harvard educated, European scholar W. E. B. Dubois, rejected Booker T. Washington’s (1967) claim that

industrial education presented the best experiences for the advancement of African Americans. Dubois thought that Washington was asking African Americans to give up at least three things: political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education of African American youth. The result, DuBois argued, was the “disfranchisement of the Negro,” the “legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro,” and the “steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher education for the Negro” (Dubois, 1994, pp. 30-31). Instead, Dubois (1994) proposed a liberal arts curriculum, which would educate a “talented tenth” of the African American population who in return would progressively teach others. Additionally, this “talented tenth” would firmly and objectively confront the systematic injustices of a racist society as well as blend the African background of former slaves with American culture. Since political and economic independence were the long-range goals for African Americans, the education of the masses was critical. With this in mind, once schools were solidly established, courses offered in elementary schools consisted of reading, spelling, writing, grammar, diction, history, geography, arithmetic and music. Additional classes like physiology, algebra, and geometry became a part of the normal school curriculum (Anderson, 1988).

African Americans began the period after the Civil War with a rudimentary education and continued oppressive conditions. Counter to, advance records of literacy were obtained. Furthermore, the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance brought forms of literature, art, poetry, and music, which established racial pride and a demand for equality and racial justice. Even though the separate and unequal practices of Jim Crow continued until the middle of the twentieth century, the commitment for a quality education for African American children never wavered.

## The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement began an explosive decade because of massive resistance of public schools to allow integration as mandated by the Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka Kansas ruling. The Supreme Court's ruling in this class action suit brought forth by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) reversed the decision of Plessy versus Ferguson, which established the "separate but equal doctrine" (as long as facilities were equal, then separation was legal).

According to Banks (2006b), textbook accounts lead individuals to conclude that shortly after the decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, schools desegregated with "all deliberate speed." However, "the battle to desegregate schools took place one at a time-from town to town and county to county" (Banks, 2006b, p. 39). For example, in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas, protestors and National Guardsmen turned African Americans away as they tried to enter Central High School. Only after receiving protection from 1000 army paratroopers sent by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, were nine students permitted to integrate the school. In a 1962 interview, a reporter asked Ernest Green, the first black graduate of Little Rock's Central High School, what he remembered most about his first day at Central High. Green responded:

In looking through my clippings, I think of all the things that have happened at Central, the most significant thing was the friendly attitude that students showed toward me the day of the rioting. The type of thing that was going on outside, people beaten, cursed, the mob hysterics, and all of this going on outside...we inside the school didn't realize the problems that were occurring and continually students were befriending us. I remember one case in particular in my physics

class. I was three weeks behind in my assignments, and a couple of fellows offered to give me notes and to help me catch up the work that I had missed. I was amazed at this kind of attitude being shown toward the Negroes. (Rains, 1997)

Another example detailed the experiences of an African American six year old. Led by four deputy marshals in 1960, Ruby Nell Bridges desegregated William Franz Elementary School in New Orleans. For an entire year, Ruby experienced education in a classroom of one because white parents refused to send their children to school. When asked, "What impact did that experience have on your life?" Ruby responded that because of that experience, her focus today is on education, family, and children (Bridges, 1999). In addition to Brown vs. Board of Education, other legislative acts had an impact upon the experiences of African American students. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 signed by President Johnson stated that states and school districts could lose their federal funding if they refused to desegregate. To provide further assistance, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided billions of dollars to disadvantaged students (Mondale & Patton, 2001).

The Brown decision made possible greater opportunity for college enrollment among African Americans. In 1970 enrollment in predominantly White institutions was 4.3 %. In 1982, this number had increased to 9.4%. The large increase was possible because of affirmative action and "aggressive outreach and recruitment, "bridge" and remedial programs, and other programs that provided psychological, cultural, and technical encouragement (Platt, 1997).

On the other hand, there were disadvantages because of desegregation. The African American community suffered a great loss with desegregation. First, an

important source of ethnic pride and a center of important activities, the African American school, was now gone. An additional greater consequence was the selection of white teachers over African American teachers. This created a void of dedicated and caring individuals who had provided nurturing and positive educational experiences for African American students. According to those interviewed by Siddle Walker (2000), committed and exemplary teachers held high expectations for students. Being products of segregated schools themselves, the African American teachers not only identified with the aspirations and needs of the student, but they also knew how to motivate students to achieve beyond their local community. To ensure that students would be capable of participating in a non-segregated world, the curriculum was challenging, with an emphasis on classical training. Complementing the curriculum were assemblies and extra-curriculum activities of clubs, special observances such as Negro History Week, competition between other schools, and athletic events. These activities served to develop further the interests and talents of the students. Furthermore, parents supported the schools in unlimited ways: purchasing needed equipment and supplies, attending school functions, and serving as advocates to assure equal educational opportunities. Equally important, parents taught respect for school personnel and disciplined students at home for major and minor school disruptions. Finally, the principal served a multi-dimensional role. Not only was the principal the chief instructional leader, but he also served as a role model for both students and staff, and as the liaison with the Caucasian community. These positive characteristics of segregated schools revealed that despite the inequalities that African Americans endured, many segregated schools were associated with pleasing and extraordinary experiences. Personally, my parents and extended family members

proudly boast of the wonderful experiences of attending segregated schools. I observe that same fondness from others when I attend their yearly school reunions and exchange pleasantries with retired brigadier generals, actors, lawyers, judges, doctors, teachers, and college professors, all enthusiastically speaking of their experiences under the care of highly educated African American teachers in segregated schools.

A final consequence of dismantling segregation and the effect upon the experiences of African Americans involved a mass flight of middle class whites and African Americans from the urban areas to the suburbs. Wilson (1978) contends that the migration of African Americans from the South to the North heavily resided in urban areas. It was in the urban areas that the African American vote had become so powerful that it influenced national, congressional, state, and municipal elections. It was in the urban areas that African Americans were able to upgrade their occupations, increase their incomes, and improve their standards of living. As a result, many African Americans moved up to middle-class status, and “the middle class segment of an oppressed minority is most likely to participate in a drive for social justice” (Wilson, 1978, p. 18). With the exodus from the urban areas, the group that possessed a sense of power and expectations of equity and equality were no longer present. Those remaining were financially unable to provide adequate resources for schools, and have “witnessed the failure of civil rights to produce long-term positive change in their lives and communities” (Fine & Weiss, 1998, p. 15). Instead, students are faced with inferior and deteriorating public schools, a lack of positive role models, and a sense of hopelessness.

The Civil Rights Movement was also responsible for the examination of the curriculum which offered limited experience with any culture that was not Eurocentric.

Hilliard, Payton-Stewart, and Williams (1990) implied that the Eurocentric curriculum restricted cultural and racial experiences for African Americans. First, the history of Africa before the slave trade was omitted. Second, the history of the people of the African Diaspora was ignored. Third, the struggle against racism was insufficiently communicated, and finally, the analyses of the global systems of racial oppression were not fully taught correctly, thus leading to the omission of the history of African people. Moreover, the experiences of African Americans with the curriculum were culturally inadequate.

In an attempt to reform the educational experiences of cultural exclusion, the Civil Rights Movement advocated a multicultural curriculum. There were three specific goals of multicultural education (Banks, 1988). First, new ethnic groups would become acquainted with the unique cultures of other ethnic groups. Secondly, students would be provided with cultural and ethnic alternatives. This in turn would lead to all children having the necessary skills, attitudes, and knowledge they need to function within their ethnic and mainstream culture. Banks (1988) also believed that the pain and discrimination members of some ethnic and racial groups experienced because of their unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics would be significantly reduced. Finally, multicultural education would assist students in mastering essential reading, writing, and computational skills. According to Banks (1988), these goals were realized given the legal access advancements of African Americans in public school institutions.

### **The Twenty-First Century**

The last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the status of African Americans lead to a reevaluation of Bank's analysis. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the status of educational

experiences reveals “a sleepwalking back to Plessy” (Willoughby, 2004). In *Where Are We Now?*, Orfield and Frankenberg (2004) reported that African American students are the most likely racial group to attend what researchers call “apartheid schools.” These schools are identified as being practically all non-white and reeking of poverty, limited resources, lower test scores, less experienced teachers, fewer advanced placement courses, social strife, and health problems. This mirrors the same dire experiences that Kozol (1991) noted in *Savage Inequalities* approximately fifteen years ago.

The last four presidents have attempted to address the inequality in educational opportunities by passing legislative acts. From “A Nation at Risk” (Ronald Reagan) to “American 2000” (George H.W. Bush) to “Goals 2000” (William J. Clinton), and now “No Child Left Behind” (George H Bush), each has attempted to reform the educational system and close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. The most recent legislative act of *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) ensures that schools are held specifically accountable for the annual progress of African American students. According to the most recent Nation’s Report Card, reading and math scores for African American nine year olds and math scores for thirteen year olds are at all-time highs. Likewise, the achievement gap in reading and math between white and African American nine year olds and math scores for thirteen year olds are at an all-time low (<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/achieve/nclb-aa.pdf>). This is a considerable improvement; however, it has not been enough to remove the experiences of African Americans from the margins to the center.

The concept of a multicultural curriculum has also been reexamined and two new dimensions have been added to the original three. Banks (2006b) added equity pedagogy

and an empowering school culture and social structure. As indicated by Banks (2006b) equity pedagogy requires teachers to modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse groups. An empowering school culture is the process of restructuring the culture and organization of schools so that students from diverse social-class, racial, and ethnic groups will experience educational equality and cultural empowerment. Both are to encourage and promote educational experiences that will result in higher academic achievement and social development.

The final development that occurred during the last half of the twentieth century that has continued to affect the educational experiences of African American males is the twist in the demand for labor. Wilson (1999) postulated that because of technological changes and a global influenced economy, the demand for manufacturing goods-producing jobs, of which a large percentage of African American males were employed, is no longer necessary. Furthermore, the new professionals, technical, and managerial positions that have been created are for highly educated, well-trained men and women. This dilemma leads to a declining earning for African Americans, especially, African American males who are leading in the dropout rate and attending college in smaller numbers. According to Wilson (1999), most of the new jobs for workers with limited training and educations are in the service sector and are disproportionate held by women.

In *The Unknown City: The Lives of Poor and Working-Class Young Adults* (1998), when asked, “What do you think about why there are so many men in jail these days?” an interviewee responded:

No jobs, point blank. There ain't no jobs. There ain't nobody who's telling them how good their potential [is]... You've got somebody who would rather sit down

and say, “Here, sell this,” “Do this, Do that.” You know, “Shoot this gun.” You know that’s all they’re hearing all day of their life, you know. And at the same time when they’re here in the daily life, they still got to face the outside world. (Fine & Weiss, 1998, pp. 29-30)

The chronological review of the education of African Americans clearly details the experiences African Americans encountered in attainment of education, democracy, equality, and social justice. Although all African Americans were subjected to similar experiences of racial discrimination during the different periods, gender differences existed. The curriculum in the industrial schools was different for males and females. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the increase of the number of African American females in farm labor increased three times more than the increase for males (Anderson, 1988). Even during the migration of African Americans from the rural farm life to southern and northern cities, the experiences of African American males were in manufacturing whereas the experiences of African American females involved an over-representation of domestic services (Rury, 1991). An examination of adolescents and the formation of male identity may reveal reasons behind the varied experiences for African American males.

### **Adolescents and Identity**

During the adolescence stage, individuals enrich their understanding of their environment with a conscious attempt “to conceptualize the self, to assess what one has been as a child, is now, and would like to be in the future” (Taylor, 1989, p. 157). Because of all that occurs during this stage of development, adolescents are vulnerable to psychological dysfunction. It is during adolescence that the task of identity formation

becomes a quintessential task. Acknowledging the complexity of the identity concept, Erikson (1968) states:

We deal with a process “located” *in the core of the individual* and yet also in the *core of his communal culture*...In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observations, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, “identity-consciousness”. Furthermore, the process is always changing and developing.” (pp. 22-23)

Identity formation is crucial during the adolescence period and for African Americans, racial and ethnic identity become more complex. According to Tatum (1997), race or ethnicity is generally not stated as a form of identity for Caucasians because their identity is taken for granted by the dominant culture. Tatum contends that for Caucasians, their outer interactions and inner processes of experiences are in harmony with one another. In addition, the image reflected by others is similar to the image displayed by the individual. Thus, the dimension of identity escapes conscious attention because there is no dissonance in interpretation. Because African Americans are members of an oppressed

and marginalized group, it is important to explore how identity, as it relates to ethnicity, gender, and race affect the academic and social experiences of African American males.

Phinney (1990) cited adolescents' ethnic identity development as comprising three distinct stages: unexamined, exploration, and achieved. An unexamined identity implied little or no understanding of issues of ethnic reasoning related to ethnic understanding. Those with an unexamined ethnic identity, internalize the attitudes and beliefs about the in-group that are most readily available in the broader cultural context. In contrast, individuals in the exploration aspect of ethnic identity are examining the meaning of their ethnic group membership in relation to the dominant culture. At this state, group members are typically immersed within their ethnic group's history and cultural practices. Individuals at an achieved stage of ethnic identity have a working knowledge of their ethnic heritage, a clear idea of the meaning of their ethnic group membership, and a commitment to their ethnic heritage, an evident demonstration of ethnic group qualities, and a commitment to their ethnicity and the role it plays in their lives.

Cross (1991) and Cross, Parham, and Helm (1991) proposed a Nigrescence Theory of racial identity. This model notates the identity process of becoming Black. The Nigrescence Theory characterized four stages of racial identity: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization with multiple identities existing within each stage. The pre-encounter stage occurs during the elementary years when students are initially exposed and taught traits of their environment. Two identities develop during this stage: assimilation and anti-Black. Cross maintains that assimilation characterizes the adoption of a mainstream identity and race is not viewed as important. At this stage,

African American children value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty represented by the dominant group more highly than those of their own cultural group. In contrast, the anti-Black identity describes individuals who hate being Black and hate other Blacks. According to Cross (1991), two aspects form the basis for the anti-Black identity: “miseducation”, which stems from the belief of negative images (e.g., lazy, criminal, unintelligent) about Blacks depicted by mainstream society and self-hatred” (p.192). The transition to the encounter stage occurs during adolescence in which an experience with covert or overt discrimination and prejudice compel the adolescent to acknowledge the personal impact of racism.

Wakefield and Hudley (2005) investigated African American male adolescent’s preferred responses to acts of racial discrimination as a function of their stage of ethnic identity status and the audience present at the time. The adolescents endorsed active, passive, or aggressive strategies to respond to racial discrimination. Active responses challenged the act of discrimination in an assertive, non-hostile manner. Passive responses did not address the act of discrimination in any way. Aggressive responses were one of hostility that may have included physical threat or harm to the perpetrator of the discrimination. All perpetrators were white American males, and scenarios described students who experienced racial discrimination while interviewing for a job, making a purchase at a department store, playing a basketball game, and entering a restaurant on prom night. Wakefield and Hudley (2005) found that African American male adolescents whose scores fell into the unexamined ethnic identity range significantly endorsed passive responses than individuals whose scores fell into the achieved or exploration ethnic range.

Additional studies reveal the impact that racial identity has on the schooling experiences of African American adolescents. Fordham and Ogbu (1986; Fordham, 1990) revealed that in order to achieve in school, African American adolescents sense a surrender of their identity. For these adolescents, academic success depended upon their development and sense of “racelessness” whereas students felt they must “maximize their success potential by minimizing their relationship with the black community and to the stigma attached to “blackness” (p. 235). Fordham’s study indicated that both female and male high achievers take on a raceless persona, but that male high achievers appear to be much more victimized in the school context by the “double-consciousness.” “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness.., one ever feels the twoness-An American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Dubois, 1994, p. 2). Even when compared with the female student, the high achieving males appear to be less committed in the cultural potential their success has in society as a whole and “far more confused and less ambivalent about the value of forsaking their indigenous beliefs and values” (Fordham, p. 258).

Noguera (2003) detailed an experience in which identity and gender intersected with academic performance. Upon being approached by an African American male for assistance with a paper on Huckleberry Finn, Noguera questioned the students as to why he had not discussed the plight of Jim, the runaway slave, a central character to the novel. The student informed Noguera that his teacher had instructed the class to focus on the plot and not get into issues about race because that wasn’t the main point of the story. The student further explained that two students in the class, both African American

males, had objected to the use of the word “nigger” throughout the novel and had been told by the teacher that if they insisted on making it an issue, the student would have to leave the course. As told by Noguera, both students opted to leave the course even though it meant that they would have to take another course, which did not meet the college preparatory requirements. The student being assisted by Noguera instead chose to just tell the teacher what she wanted to hear.

In addition to academic achievement, ethnic identity affects social development. As part of a violence-prevention pilot program for grades five through eight, McMahon and Watts (2002) examined the relationship between the influence of ethnic identity and global self-worth on aggression, coping, and adjustment among urban African American adolescents. Even though global self-worth was the primary focus of the study, McMahon and Watts (2002) found that youth with a greater sense of ethnic identity reported more coping strategies, fewer beliefs supporting aggression, and fewer aggression behaviors.

The images from popular culture also affect identity formation as it relates to social development (Orange & George, 2000). In rap videos, images make adolescents think that being hard is the sole definition of being African American (Sims, 1993). In films, images of African American males are as drug dealers, violent sexual predators, and dangerous and lazy menaces to society (Kincheloe, 2002). In television, images of African American males are as crime suspects as opposed to positive role models or any individual who generally commands a degree of authority, power, or respect in the community (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Dixon, 2000). Adolescents observe these models in media images and pick up traits, orientations, and values (Boykin & Ellison,

1995). These images are so strong that a hyperreality is created whereas individuals lose touch with traditional notions of community, self, and history (Kincheloe, 2002). When compared to non-African American teens, there is even a 40% difference in television viewing time (<http://www.tvturnoff.org/mages/fact&figs/factsheets/FactsFis.pdf>) Academic achievement is affected by this. Healy (1990) contends that intensive or excessive viewing can affect a child's brain and the development of creativity and intelligence by reducing stimulation of parts of the brain that are critical for development of language, reading, and analytic thinking. Furthermore, it diminishes mental ability and attention, and discourages the development of executive systems needed for regulation attention, organization, and motivation. To counteract this effect, Daspit and Weaver (2000) suggest that students negotiate the terrains of popular culture by inviting multiple meanings that contradict and act independently from each other. The multiple meanings allow students to remake their own identities when creating experiences that can enhance their academic achievement and social development. Popular culture can provide students with a "backstage pass" which offers access to authentic reflexivity" (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p.174). Thus, popular culture can be a primary educational site (Reynolds, 2003).

Clearly, racial/ethnic identity is a complex, yet important component of adolescent development. Because of this complexity, the influences involved in the construction of African American male identity should be at the center of analyses. Moreover, their environment maybe characterized by poverty, crime, and unemployment. It is the basis of their identities that African American males are presumed to be at risk, marginal, and endangered throughout American society (Anderson, 1990). A strong sense of racial identity and racial socialization provide protection against daily hassles that

African American males experience as they seek to perform well in school (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). Therefore, an understanding of the cultural and structural forces that shape experiences and influence the construction of their identities must be investigated (Noguera, 2003). Given its importance for positive identity development, Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) present several prescriptions that enhance identity formation and lead to greater academic and social experiences. First, methods should be proposed to keep minority youth in school and academically oriented since their lack of education continues to serve as a condition that virtually guarantee a life course of socioeconomic disadvantage. Secondly, efforts are required to heighten health consciousness since chronic health problems confound identity processes. Thirdly, the importance of constructive social networks and support systems should be affirmed. The methods should be proposed to support parenting efforts as cultural transmitters while at the same time teaching parental skills that promote the parent's sense of ethnic pride and enhance "home-school partnership bonds" is essential. Finally, schools should provide a mechanism for sensitizing teachers to the customs, traditions, and communication patterns of ethnic minorities.

If the suggestions offered for the enhancement of identity are implemented, the majority of African American adolescent males could be eligible for inclusion in the "talented tenth".

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may

guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own races. (Dubois, as cited in Leeman, 1996)

### **The Experiences of African American Adolescents**

Positive experiences for African American children begin at birth. In a comparison of African American and European psychomotor development, Wilson (1978, cited in Wilson, 1992) noted eight observations in which African American children develop at a rapid pace in contrast to European children. The first year of life favored a head start for African American children. For example, at only nine hours old, African American infants were able to draw up in a sitting position, able to prevent its head from falling backward; it took the European child six weeks. At two days old, with head held firmly, the African American infant was able look directly in the face of the examiner; it took the European child eight weeks. At seven weeks old, the African American infant supported himself in a sitting position and watched his reflection in the mirror; the European child took twenty weeks. At five months, the African American infant held himself upright, took a round block out of its hole in a form board, and stood against a mirror. Respectively, it took the European child nine, eleven months, and nine months. The African American child walked to the Gesell Box and looked inside at seven months; it took the European child fifteen months. The final notation observed the African American toddler climbing the steps alone at eleven months, whereas it took the European toddler fifteen months.

Thus, the initial stage for achievement for African Americans is set at an early age and continues with the formulation of experiences in the home, the community, and the school. Beginning with the home, parental involvement remains an important predictor of

school outcome through adolescence (Hill & Taylor, 2004), and parental support has been the most frequently cited contributing factor for academic success (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998). When comparing the role of parental involvement of successful African American students with unsuccessful African American students and successful European American students, Yan (1999) found that parents of successful African American students demonstrated higher levels of parental involvement in areas of discussing school experiences and future plans, contacting the school in regards to school experiences and future plans, spending time on cultural activities, participating in school activities, family rules, and educational expectations. Although some contend that the education of the parent is directly related to higher levels of students' academic achievement (Smith, Atkins, & Connell, 2003). Hrabowski et al (1998), and Gonzales, Cauce, Friedman, and Mason (1996) found that family income, parent education level, and the number of parental figures in the home are not variables which significantly predict school performance.

In *Beating the Odds: Raising Academically Successful African American Males* (1998), four groups of males from non-educated single-family households, college-educated single-family households, non-educated two-parent households, and college-educated two-parent households, indicated that experiences of parental involvement focused upon four factors that aided their academic and social success. The similarities among this diverse group found experiences in which parents focused on reading and learning at an early age and school achievement were family priorities. These parents also demonstrated an interest in homework and monitored it on a regular basis. In addition to being involved at home, parental involvement at school was important. Lastly, parents

encouraged, supported extracurricular activities, and when necessary, arranged for an optimal academic environment.

Community involvement is another factor which influences academic achievement. Community involvement consists of the actions that organizations and individuals take to promote student intellectual and social development (Nettles, 1991). One significant institution that assists students academically and socially is the church (Hrabowski et al., 1998; Haight, 2002; Ross, 1998, 2003).

In an attempt to understand African American children's participation within the cultural context of the church, Haight (2002) examined socialization strategies that support educational achievement. Through Vacation Bible School, monthly events such as "youth emphasis day," and weekly sermons specifically designed for youth, children were nurtured as future leaders. Haight (2002) believed that this contributed to children's sense of self-worth and efficacy, which in turn affected achievement and social development. "Children are given a place as legitimate community members whose current contributions are meaningful. To be given opportunities for genuine, legitimate participation can result in the development of many competencies" (Haight, p.195) In addition to the activities, Haight indicated that stories told by teachers in the church stress faith, effort and community. "This challenges students to remain a loving and moral person throughout the journey and to maintain a deep optimism in the ultimate rewards of a successful journey" (Haight, 2002, p.196). Not only are principals of freedom, justice, and forgiveness taught as spiritual lifelines, but these same principles can be used in everyday life to "develop capacity for emotional regulation" (Barbarin, 1993).

Other programs in the African American community provide social support, enrichment activities, and resources to aid students in academic achievement (Nettles, 1991). After two years of operation, Nettles and McParland (cited in Nettles, 1991) found that students who participated in a mentoring, advocacy and tutorial program in the community had better attendance and English grades than students in the same grade who did not participate.

A community program aimed specifically toward African American males is an African centered rites of passage program. Not only are rites of passage movements “a resurgence of African centered practice for socializing African American youth” (Warfield-Copper, 1992), but it affects academic achievement. According to Hill (1992), African American rites of passage provide and instill the fundamentals of African and African American culture, history, life skills, and character development training which serve to increase the self-esteem and ethnic pride of adolescent African American males. Consequently, these young males are able to receive the academic regimen placed before them as well as develop mentally and socially. The value system worthy of daily implementation is based upon the seven principals of Nguzo Saba: Umoja (Unity) - striving and maintaining unity in the family, community, nation, and race; Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) - defining and molding oneself from a strength-oriented perspective as opposed to being incorrectly defined or spoken for by others; Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) - working collectively toward resolving problems and maintaining the community; Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) - building and preserving the stores, shops, and businesses in an effort to enjoy jointly the profits; Nia (Purpose) - making a concerted attempt to build, develop, and cultivate the community in order to reclaim the

inherent greatness of African American people; Kuumba (Creativity) – thinking of and executing ways to improve the community both intrinsically and aesthetically; and Imani (Faith) - having steadfast determination and belief in themselves, parents, teachers, and leaders. Additionally, Ma'at, the Ancient Egyptian divine Principle of Truth, Justice, and Righteousness, are as aspect of rites of passage programs.

The results of a longitudinal study found that when comparing grade point averages, retention and graduation rates, students who participated in a rites of passage program experienced more success than student who did not participate (Goggins, 2003). Conversely, another evaluation of rites of passage for adolescents revealed that participating youths had no significant gains in their academic orientation (Harvey & Hill, 2004). Nevertheless, the program enhanced the adolescents' motivation for learning by using creative strategies to promote their appreciation of reading, biology, science, and mathematics.

Martin (2000) examined community factors that contributed to African American adolescents' success in mathematics. According to Martin (2000) studying community beliefs about mathematics reveals how the legacy of denied opportunities and differential treatment in mathematics contexts informs and affects the day-to-day lives of African American adults. The experiences of the adults consequently influence their expectations for their children in the area of mathematics achievement, and the community contexts that students look to for messages about the importance of mathematics. Even though narratives from successful adolescents did not cite the importance of the community beliefs about math as a factor of academic achievement, the majority of community

members' narratives indicated that community belief about math is a major factor affecting academic achievement. As indicated by one community individual,

There's no incentive out there to excel in that area. We don't have no industry out there and the industry out there, they're not targeting the Black community and saying, if you go and get more math, then I can guarantee you this. But the average Caucasian may know that with math...he knows where his market is for what he's going to get. The average Black American doesn't know what markets there are out there for math. They're not looking at NASA needs mathematics. They're not looking at who needs skilled people at math. They just don't know. (Martin, 2000, p. 178)

In addition to church and community programs, a proportion of college-educated African American residents indicated the stability of the neighborhood affect academic achievement (Smith et al. 2003). Community centers also serve as key alternative educational sites that create unique validated pathways to success (Dimitriadis, 2003).

Most importantly, circumstances within schools greatly affect the academic achievement of African Americans. The beginning of gender inequality for African American males develops during upper elementary. According to Kunjufu (1995), during early elementary African American boys exhibit high achievement and demonstrate a strong potential for academic success. However, by fourth grade, these same students are labeled as "underachievers". Kunjufu identifies this phenomenon as "fourth grade failure syndrome" and contributes this withdrawal of interest in school related academic activities to teachers that are unfamiliar with African American language, values, and behaviors. Likewise, Kunjufu contends that the predominance of female teachers' views

of male behavior (e.g. louder, more physical, less cooperative, shorter attention span) as inappropriate also contributes to “fourth grade syndrome.”

African Americans also begin to experience tracking in elementary school. According to Wheelock (1992), 60% of elementary schools are breaking up students into different levels in every grade, or practicing some kind of whole-class grouping by ability. The process continues in middle school whereby African American males routinely are assumed to be academically deficient and then demonized for their angry reactions to those biased assumptions (Muwakkil, 2005). Resentful of a system that dismisses their potential, many African American males eventually experience diminished self-esteem, motivation for learning and engagement in school (Denbo, 2002). A severe consequence of tracking is that it limits the number of African American students who enter college because the large numbers of minorities who are tracked in the early grades are never provided with experiences in school that would lead to preparation and readiness for college. Thus, tracking prepares students for their socioeconomic future (Paige & Page, 1995). More disturbing is the fact that placement is racially skewed. In a study of tracking within two school systems, Oakes (1995) found that at all three levels—elementary, middle, and high school, African-American and Latino students were much less likely than white or Asian students with the same qualifying test scores to be placed in accelerated courses. Furthermore, Oakes discovered patterns of large, overlapping ranges of scores at different instructional course levels. This observation led to the conclusion that assignments to low-level classes and high-level classes were based upon teachers’ judgment about students’ academic abilities. Thus, Oakes concluded that

tracking created experiences of unjustifiable disproportionate and segregative assignment to low-track classes and exclusion from accelerated classes.

Teacher behavior, perception and expectation greatly affect the experiences of African American students, and the connection between students' race and sex has been documented for more than a quarter of a century. In Taylor's study (1979), 100 white female undergraduates at a teacher-training program presented lessons to "Phantom" students, who were alleged to be observing and responding from behind a two-way glass. The students were described as high or low ability, male or female, black or white. Verbal and nonverbal teacher responses were recorded. Taylor (1979) discovered that the subjects who believed their pupils were black gave fewer positive feedback statements than did the subjects who thought their pupils were white. In addition, positive feedback and helpful prompting were most often withheld from black males and most often given to white males.

Orange and Horowitz (1999) also showed how students' perception of school and their teachers affect achievement, attitudes and performance. In their study, African American and Mexican American adolescent males rated their preference for literary tasks, academic activities that allow students to express themselves through reading and writing. Likewise, teachers were asked to rate the preferences according to how they thought that the students would rate the tasks. Students and teachers' perceptions were quite different. Activities ranked high by students were ranked low by teachers. These differences revealed what Orange and Horowitz (1999) termed "academic standoff," or mutual resistance in which teachers and students each had perceptions that clearly

counterbalance each other. When teachers and students are at odds, experiences are subject to being negative as opposed to the preferred outcome of positive experiences.

In *African American Teens Discuss their Schooling Experiences* (2002) a questionnaire was administered to 271 African American students. Twenty-eight of them were interviewed in regards to their elementary, middle, and high school experiences. It was discovered that more than half of the students who responded to the questionnaire experienced a major problem or obstacle during middle school that might have prevented them from graduating or becoming a successful adult. Nevertheless, 75% of the students believed their middle school teacher cared about them, believed they would graduate from high school, and believed they would become successful. While thirty-eight percent of the adolescents indicated that two or more of their best teachers were during middle school, 16% responded that two or more of their worst teachers were also during middle school. More than 56% rated the quality of instruction of their middle school teacher as good and 13% rated it as excellent. The majority of student indicated that they spent two to five hours per week on homework during middle school, but they also did not feel that the homework assignments were very beneficial. Students also identified math and science as the most difficult courses, and physical education and language arts as the easiest. For the majority of the interviewees, elementary school years were positive, middle schools years were problematic, and high school years were an improvement. One male student's account was:

He wasn't teaching math. He was just talking about his life, his personal problems. I can't remember if he got fired or if he moved to another school but he was no longer there by the time I got to eighth grade. He was just terrible. If you

didn't like what he was saying, he would get so upset with you, but if you just sat there and laughed and acted like you really enjoyed him—doing that fake stuff—he was just like your buddy. I hated that. I mean teach something! Let me learn something! Don't let me learn about cars or how you can't stand your ex-wife. I don't think it should be a personal matter unless it's educational. Once he told me that I was just making excuses just like all of the Black people on Welfare.

(Thompson, 2002, p. 105)

Another case study involved reflections of African American males on their secondary school experiences in the area of mathematics. In Polite's study (1999), students indicated that teachers were uncaring and failed to create a challenging academic climate. These males indicated that the lack of good guidance and counseling resulted in them intentionally shying away from challenging math courses. Even though many indicated that they had postsecondary plans for careers in electronics, health care, mathematics, and sciences, few had enrolled in courses beyond Pre-Algebra I and II and Algebra I because counselors provided little knowledge about prerequisites for specific college programs and jobs. However, students also reported that they themselves had "free choice" in selecting their courses and generally selected courses based upon minimum graduation requirements. They also admitted that they played a role in the nonacademic nature of the overall school climate which affected both teachers' attitude and students' achievement. Nevertheless, Polite (1999) referred to the African American males' school experiences as "ecology of educational neglect" (p. 104).

Using data from The National Center for Educational Statistics, Davis & Jordan (1994) investigated factors which influenced academic success for a large representative

sample of African American eighth grade males. Davis & Jordan (1994) found that adolescents who experienced having their assigned teacher each day instead of substitutes performed better. Additionally, students with personal practices of good study habits and perfect attendance also yielded positive results in terms of achievement, engagement, and grades. Similarly, students who achieved well in elementary school continued to perform well in middle school. Conversely, factors that served as deterrents to academic achievement included an over-reliance on discipline, retention, the need for remediation, suspension, and attending urban schools. When examining school experiences of African American males, Davis & Jordan believed that it is important to investigate contextual and structural factors that influence academic success.

Although there is an under-representation of African Americans males in accelerated or gifted classes and little research of their experiences, a search found the experiences of talented and gifted African American males' experiences to be similar to African American males in the general population. From an ethnographic study of twelve gifted African American males, Hebert (1998) described the experiences of two of those students; one an achiever and the other an underachiever. Whereas both students displayed above-average potential as measured by standardized test and superior performance in one or more academic areas, different factors influenced either the achievement or underachievement of these two students. Heber (1998) found that the achiever's experiences included supportive parents, teachers and coaches who encouraged academic excellence over athletic prowess, involvement in extra-curriculum activities, respect from his multicultural peers, and appropriate and intellectually challenging educational opportunities. Contrasting, the underachiever scored in the 96<sup>th</sup>

to 99<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading, math, and language arts yet his report cards reflected C's and D's. One factor that influenced underachievement in this student included a mis-match in leaning modality. Activities both at home and in one class clearly demonstrated that the underachiever was a hands-on learner, yet inappropriate counseling and curriculum experiences did not match his learning style. Additionally, family issues and inappropriate and illegal after-school employment of 37 hours a week instead of extra-curriculum activities provided experiences which jeopardized his chance of not only fulfilling his career goal, but also of simply graduating from school.

The importance placed on learning styles and culture by educators has serious implications for the academic success of African American adolescent males. Too often, these students are required to assemble in classrooms that are unsupportive of their individual learning styles. Shade (1992) contends that African Americans and Euro-Americans significantly differ in their perceptual orientation to the environment. Hale (1986) characterized the learning styles of African American males as self-centered, global, descriptive in nature, distractible, and over-involved in all activities. Jackson-Allen and Christenberry (1994) compared the learning style preference of low-achieving and high-achieving African American males. Their results revealed that high-achievers had stronger preferences for motivation and were more parent motivated than low achievers. On the other hand, low achievers had stronger preferences for learning experiences that involved opportunities for mobility. However, Peeke, Steward, and Ruddock (1998) found every possible learning style represented among African American adolescents. Students in this study learned best by directly experiencing through the five senses and from a combination of techniques (i.e. drill, demonstration,

direct, actual experiences, programmed instruction, and practice). Peeke, Steward, and Ruddock (1998) believed that to ensure that students are able to achieve in any school environment as well as to address future life challenges inside and outside school, it is best for African American adolescents to become aware of and be exposed to other options as their preferences are pursued. Consequently, learning style is not dictated by race; culture is the driving force (Kunjufo, 2002). Moreover, Willis (1992) observed African American adolescents experiencing learning situations highly reflective of dimensions of the West African belief systems. The nine dimensions are (a) affection, with an emphasis on emotion and feelings; (b) communalism, through a commitment to social connectedness where social bonds transcend individual privileges; (c) expressive individualism, the cultivation of a distinctive personality and a spontaneity in behavior; (d) harmony, the belief that humans and nature are harmoniously conjoined; (e) movement expressiveness, an emphasis on the interweaving of movement, rhythm, music and dance as artistic demonstrations; (f) oral interpretations, a preference for oral/aural modalities of communication; (g) spirituality, a ritualistic rather than mechanistic approach to life; and (h) social time perspective, an orientation in which time is treated as passing through a social space rather than a material one (Boykin, 1983). Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) summarize the difference by emphasizing that mainstream American cultural orientation endorses competition, individualism, the creation of a nuclear family, religion as separate from other aspects of life, and mastery over nature. Conversely, African American cultural orientation promotes a collective orientation, an extended family network, religion as integral to other aspects of life, and harmony with nature. This clearly demonstrates that the emphasis should be more upon culture.

Previously, it was suggested that No Child Left Behind is committed to high expectations and accountability, which should foster positive academic experiences for African Americans. On the other hand, the experiences of African American males brought on by zero tolerance policies appear to partially derail the educational process. According to Fuentes (2003) “that’s why legal and education experts are blaming zero tolerance for what is now being termed the “school to prison pipeline” (p. 17). Fuentes further details the affective and social experiences of two African American males that resulted from zero tolerance.

Bryson Donaldson, the only twelve-year-old African American male in his class, was patted down, scanned with a metal detector, given a five-day suspension, and then placed in an alternative program simply for pointing his finger like a gun at a classmate. Prior to the incident, Bryson was a straight-A student. Afterwards, according to Bryson’s mother, he had nightmares, had to be taken to a psychiatrist, and then struggled to attend school each day.

The second incidence involved Daniel Brion, a fourteen year-old eighth grader.

While walking down the hall, Daniel commented that he wished the school would burn down and take the principal with it. His remarks were overhead, but reported as Daniel had gasoline and was recruiting a gang to burn down the school.

Immediately the police were called to investigate. Several weeks later, Daniel was yanked out of class, interrogated again by a policeman, and read his Miranda rights.

Students who have successful school experiences are less likely to be involved in delinquent acts than students who are relatively unsuccessful in school (Voelkl, Welte, &

Wieczorek, 1999). Even when infractions occur, Skiba and Knesting (2001) offered recommendations that will decrease the number of experiences African American males encounter within the discipline cycle. First, reserve zero-tolerance disciplinary removals for only the most serious and severe of disruptive behaviors, such as weapon offenses, and define those behaviors explicitly. Secondly, replace one-size-fits-all disciplinary strategies with graduated systems of discipline, with consequences geared to the seriousness of the infraction. Thirdly, expand the array of options available to schools for dealing with disruptive or violent behaviors. Fourth, implement preventive measures that can improve school climate and reconnect alienated students, and finally, evaluate all school discipline or school violence-prevention strategies to ensure that those strategies are truly having an impact on student behavior and school safety.

The literature review clearly reveals that a substantial number of experiences that African American males encounter impede their progress towards academic achievement and acceptable social development. This further adds to the normal stressors of adolescence development. Since traditional approaches have been highly ineffective, a new formula is warranted. With careful dispassionate analysis of the narratives of successful African American males, a better understanding of an appropriate pedagogy should emerge. Narratives from African American adolescent males are the beginning of the journey towards pedagogy of social justice.

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Pedagogy [refers] to the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, and evaluation, purpose, and methods. All of these aspects of educational practice come together in the realities

of what happens in classrooms. Together they organize a view of how a teacher's work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. (Simon as cited in McLaren, 2003, p. 187)

The pedagogy of most schools teaches an ideological consciousness that helps reproduce the division of labor in society which served the interest of the dominant culture (Apple, 1979; Apple, 1995), specifically, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant males (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). Apple (1995) contends that this economical, ethical, and political structuring of culture frames the ways in which subordinate groups live and respond to their own cultural system and lived experience. Furthermore, the dominant culture fixes the meaning of representations, signs, and symbols, to provide a common worldview as it disguises the relations of power and privilege. Apple (1979) noted the interconnection between ideology and school by examining the basic regularities of school experience and what covert ideologies teaching goes on because of them, the ideological commitments embedded within the overt curriculum, and the ideological and ethical ways experiences are thought about, planned, and evaluated. In the words of Cummins and Sayers (1995), "Curricular content and its mode of presentation represent one aspect of the way education is structured. In the not-so-distant past, much of the curriculum in North American schools was unashamedly Eurocentric and in many cases explicitly racist" (p. 381).

These daily practices, which reflect the ideology of the dominant society are ordinary in classroom and do not promote any resemblance of equality, democracy, or

social justice for minority students. John Dewey (1997) wrote that democracy and education are intertwined in their responsibilities to help the public solve its problems. Ayers (2006) suggest that in order to develop knowledge and understand social and educational phenomena fully, those in education must draw on the humanities and themes of enlightenment and emancipation, human knowledge, and human freedom. According to Ayers (2006)

Humanism is built on the idea that human life is indeterminate, expansive, and interconnected, that there exists a special human capacity for knowledge of who and what we are in the world...Every humanist is drawn in the spirit of cooperation, sharing, and being-in-common - to explore and expand every bit of it. Because humanism invites the input and engagement of all, there is no obvious conflict between the practice of humanism and the pursuit of democracy—humanism, like democracy, unleashes energy toward enlistment and freedom. (p.83)

Once eyes are open whereby individuals are seen as human beings, it becomes easier to witness oppression and injustices. A second step becomes challenging orthodoxy followed by linking consciousness to conduct (Ayers, 2006). This leads to the road of social justice.

Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) contend that the aim of social justice education is to help students develop credible sources, honest personal reflection, and critical thinking. Attending to this aim requires the development of five teaching principles. First, attention must be paid to personal safety, classroom norms, and group behaviors. This balances the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process. Secondly, the

individual student's experiences should be acknowledged and supported. This provides concrete, real-life examples when discussing the interaction among various and distinct social groups. A third principle attends to social relationships within the classroom, whereby students name and understand behaviors that emerge within groups. This leads to an improvement in interpersonal communications among cultures. The fourth principle utilizes reflection and experience as tools for student-centered learning. Experiences create a starting point for dialogue among students. Finally, the outcome of the learning process should reflect value awareness, personal growth, and change.

One technique that will take educators to where they need to go in fulfilling humanism, democracy, and equality is through appropriate pedagogy. Armed with the intentional outcome of promoting social justice, the experiences of African American males should reflect a pedagogical paradigm, whereby teachers understand and appreciate cultural background, language, and learning styles. Irvine (1990) theorized that cultural synchronization either contributes to or seriously inhibits the school experiences of African American males. Gay (2000) agrees, further adding that the pedagogical paradigm that appears to be most effective for students of color teaches to and through personal and cultural strengths, intellectual capabilities, and prior accomplishments (Gay, 2000). Referred to as culturally responsive, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, or culturally compatible, a culturally relevant pedagogical occurs when elements of the students' culture are incorporated into the teaching process as indicated in the principles of social justice education.

Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, and 2001) defined the use of culturally relevant instruction as a type of instruction that empowers students emotionally, intellectually,

politically and socially. Cultural relevant pedagogy is also based upon three premises (Ladson-Billings, 1994). First, students must experience academic success. Secondly, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence. Finally, students must develop a critical consciousness through which they can challenge the status quo of the current social order.

Ladson-Billings (2001) contends that students experience academic success when teachers focus upon academic achievement. To focus upon academic achievement, Ladson-Billings indicates that teachers presume that all students are capable of being educated and thus, send a clear message of what achievement means in the context of the classroom. Furthermore, the teacher knows the content, the learner, and how to teach content to the learner. Teaching content to the learner means making relevant connections. More importantly, instead of using a one-time assessment such as a standardized test, measurement of academic achievement is evaluated through a variety of means. One mean of appropriate evaluation for African American males is using popular culture. In a poetry unit in which students were to understand the historical period in which a poem was written in order to come to a deep interpretation, Morrell (2002) witnessed academic success of his high school African American students once he incorporated hip-hop music, film, and mass media as a means to ensure academic achievement. Because of infusing popular culture, Morrell noted that students' critical and analytical skills were honed, they were able to understand the connection between literature, popular culture, and their everyday lives, and they were able to translate their analyses into quality oral debates and expository pieces similar to those required of college preparatory English classrooms.

As indicated earlier, cultural competence occurs with a strong sense of identity, and rites of passage programs enhance this characteristic. However, if students don't get the opportunity to participate in such programs, Ladson-Billings (2001) believes that cultural competence is achieved in classrooms when teachers understand students' culture, the role it plays in education, and then use the students' local and global culture as a basis for learning. The results of Rickford's (2001) study on culturally relevant texts indicated that African American folktales and African American short stories increase motivation for students. The inclusion of themes, characterizations, illustrations, and language, (i.e. African American vernacular English), validate African American culture. This has "an important psychological impact on students. It makes students feel personally involved and emotionally invested" (Rockford, p. 371). One student's response to the use of contemporary ethnic narratives was, "It is a good story...and whoever wrote this gets two thumbs up for writing such a beautiful and great story" (p. 267).

Critical consciousness, the third premise of culturally relevant pedagogy, allows students to critique the cultural norms, mores, institutions, and values that maintain social inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Friere (2001) postulates this notion of "conscientization" as students recognize and evaluate structures of power. Moreover, students begin to understand themselves as active agents, enabling them to identify and/or create conditions for the possibility of change in oppressive sociopolitical constructs. Students develop critical consciousness when they are aware of the sociopolitical context of the community, school, nation, and world, and then plan and implement academic experiences that connect them to the larger social context (Ladson-

Billings, 2001). For example, an eighth grade social studies class addressed the issue of violence in their personal lives and in society. After being provided with background knowledge, students assessed violence in the media by watching television and movies. Afterwards, they interviewed experts in an effort to analyze media portrayals of violence critically. Based upon their analyses, students formulated, wrote, and revised action recommendations for their peers (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998). “By studying problems in their lives and by rooting those problems historically, students are able to diagnose this society, uncover inequality, and explore the reasons for its existence” (Christensen, 1998). Furthermore, participation in civil life of the community is the beginning of effective citizenship. Once students learn how to make decisions and solve problems within their communities, they are better able to take actions that will enhance democracy and promote public interest in their nation, and eventually in the world. According to Banks (2006a), Ladson-Billings and Tate define public interest as “actions and decisions that further democracy, democratic practices and social justice” (p. 141). This is critical because it allows for the voices, experiences, and hopes of those once marginalized to be heard once again. Additionally, because this nation is part of a global society that is highly interconnected, it is important for African American males to develop a delicate balance of cultural, national, and global identifications (Banks, 2004).

Gay (2000) details the characteristics of cultural relevant pedagogy. Cultural relevant pedagogy “acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum” (p. 29). Thus, the process becomes validated and affirmed with cultural instruction. Culturally relevant

pedagogy is comprehensive because expectations and skills are blended into all aspects of the curriculum and the classroom. Cultural relevant pedagogy is thus multidimensional. In addition to covering curriculum content, learning context, and classroom climate, cultural relevant pedagogy encompasses teacher-student relationships and performance assessments by acknowledging culturally relevant distinctions. Furthermore, culturally relevant pedagogy is empowering which translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act (Gay, 2000). Cultural relevant pedagogy has a dichotomous effect with its transformative agenda. One angle confronts culturally hegemonic tendencies employed with curriculum and classroom instruction. Meanwhile, student development of academic achievement, political and personal efficacy, and social consciousness alertly combat all forms of oppression and exploitation. Finally, cultural responsive pedagogy is provisionary because students begin to understand that truth comes in many versions of ideas that are being espoused and is not permanently understood. Gay posits:

It [cultural relevant pedagogy] releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing.” The validation, information, and pride it generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating. This freedom allows students to focus more closely and concentrate more thoroughly on academic learning tasks.

(p. 35)

Gay (2000) concludes by stating that culturally relevant pedagogy features cooperation, community, and connectedness within the classroom. Cooperation manifests itself when students work interdependently within the classroom and the community. Leonard and

Guhu (2002) used cultural relevant pedagogy by connecting the community to mathematical understanding. For developing problem solving skills, Leonard and Guhu took students on a walking tour of their neighborhood. Using disposable cameras to capture interesting sites and people, students later used these photographs to formulate word problems. A school with a 30% African American population and 70% Latino population went one-step further in connecting math to the community; they involved the community and parents (Zanger, 1998). This project enlisted parents to help their children create mathematical story problems in their home language. According to Zanger (1998) publication of the stories was in a school-wide mathematics storybook and subsequently, distributed to the entire school community. Although the initial response was not overwhelming, after parents recognized the value of the published book, the project became a success for future publications. This cultural relevant pedagogy significantly affected parents and students. From Zanger's perspective, it gave parents who did not have an opportunity to come into the school the chance to contribute. Additionally, the project reflected the importance of extended families in the students' lives as parents, aunts, siblings, and grandparents coauthored stories submitted. Equally important was the thrill of parents seeing their child's name in print. The worthiness for students was significant as well. In creating the stories, "children brought imagination, compassion ...and a sense of humor not to be found in any textbook". Also noticed was that students who spent more time on student-centered mathematical problems tended to produce more mathematically sophisticated and challenging stories. This suggests the development of higher-order thinking skills. Likewise, the mathematical storybook increased students' motivation in mathematics classes. "Although difficult to measure in

quantitative terms, the experiences of writing and solving story problems seemed to contribute to students' mathematics empowerment" (Zanger, 1998). A heightened awareness of each of the characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy will increase the academic achievement and social development of African American adolescent males. Notwithstanding, culturally relevant pedagogy builds "equity pedagogy" – one that makes knowledge accessible to all students (Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 150).

Combining with the characteristics of a classroom that practices culturally relevant pedagogy, there are also certain characteristics of teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers of culturally relevant pedagogy understand the constraints imposed by race and class on their students' educational opportunities, and thus shape their pedagogy accordingly. In an examination of the practices of four successful urban African American teachers, Stanford (1997) found commonalities of community solidarity, community of learners, focus upon the whole child, and personal accountability. The first theme of community solidarity meant establishing interpersonal relationships not only with the students, but with the families as well. For example, teachers frequently visited the homes, and assisted parents who were unaware of resources and ways to access them. Along with sharing a culture, these teachers were current or former residences of the community. The second theme witnessed teachers sending a clear message to students that they were important members of a learning community. This meant that each person's presence and participation were necessary. To achieve this, oftentimes teachers were required to assume familial roles of father, mother, sister, brother, cousin, and teacher. The third theme of focusing on the whole child was concerned with both cognitive development and affective development. The teachers

equipped students for the realization of a harsh future because of their race, gender, and social class. This required becoming extensively involved with students outside of school. Howard (2002) elaborated about teachers who use holistic instructional strategies.

They are concerned with developing all the faculties of learners so that students are intellectually capable(able to master cognitive and academic tasks), socially adaptable (able to coexist with peers and adults in a respectable manner) and morally sound (able to adhere to teacher and societal norms. (pp. 186-187)

The final theme of personal accountability was the teachers' willingness to accept responsibility for their students despite challenging situations. These teachers believed that the purpose of their work was to improve the life chances of their students; therefore, they accepted them as they were and looked for ways to build on their strength. Ladson-Billing (1994) identified these same teachers as dreamkeepers, coaches, or conductors. Instead of settling for the dream deferred, these teachers will take "any means necessary" to turn deferred dreams into hopes, possibilities, and realities.

An initial step in making the dream a reality involves acceptance of the language Africa American students bring to the classroom. Like standard dialect, Ebonics, or Black English is rule based, just like Standard English, and not a sign of cognitive deficiency (Delpit, 2002b); it is connected to our identity.

Just as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world – both in how we perceive our surroundings and in how those around us perceive us- our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin That We Speak*. (Delpit, 2002a, p. xvii)

The language and speech of African American males are highly expressive and often times harmless. Expressions known as “woofing” “playing the dozens,” or “jonin” (depending upon the generation) are ways in which African American males communicate. Thus, reinforcing and reaffirming the legitimacy of non-mainstream languages and dialects by promoting it as a co-equal language of instruction (Smitherman, 2002) is using culturally relevant pedagogy. “To push children to do anything else is repressive and reactionary” (Delpit, 1995, p. 37).

Integrating multicultural lessons, keeping students interested, and covering the required curriculum are not easy tasks. Teachers must learn to develop culturally relevant pedagogy. With any subject, it requires selecting materials that reflects the best elements of a cultural group’s identity and practice. Hefflin (2002) devised guidelines for selecting multicultural literature for adolescents. The first recommendation was to select literature from authors and illustrators who have established reputations for publishing culturally sensitive material. Secondly, analysis must be made of how the characters are portrayed in the story as well as the author’s use of language. Third, illustrations should be examined for appeal, ethnic sensitivity, and authenticity. Finally, information should be evaluated for accuracy. In addition to using literature that reflects the elements of a cultural group, a familiar communicative social pattern should be employed. For example, one key theme of African American social interaction is the call-and-response vocal communication pattern similar to that heard during African American church service where the reader “calls” out to the group from the text, followed by a “response” back to the lead reader (Smith, 1995). Using social patterns that connect students to their community, home, culture, and history makes it easier to link the subject matter to

student's personal lives. In designing and implementing a culturally responsive lesson, educators must remember that tailoring instruction to fit the cultural, personal, and social lives of students so that curricular goals can be realized is largely about seeing the materials and methods of our work through the norms and practices of our students' experiences (Hefflin, 2002).

### **Summary of the Literature**

For African Americans, the structure, ideology, and content of African American education was freedom, democracy and equity. However, White architects structured education as a means of maintaining racial and class subordination. With the commencement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, schools continue to marginalize and oppress students of color, especially African American males. Schools are failing to educate African American students because the values, beliefs, and knowledge espoused as truth are based upon the culture of the constructs of white middle class society. Some experiences of African American males result from how their identity is constructed. Their academic and social experiences are greatly affected by the manner in which their identity is constructed. Examination of the experiences of African Americans males in regards to home, the community, environment and structural factors, tracking, teacher perception and expectations, school policies, and popular culture must begin with students' voices. Dr. Hilliard (1991) once proposed the questions, "Do we have the will to educate all children?" If this country truly has the will to educate all, then a culturally relevant pedagogy should be a central component for providing experiences that will aid African American adolescent males in academic achievement and social development. Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning the structural inequality, the racism, and the

injustices that exist in society. Creating pedagogy of social justice requires “making explicit connections between instructional resources used in classrooms and lived experiences of students outside of school” (Gay, 2000, p. 118). Yes, “the struggle to find culturally relevant pedagogy is rarely seamless, swift, or facile” (Paul, 2000).

Nevertheless, it is well worth the effort because it serves to improve academic skills, interest, motivation, and the emotional well-being of all children, especially African American males.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework for this study is Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory has its roots in the works of Derrick Bell (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) and other legal scholars whose work challenged how race and racial power were constructed and represented within laws. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solorzano & Yasso (2002) formulated the concept of Critical Race Theory to apply to the realm of education. Using the framework of Critical Race Theory, the study is designed to investigate the influences of homes, communities, and schools on academic achievement and social development of African American adolescent males.

Critical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is the method used to guide the collection and analysis of data acquired from the participants. This method was chosen because narrative requires the process of talking and listening. In reflecting upon my twenty-eight years of teaching, I have noticed that as a language arts teacher, I have been the chief storyteller. By nature, I am a talker and as students consistently demonstrate inadequate language skills, I have attempted to give them as much instruction as possible. As I listened to teammates this past year share personal information about students, I have come to realize that I have narrated too much, and I do not know enough personal information about my students. In order to enhance students' learning opportunities, teacher must focus upon knowing students on a personal basis and forming positive relationships with them in order that teachers had better understand their lives as students and individuals (Boyd, Ndudra, Brock, & Moore, 2004). Critical

narrative inquiry allows students the opportunity to become the storyteller while I, the researcher listens.

### **Critical Narrative Inquiry**

In the search for social justice for African American adolescents, the researcher merged critical theory or inquiry and narrative inquiry. Critical theory emerged from three primary scholars (Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse) connected to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt who noted the inconsistencies between the rhetoric of egalitarianism and the reality of racial and class discrimination in America (Kinchee & McLaren (2003). Extending, Kinchee and McLaren's (2003) reconceptualized view of critical theory places a focus on the relationships between hegemony, ideology, culture, power, and domination as it relates to matters of race, class, and gender. Thus, with African American males, the premise of critical theory allows students to be identified from a subjective perspective as opposed to an objective or scientific perspective (Kinchee & McLaren, 2003).

Sirotnik (1991) contends that critical inquiry is dialectical, dialogical, and deliberate. Dialectical whereas the knowledge building process continuously questions, contradicts, modifies, and revises. Dialogical because communication exists between home, school, and community, and deliberate in that individuals become consciously and actively involved. This combination of praxis, of thought and action, is enlivened by a sense of power (Beyer & Apple, 1998). Thus, it is only fitting that critical inquiry is used in the experiences of African American males because sustainable empowerment must begin from the concerns of the marginalized (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Critical inquiry also considers values, beliefs, and human interests as guidelines; thus, it is committed to the ideas of fairness and to the simple yet enduring morality that underlies the Golden Rule (Sirotnik 1991). Critical inquiry aims at democracy for all citizens, especially those whose voices had been silenced and ignored. This places social justice at the core of critical inquiry. In the quest for social justice, critical inquiry examines whether schools use pedagogical methods, which meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students, and if not, critical inquiry seeks to create an environment supporting the belief that with proper social and academic support, all students can excel (Garcia, 1997). A critical analysis of the experiences of African American adolescent males not only changes mindset, but also truly offers realistic guidelines for those who are genuinely seeking a democratic vision of schooling.

The selection of the participants was based upon standardized scores; however, student achievement alone does not tell much of anything until the narrative of the students' learning history is brought to bear on the performance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative notes the significance of history as it creates a memory box for stories as they are lived, relived, told, and retold. Remembering details are important because early life experiences not only set the stage for a critical examination of the conventional interpretation of African American adult male socialization, but it is only through the recollection and perception of early life experiences can African American males accurately be defined (Myers, 2004). Thus, recalling experiences is a way of protecting the future of African American males.

Narrative serves not only to understand the experiences of African American males better, but additionally serves to promote greater awareness of self. According to He (2003)

The reasons for telling and retelling narratives are to search for their cultural roots, to reflect upon their background and experiences, to examine their values and beliefs in order to understand the ways in which their personal histories, cultures, and experiences affect who they are, how they perceive the world, and how they interact with others in an increasingly diversified world. (p. xix)

Although He was referring to cross-cultural teachers' use for narratives, those same principles can be applied to students. Students benefit greatly as they live, relive, tell, and retell their stories. Possibly, retelling stories will arouse and then engage students in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity and to their freedom (Ayers, 1998).

Likewise, those who are listening benefit as well, especially if they look upon the students' realities as possibilities. If students' realities are taken on as possibilities, and then felt as realities, then action must be taken (Nodding, 1992). Thus, narrative inquiry, like critical inquiry and critical race theory, takes on the role of social justice.

According to Dewey (1997), education is inadequate without a philosophy of experience; therefore, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that examining experience is the key to education.

Experiences give rise to voice at the moment experience becomes informed by language and representation, at which point they are discursively circulated in the larger economies of power/knowledge, and located within the prevailing dependent hierarchies of race, class, and gender. The context in which such

articulations recursively take place – that is, the theoretical vernacular that students employ and the condition that determine which vernaculars are used by which groups of students on the basis of their race, class, and gender – in order for personal and collective meanings to occur. (McLaren, 1995, pp. 195-196)

The quote signifies that language is the primary variable that unites individuals and their everyday experiences. Through greater utilization of language through narrative, individuals process more efficiently the events and occurrences that ultimately lead to greater understanding of their experiences. These experiences affect how students relate to and communicate with their peers and their teachers. Certain slang/manners of speaking take on a “universal” meaning and make it easier for groups to relate to those within and outside their group. The everyday language students’ use often divides them into hierarchies based upon race and gender. These experiences also play a role in how education is viewed, and whether the individuals are successful in school. As indicated in chapter 2, when significant differences exist between the student’s culture and the school’s culture, teachers can easily misread students’ aptitude, intent, or abilities as a result of the differences in styles of language use (Delpit, 1995). Thus, the experiences of African American males are keys in developing avenues for academic achievement, social skills, and pedagogy of social justice

On a personal note, narrative inquiry requires interactive collaboration between the researcher and participant (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In this study, the researcher intends to collaborate using notes, journals, and structured individual and focus interviews. Since neither the researcher nor the participants know at the outset what the outcome will be, collaboration between the researcher and participants will result in

well-informed decisions about ways of improving academic achievement and positive social development for African American adolescent males. The researcher anticipates that over time collaboration will formulate a feeling of connectedness and an ethic of care. According to Nell Nodding (1992), dialogue as an ethic of care, makes students feel comfortable, valued and secure. This encourages positive emotional bonds with teachers and peers and a positive attitude toward school, which in turn facilitates academic motivation and learning (Nodding, 1992). Narrative inquiry has at its heart awareness of humanity and sensitivity to uniqueness (Phillion, 2002).

Narrative inquiry does not occur by happenstance; narrative inquiry is structured within a three-dimensional space of personal and social, past, present, and future, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Focusing upon feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions, and the environment comprise the personal and social dimension. With time, “the past conveys significance, the present conveys values, and the future conveys intentions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991 p. 138). As espoused by Phillion (2002), narrative inquiry reaches to the past, is rooted in the present, and turns an eye to the future. Using historical texts, the experiences of African American adolescent males must be analyzed through past interpretations, present examinations of reflections, and future understanding. A critical race theorist can hypothesize that the present lack of academic achievement among African American adolescent male results from Carter G. Woodson’s past interpretation as stated in *The Mis-education of the Negro* (1998). In 1933, Woodson proclaimed, “the problem of holding the Negro down ... is easily solved. When you control a man’s thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions (p. xiii). This statement from the past implies that education received by African Americans does

nothing to help them successfully negotiate the future. The present narratives from successful African American males could provide future answers for “where to go from here.”

Narrative inquiry incorporates the elements of storytelling, and storytelling has always been important to the culture of African Americans. According to Gates (1989, cited in Champion, 2003),

Telling ourselves our own stories-interpreting the nature of our world to ourselves, asking and answering epistemological and ontological questions in our own voices and on our own terms-has as much as any single factor been responsible for the survival of African-Americans and their culture. The stories that we tell ourselves and our children function to order our world, serving to create both a foundation upon which each of us constructs our sense of reality and a filter through which we process each event that confronts us every day. The values that we cherish and wish to preserve, the behavior that we wish to censure, the fears and dread that we can barely confess in ordinary language, the aspirations and goals that we most dearly prize-all of these things are encoded in the stories that each culture invents and preserves for the next generation, stories that, in effect, we live by and bough. (p. 87)

Critical Race Theorists believe the exchange of stories about individual situations, and the telling of these stories serve as interpretive structures by which to impose order on the retelling of experiences. Secondly, stories provide members of marginalized groups a vehicle for psychological self-preservation because of these groups internalizing the stereotypic images that the dominant groups have constructed in order to

maintain their preservation of power caused by this lack of empowerment. Storytelling provides healing power by providing an objective exposition of one's condition to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows the individual to stop inflicting mental aggression on oneself in relation to others. Finally, the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the disconnections within the conviction of viewing the world in one way by helping the dominant group participate in self-examination to bring the brutalities of racism in the open (Delgado 1989, as cited in Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). hooks (1989) contends

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back" ...that is the expression of our movement from object to subject. (p. 9)

"Talking back" alleviates the problem of absence of dialogue from African American males. An examination of student experiences as they "talk back" about home, community, and school influences and pedagogy methods, which are most effective in achieving social justice, is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is the best way to think about experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Stories also have a unique power to release imaginations and reevaluation. These stories awaken, disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected (Greene, 1995). Stories become mechanisms through which African American adolescents' voices are heard instead of systematically silenced. Critical race theory focuses upon the role of voice in bringing additional power to African

American adolescent males. My aim as a researcher is to assist students in identifying factors, which shape their school experiences.

Recalling, restructuring, and reconceptualizing events, experiences, and life itself opens the door to narrative to “storied life composition” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). These life stories built on relationships that bind individuals together and intricately weave with time and place, provide insight into “who we were, who we are, and who we will become” (He, 2002, p. 320). Through the exploration of critical narrative inquiry, the researcher aims to unveil personal stories, which give the marginalized voice. Breaking the silence of the oppressed is an effort to understand better the perceived lives and to identify individual and collective factors that influenced their academic and social development. Additionally, critical narrative inquiry allows for the close examination of ways that educators may reshape and reformulate the “discursive and ideological formations in which subjectivities are produced and the social and political contexts out of which they are generated” (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 19). By telling personal stories and recognizing these stories as “significant sources of knowledge,” our discussions are guides as “[educators]struggle to capture the essence of educational ideas, theories, principles, and practices” (Gay, 2000, p. 198). Narrative inquiry is not a simplistic format of students’ stories. Critical narrative inquiry is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection methods included school portraiture, student profiles, assessment documents, individual and focus interviews, a teacher quality-ranking sheet, and researcher reflective journal. This study recounted the stories of five African American

adolescent males in regards to their academic success and social development. These students recently completed their last year in middle school in a suburban metro Atlanta city. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval to conduct human subject research from the appropriate department at Georgia Southern University. Permission forms were secured before data from participants were collected. Participants met for three sessions. The first session focused upon the influence of the home; discussion of community and school influences was the focus of the second interview, and the final interview was a follow-up to discuss the ranking of teacher qualities as well as administration of an on-line assessment of learning styles. Collection of family background information also occurred at the beginning of the first session.

### **School Portraiture**

The following school portraiture was taken from the 2004-2005 Strategic Plan School Report. Bear Creek Middle School is within the jurisdiction of Fulton County Public Schools. The school's attendance zone includes three other cities and comprises the largest and most rural attendance zone in Fulton County. The current population is approximately 1400 students (the school was built for a population of approximately 800 students). Bear Creek receives students from five surrounding elementary schools. When the school opened in 1990, the majority of students were Caucasian. The school now serves a majority African American population. Over the past few years, the racial make-up has increasingly become more diverse as students of Hispanic and Asian cultures have transferred to this institution.

Bear Creek is unique in that it shares its spacious campus with Creekside High School. This allows the school to have an active "Teaching Insights" program in which

high school students volunteer in the school assisting teachers and students. Also because of proximity, middle school band students march in the high school band. The Career Center at Bear Creek won national recognition in 2001 and 2002, and one of the three counselors was named Fulton County 2003 Middle School Counselor of the Year. Students have received county awards in art, technology, and dance. In addition, students have represented Fulton County at the state and regional levels at the Georgia Spelling Bee, the Georgia Science Fair, the GaETC Technology Fair, and the Metro Foreign Language Forum.

In the latest report ranking of Fulton County's Top 10 Middle Schools, Bear Creek ranked tenth county wide and 327 among middle schools in the state of Georgia. The latest achievement scores were 60.5%. This exceeded the standard (school or state) by 22%. Math and reading percentiles were 29% and 40% respectively. The school made Adequate Yearly Progress for the second year, and is one of four schools in the county to be removed from the Needs Improvement List. The poverty rate at the school stands at 68%. ([http://www.publicschoolsdirectory.com/fulton\\_county\\_georgia\\_schools.asp](http://www.publicschoolsdirectory.com/fulton_county_georgia_schools.asp))

The school faces a number of factors that impede student learning and achievement. These factors have a significant impact on assessing social input (from the community and home) and output (student growth and academic achievement). Examples of threats include a high mobility rate, the level of parental education, a lack of parental involvement, low PTSA attendance, a significant population of non-homeowners, and students entering the school performing below grade level. Due to overcrowded conditions, one eighth grade team and one-seventh grade team are taught in portables.

### **Participant Selection**

The seventh grade Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) of 2004-2005 was analyzed to determine students who exceeded the standard score of 350 on the reading and math portions. The standard score of 350 represented level three students; those who score in the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher. CRCT scores were used as opposed to grades because this assessment yields information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state levels. This information is also used to diagnose individual students' strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the instruction of the Quality Core Curriculum and the Georgia Performance Standards, and to gauge the quality of education throughout Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2005-2006). Moreover, those who score in the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile range show proficiency of readiness to do college preparatory work in high school. Three hundred forty-four seventh graders took the test. Of the 34 students who exceeded the standard score of 350 in reading and math, 19 were African American males, and five of those were identified as talented and gifted. An additional three were on the multi-age team whereby they had the same teachers for their entire middle school experiences.

After receiving and reviewing the 2005-2006 eighth grade CRCT scores, the researcher met individually with ten prospective African American males who exceeded the standard score of 350 in reading and math in seventh grade and passed the CRCT for eighth grade. Because one student had a perfect score on the math portion of the 2006 CRCT, his teachers suggested that he be included in the study. Explanation of the study was provided, their participation was requested, and reasons to participate were given. No monetary or tangible incentive to participate was offered. After making contact with

the students, parent/guardian of those males received an explanatory letter via U.S. mail describing the study with enclosures of a minor and parent consent form. After receiving the information, several parents called or emailed indicating interest in their child's participation; other called or emailed inquiring about scheduled times since plans were being made for summer vacation. After two weeks, the researcher established the period for the interviews and nine parents were contacted via telephone (two letters had been returned and since those parents had not received prior written notification of the study in a timely manner, the researcher decided not to seek permission for participation). During the telephone conversation, the study was described again, consent to participate was discussed, parental questions answered, and the individual and focus interview times were scheduled. Six students were available for participation. However, when reminder telephone calls were made two days prior to scheduled interview times, one student was unavailable, thus five students were included in this study.

### **Participant Profiles**

The participant profiles included family and academic background information. Each participant informally answered background questions to assist with the composition of a brief biographical sketch. I examined each student's permanent record to obtain the last grades for middle school, the most current Iowa Test of Basic Skill (ITBS) score, and the Georgia Middle Grades Writing Assessment (MGWA) scores. The ITBS was viewed because it shows a student's standing within the group of students in the same grade who are tested at the same time of year. This large group of students attended schools that are representative of schools throughout the nation in terms of region, enrollment, size, and socioeconomic status. The MGWA is a criterion-based

achievement test in writing, and it indicates whether students' performance exceeds target, is on target, or below target for achieving writing skills for eighth grade. The highest possible score is 400.

Discipline information was also included. Profiles are listed in alphabetical order according to each student's pseudonym. African names were selected as pseudonyms because significance is attached to African names. Not only are African names gorgeous, charming, and melodic, but they also bring forth the hopes of the ancestors and exert influence on one's life. The names chosen for the participants reflect upon the meaning of how the researcher saw the participants.

**Bakari** (one who will succeed) was absent and failed to take the GMWA. His national percentile ranking on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for reading, math, social studies, and science were 85, 75, 86, and 90 respectively. Bakari also missed administration of the language art's section of the ITBS. His discipline record revealed four offenses, two of which resulted in OSS (Out-of-School Suspension) and one ISS (In-School Suspension). His 2005-2006 CRCT scores were 859 (reading), 850 (language arts), 368 (math), 308 (science), and 328 (social studies). Bakari completed the year with an 85 grade point average.

**Erasto** (man of peace) scored 350 on the Georgia Middle Grades Writing Assessment. This was within the on-target range. On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) his national percentile rankings for reading, language arts, math, social studies, science, and core were 32, 35, 71, 69, 62, and 44 respectively. When questioned about the low performance on certain sections, he indicated that the reading passages were too long so he did not read carefully, and the language arts section was too long as well. His

2005-2006 CRCT scores were 829 (reading), 819(language arts), 440 (math), 307 (science), and 314 (social studies). His end-of-the-year grade point average was 86.8. Erasto did not have a discipline record.

**Hamidi** (to be commended) scored 362 on the Georgia Middle Grades Writing Assessment (his score on the practice test of the MGWA was a perfect score; this score was within the on-target range). On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) his national percentile rankings for reading, language arts, math, social studies, science, and core were 79, 81, 87, 80, 73, and 84 respectively. His 2005-2006 CRCT scores were 836 (reading), 853 (language arts), 368 (math), 338 (science), and 350 (social studies). His overall end-of-the-year grade point average was 87. His discipline record revealed four offenses, none of which resulted in In-School Suspension or Out-of-School Suspension.

**Kamau** (studious) scored 353 on the Georgia Middle Grades Writing Assessment. This was within the on-target range. On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, his national percentile rankings for reading, language arts, math, social studies, science, and core were 52, 47, 88, 69, 59, and 63 respectively. Kamau's 2005-2006 CRCT scores were: 850 (reading), 837 (language arts), 339 (math), 324 (science), and 326 (social studies). His overall yearly grade point average is 86.8. His discipline record revealed one offense, which resulted in a student conference.

**Leabua** (one who speaks) scored 358 on the Georgia Middle Grades Writing Assessment. On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) his national percentile rankings for reading, language arts, math, social studies, and science were 32, 12, 35, 28, and 16 respectively. When questioned about these low scores, he indicated that he did not take the test seriously. His 2005-2006 CRCT scores were 800 (reading), 819 (language arts)

339 (math), 318 (science), and 336 (social studies). His overall yearly grade point average was 80.3. His discipline record revealed twelve offenses, five In-School Suspensions and two Out-of- School Suspensions.

It should be noted that Bear Creek students' scores overall on the ITBS were extremely low. Even students who were identified as talented and gifted scored less than 50% in reading, language arts and math. The response for the low performance school-wide was that the test did not count so no one took it seriously. Unknowing to students, high schools use the ITBS scores to place students in advanced placement classes.

### **Discipline Records**

The initial intent of the study was to look at students who were achieving academically and socially. An assessment of social development was to be determined by the middle school discipline report. The original plan was to include students who had no discipline referrals. To my surprise, of the ten names given to data clerk for discipline records, only one had no report. Frequency and seriousness of the offences were then considered for participation.

### **Participant Interviews**

Fontana and Frey (2003) state that “interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated contextually based results” (p. 62). Thus, the focus of the interviews included the activities of everyday life, the “what” (p. 62), as well as the work involving producing order in the everyday life, the “how” (p. 62). This “what” and “how” were particularly useful for this dissertation because I wanted to know how these students achieve academically, when at times they are surrounded by identity crisis, racism,

disenfranchisement, and pressure to conform to the elements as displayed in popular culture. Both individual and focus group interviews (Merriam, 1998) were used to record participants' voices and feelings as they responded to interview questions in regard to their academic achievement and social development. The interviews were structured with a series of pre-established questions. Structured interviews leave little room for the researcher to exercise independent judgment and little room for error (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Adolescents search for peer acceptance and approval, and to avoid any embarrassment of family rules, the individual interviews focused upon the influence of the home on participants' academic achievement and social development. The interviews were scheduled for an hour each, and parents provided transportation to the school. However, each individual interview lasted approximately 25 minutes and instead of having participants loiter on school premises during summer school, I elected to take three of them home (students live within a ten mile radius of the school).

The second session was a focus interview. Focus interviews were used as a catalyst to recall specific events and stimulate descriptions of experiences shared by the group. To ensure that each participant answered each question, the researcher randomly called upon individuals for a response. This also ensured the fullest coverage of the topic. The focus group interviews, which lasted approximately 90 minutes, focused more on the community and school influences. The first individual and focus group interviews occurred the same week in a small conference room inside the media center. The individual session was held on Tuesday followed by the focus interview on Thursday. To maximize the condition of the weather, interviews were held the last week of summer

school. This was the last week in which the air conditioner would be on in the entire building as opposed to specific areas.

The last individual interviews occurred several weeks after data had been transcribed. That interview occurred on a Sunday afternoon in a public library located near the participants' residences. The purpose of the last session was to gather more information about the rankings of the qualities of classroom teachers. Administration of an on-line learning style assessment also happened during the final individual session. The purpose was simply to provide information for students which would assist them in having successful high school experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicate that conditions shape the interview. Since participation in a research project about personal experiences requires trust, I tried to establish rapport from the onset. I stressed genuine interest in the issue of academic achievement among African American males and in the participants experience with it. I communicated this interest and concern to both the parents and the participants. To minimize distractions of note taking, the individual and focus group interviews were tape-recorded. Darlington and Scott (2002) believe that tape recording is less distracting for the interviewee and makes it easier "for the interviewer to attend to the crucial relational aspects of the interview" (p.59). This requires the interviewer to remain neutral, never interjecting an opinion. Termed "balance rapport", Fontana and Frey (2003) indicate that the interviewer must be casual and friendly; yet directive and impersonal. Meloy (2002) states that to be on the human level with the participants, I must also be an active participant in each of the conversations. According to Meloy, I am not just a researcher; I am an "advocate of philosophy-as-integrative-practice" (p. 148). In each

interview, I became very involved in the responses and was eager to convey my passion for this research.

Maintaining a balance was also important because of the gender difference. According to Fontana and Frey (2003), “the sex of the interviewer and that of the respondent do make a difference, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries ...[whereby] masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones” (p. 82). I did not want to appear too motherly or too authoritative, consequently, at the conclusion of the focus interview when students wanted to visit summer session classrooms, I did not object even though I was uncomfortable with the idea. I did not want students roaming the building, especially since retake of the CRCT was happening that day for eighth graders who had failed the CRCT in the spring and must now pass it before being promoted to ninth grade.

### **Teacher Qualities**

Prior to beginning the recorded individual interviews, students ranked ten qualities of teachers from one to ten. The qualities were creative, flexible, patient, fair to everyone, humorous, challenges students to go above and beyond, intelligent, makes the course work culturally relevant, enthusiastic and energetic, and gives rewards. Rankings ranged from 1 of most important to 10 being least important (see Appendix C). Rankings were also placed in categories of most important, important, least important, and not important at all. This ranking was used to gather data in answering the research question of “what do African American adolescent males feel are the important qualities of classroom teachers?” How students feel about qualities of teachers can make a difference in how well students perform in class. Successful and outstanding teachers are generally

effective with students, which translate into high academic achievement and positive social skills. Students who have effective teachers generally perform on or above grade level. The list of qualities for outstanding teachers came from books that describe how teaching can best be done (Highet, 1950; Dossin, 2002) as well as list compiled by numerous authors (Martin, 1972; Brian, 1998; & Probst, 1999). Surprisingly, throughout the years, the most valued qualities have been strikingly similar no matter the source i.e. students, parents, teachers, or other educational professionals.

### **Learning Styles Assessment**

Researchers have documented that learning styles influence academic achievement (Hale-Benson, 1986; Shade, 1992; Jackson-Allen & Christenberry, 1994; Peeke, et al., 1998, and Kunjufu, 2002). It is important for students to know their learning style as a strategy for achieving academic success. A two-minute online assessment was taken by the participants to determine if their voiced preferred style aligned with a formal measuring instrument. The assessment measured three types of learning styles: visual, tactile, and auditory. Students received a printed detailed personalized assessment that was to be shared with parents and teachers (See Appendix D).

### **Researcher Reflective Journal**

I also kept a journal that contained my thoughts and reflections upon the conversations and interviews I had with the participants and with their parents. Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest that self-reflection notes can serve as rich data to use in the analysis of qualitative research. I discovered that to be true throughout the transcribing of the interviews. Even though the notes appeared to be few, when reflecting upon the interviews, noted jotted brought forth a wealth of information about participants and my

own thoughts. When participants were discussing teacher, I made notes as a reminder for me to consider the kind of place my “space” will be as I make modifications based upon what I have learned from the data.

### **Data Analysis**

The recorded interviews were transcribed into written field texts. Transcribing was a lengthy process, and was later analyzed for the researcher’s findings. The data analysis procedure used was thematic analysis, a process that involved coding and then segregating the data by codes into data clumps for further analysis and description (Glesne, 2006). My analysis looked for experiences that influenced academic achievement and social development. Because not all the questions were grouped into categories, I used different highlighters to code experiences relating to home, community, and school. Then, I used other highlighters to distinguish responses of similarities and differences.

I maintained the integrity of interpreting the data received from participants using substantial descriptions. The analysis involved thick descriptions. According to Shank (2002), thick descriptions involve capturing the essence of the reason behind each detail. Second, relevant descriptions are understandable if there is some attachment to the influences of the rest of society. Third, thick descriptions describe “what is present, on its own terms and at its own level” (p. 77). Shank concluded by indicating that “thick descriptions strive to make meaning clear” (p. 77). From the “thick descriptions”, new narratives will be written and voiced in the arena of democracy and social justice for African American males. For this to occur, it is important to remember that innovation can survive only on further innovation, thereby avoiding stagnation and assimilation

(Roy, 2003). This allows academic achievement and social development to constantly and continuously be taken to new heights.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION: STUDENT INTERVIEWS

The purpose of this study was to examine the home, community, and school experiences of African American males who are achieving academically and socially, and to determine how these experiences influenced their academic and social development. This study is important because it refutes the claim that educational institutions fail in educating the majority of African American males. A large percentage of African American adolescent males are excelling, and this study allowed the voices of those successful African Americans adolescent males to “resound loud as the rolling sea.”

Five students participated in the collection of data: Bakari, Erasto, Hamidi, Kamau, and Leabua. African names were chosen as pseudonyms because these names exert influence on one’s life. The names chosen for the participants reflect upon the meaning of how the researcher views the participants.

Collection of data was via individual and focus interviews, both of which were transcribed for analysis. The purpose of the individual and focus interviews was to determine similarities and differences in the influences of home, community, and school upon academic achievement and social development. Adolescents search for peer acceptance and approval, and to avoid any embarrassment of family rules, the individual interviews focused upon the influence of the home on participants’ academic achievement and social development. A few school experience questions followed during the individual interview when the researcher discovered that the duration of the interview was shorter than expected. Community and school experiences were the core of the focus interviews.

The interviews occurred on three occasions. The initial individual interviews focused upon experiences in the home. The focus session focused upon community and school experiences. That session occurred two days after the individual interview. Both sessions took place in a small conference room inside the media center of Bear Creek Middle School during summer school. The final individual interviews occurred on a Sunday afternoon several weeks after transcription of data and at the beginning of their freshman year in high school. The location was in a public library located near the participants' residences. Those sessions were brief. Student responses to the teacher quality ranking only took about ten minutes and the online assessment was completed within two minutes.

Presentation of data for each participant is given within the categories of experiences in the home, community, and school. The narratives are listed in alphabetical order of the participants' names. Each participant responded to the same basic questions. Follow-up questions appear for some. The transcribed interviews are written exactly as quoted by the individuals. Thus, many grammatical errors are present. Some errors are corrected and noted in brackets after the error. Journal entries documenting my thoughts as they responded to questions are included in the section of my reflections. To reacquaint the reader with the students, another short profile precedes their home experiences. My reflection upon each student follows the narratives on school experiences.

## Home Experiences

Table 1: Questions Relating to Experiences at Home

1. What is your after-school routine?
2. What are your chores?
3. What are the rules in your home in regards to homework? Are you allowed to watch TV, listen to music, or talk on the telephone while completing homework?
4. Approximately how much time per week do you spend on homework?
5. If you need assistance in completing homework, what do you generally do?
6. Approximately, how many times have you used Homework Hotline?
7. Describe your study environment
8. How do you manage projects that are due two- three weeks away?
9. What do you do with your time when you have no homework?
10. Approximately how much time per week do you spend watching TV?
11. Approximately how much time per week do you spend reading magazine, newspaper, or books?
12. Approximately how much time per week do you spend listening to music or playing video games?
13. How does your family respond when you receive high grades, rewards, etc?
14. Who has been the most influential person in your life? What meaningful experiences have you shared with that person?
15. How are you disciplined at home?
16. What happens at your house when you speak non-Standard English or slang as opposed to Standard English?
17. What are some things that your parents have told you in regards to being an African American male?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your home experiences?

*Bakari*

***Bakari** (one who will succeed) resides with his mother. Bakari has one younger sibling who resides in the home. Bakari's mother attended job core and is a cashier. Bakari receives free lunch. He rarely participates in any extra-curriculum activities. His hobbies include watching television, talking on the telephone, and going outside. Bakari's career aspiration is to become a lawyer, a writer, a poet, or a rapper. Bakari's results on the learning styles assessment indicated that he scored highest as a visual learner (34%), followed by tactile (31%) and lastly auditory (30%).*

After school, I do homework, chores, and watch TV. My chores consist of cleaning the kitchen and other commonly used areas of the house. Homework is first, and then everything else comes after. No TV, music, or talking on the phone is allowed while I am doing my homework. I spend at least ten to fifteen hours a week on homework. When I need help with my homework, I may ask my mother for help, or try to go to the library. I've heard about homework hotline, but I've never used it. I do my homework in the family room away from everyone else. All of my supplies are in the family room. If I have projects, I start on it like three-to-four days after [the assignment is given] to try to finish like two-three days before it's due. When I don't have homework, I often study for upcoming tests. If nothing is going on, then I'll do my chores and go watch TV or something.

I spend probably 20-21 hours per week watching television. Well, I really don't read a lot, like every blue moon a new Harry Potter book comes out, then I'll read it. But I don't read like every day. I spend about ten hours per week listening to music or playing video games. When I do well my family congratulates me, and if they are able, they give me money or take me out to eat.

My mother has been the most influential person in my life. She talks to me sometimes and lectures me about how important school is. She tells me that I can't fall off because the Black male race isn't really doing that well. Most of them end up dead, or in jail, and she doesn't want to see me like that. My mom uses a combination of punishment and revoking privileges. My punishment may consist of being sent to my room with no phone, TV, etc. I am not allowed to do anything, nor go anywhere. I get disciplined for things such as talking back, not doing my chores, and for not keeping up

with my studies. The length of my punishment depends on what I have done, but I figure that the average is about a week. I am allowed to use some slang, but my mother does not allow me to use the word “nigger.” She also does not like me to use words such as “ain’t.” My mother says that as an African American male, I need to strive harder for the race itself, because most of us end up in jail or dead or in some type of gang or something.” One thing that I want to add is the fact that I want to please my father. He died before I reached the age of one. I think that he’s always looking down on me. I think if I do good in school, you know, it will make him happy.

*Erasto*

*Erasto (man of peace) moved to Atlanta last year to reside with his uncle and aunt. Both of Erasto’s’ parents live in Cleveland, Ohio. Erasto has ten brothers and four sisters, many of which he identified as stepbrothers and stepsisters. Erasto receives free lunch. Erasto participated in Club Z, an after school tutorial program. Erasto does not have a discipline record, and his hobbies include playing basketball and surfing the World Wide Web. Erasto’s career aspiration is to become an accountant. Erasto trains and breeds pit bulls. The learning style assessment indicated that Erasto is an auditory learner (23%), followed by visual learner (20%) and lastly tactile learner (19%).*

My after-school routine consists of homework and studying, getting on the computer, and watching TV. My chores include washing the dishes every night and sometimes folding the laundry. I am allowed to listen to music while doing my homework, but talking on the phone and watching TV are prohibited until my homework is complete. I spend about an hour per day on homework, which has to be done before I can do anything like watch TV or go outside. If I need assistance completing my

homework, I consult my cousin who is in the ninth grade. I have never used Homework Hotline. I do my studying in the kitchen or by the computer. My supplies are stored in my uncle's room, but I can get them whenever I need to.

To manage projects that are due two-to-three weeks away, I start a little bit on it, then I wait until the middle of it, then I start working on it until it's due. When I do not have homework, I still take time to study. I often review my work from school and take time to do some reading. If something "special" is on, I may watch TV. I spend about three hours per week watching TV. I spend the same amount of time reading magazines, newspapers, or books. I spend about 5 hours a week listening to music or playing video games.

My success can be attributed to my grandmother and my uncle. They make sure I do my homework, and they help me study for tests. I don't speak slang at home. My family has taught me that being African American and male does not mean my opportunities are limited. They tell me that I can be whatever I want to be [and] don't let anybody tell you what you can't do. No.

*Hamidi*

***Hamidi** (to be commended) resides with his mother and father. Hamidi's mother attended college and is a nurse; Hamidi's father also attended college and is an engineer technician. Hamidi has one sibling who attends college. Hamidi does not receive free lunch. Extra-curriculum activities include basketball, band, volleyball, student council, and academic bowl. His hobbies include playing all sports. Hamidi's career aspiration is to become an attorney. Sports motivated Hamidi to do well in school. He knows that playing sports is contingent upon good grades. The learning style assessment indicated*

*that Hamidi is equally an auditory learner and visual learning at 27%. The score for tactile learner was 21%.*

After school, I wash dishes, take out the trash, clean my room and stuff like that. The rule in my house is do your homework before you watch TV, or go outside, or anything. I can watch TV while doing homework, but I can't talk on my phone. I can listen to music too. I spend probably about 15 hours on homework. If I need help with my homework, I go on the computer or ask my mom. I have used the Homework Hotline just once. I was just trying it out. My study environment is quiet. I study in my room. I have my TV on; it's just turned down low. It's not distractible, and I have music on sometimes as well. I generally have dictionaries pencil, and paper in my room. When I have a project, once I get home I try to do half of it. That way I can take a little break, and then do the rest the next week. Then it will be done. Then I can just turn it in. When I don't have homework I play sports, basketball, or just go outside. I watch about 10 hours of TV during the week. I probably spend five hours a week reading. My mom subscribes to Jet Magazine, and I read that. We get the local newspaper, but I don't read that. I spend probably about 5 hours listening to music or playing video games.

My family is proud when I do good. They act like I just won a million dollars or something! The most influential person in my life is my brother because he has stuttering problems, but he still attends college. He is almost out. I think this year or next year will be his last year. He just always tells me to keep my eye on the prize. We just have a bond. If I step out of line, I get consequences like it could be a whipping, or I can't do nothing, or sit in my room, or that's pretty much it right there. Nothing really happens if I use slang or speak non-standard English. My parents have taught me that, as an African

American male, jobs are scarce. People are always trying to put you down. They don't be trying to help you out. It is hard to find a helping hand. Nah, I ain't got nothing else to say.

*Kamau*

***Kamau** (quiet warrior) resides with both parents. His mother attended college and is a nurse; his father is a college graduate and is a district manager for a large department store. Kamau has one older sibling Kamau does not receive free or reduced lunch. Kamau has not participated in any extra-curriculum activities. His hobbies include playing football and basketball with friends and playing video games. Kamau's career aspiration is to become a math college professor. The learning style assessment indicated that Kamau is an auditory learner (24%), followed by visual learner (22%) and lastly tactile learner (21%).*

When I get home from school, I sleep a lot. After sleeping, I get my homework done and later I watch TV. My chores are cleaning up my room every day. Chores that I share with my brother are washing dishes, taking out the trash, mowing the lawn, washing the car, and cleaning out the bathroom. In my house, you can't watch TV or do nothing without getting your homework done. You can't go outside until you get your homework done. I spend about 2 hours a week on homework, because I don't have a lot of homework. I am allowed to listen to music during homework, but I can't watch television. If I need help with my homework, I call my dad first. If my dad is unavailable, then I call my mom. If it's math, then I definitely call my dad. I don't know what Homework Hotline is. I study in my bedroom. There is no TV. I have dictionaries,

a thesaurus, and encyclopedias. I don't have a computer in my room. It's downstairs, and I only use it to do writing projects.

When I don't have homework, I usually call my friends to see if they are coming out. If so, I go outside. If not, I go to sleep or watch TV, or help my mom and dad cook. I spend about 2 hours per week watching TV. I sleep most of the time when I get home from school. I don't read magazines, but I like reading the funnies from the newspaper. I read the funnies everyday. I can't play videos during the week, because I get distracted. I can play beginning on Friday when school is out. If I get all As on my report card, my family takes me out to dinner and gives me \$100. If I get Bs, it's \$5 for As and \$3 for Bs. Cs don't count for any money. The most influential person in my life is my brother. He did really bad in middle school. Now he is doing well in high school. He used to get C's, D's, and F's in middle school, but now he gets A's and B's. If he can do it, then I know that I can do it. If I do something bad, like talk back to my parents, I get grounded for two weeks. No TV, no radio, no games. I can go outside though. I don't get in trouble for using slang or non-standard English. My mom and dad know what I'm talking about when I say slang and stuff, so it's okay. My parent's have told me that it's not easy being African American and male. You have to work harder to get what you want. This makes me want to push harder. No.

### *Leabua*

*Leabua (one who speaks) resides with his mother who attended college for two years and currently serves as assistant to the executive director of an agency, which prevents adolescent pregnancy. Leabua has four siblings who reside in Florida with their father. Leabua does not receive free or reduced lunch. Leabua plays the trombone*

*in the band, and is a member of the high school marching band and the county honor's band. He competed in the technology fair at the regional level. His hobbies include playing football in the neighborhood, writing songs and poems, and talking on the telephone to girlfriends. Leabua's career aspiration is to become an attorney or a band teacher.*

Well, during the fall, my after-school routine is band and football from the hours of 4:00-7:00. Sometimes it's 4:00-8:00. During the spring, it's track and baseball. Sometimes I have just enough time to go home, relax, and get ready for the next day. My chores are to empty the garbage, take the trashcan to the street for pickup, empty/load the dishwasher, keep my room clean and help with the vacuuming. My homework must be completed and checked by my mother before recreation time starts. I spend about seven hours per week on homework. I am allowed to listen to music while I do my homework. Music calms me down and helps me stay focused. I prefer not to watch TV or talk on the phone when I am doing my homework. If I need assistance with homework, first I contact the smartest person in his class. Then I look in the book. I'll look in the book just generally looking around. If I still don't have an idea of what it is, I try my best to complete it. I will go the next day and ask my teacher to give me more assistance. I don't use the homework hotline. I kind of feel that's cheating, so I pretty much do it on my own.

I do most of my studying in the bathroom or in the garage. I mostly sit in my bedroom to do my homework. I turn the radio on. Just kick back and do my homework. I have a computer in my room, dictionary, encyclopedia, and all my supplies. When I have a project to do, I try to take it slow at a time. I do projects in three steps. Gather

information, gather materials, and put it together. The first week I gather my information, the second week I gather materials, and after reviewing all materials and research, I find out what chronological order I want to put it on. I put it all together on the last week. That will be two-three days before the project is due so I ain't got to do nothing else. [When I have no homework I] talk on the phone, go outside, watch TV, or play a little game.

I spend about six hours a day watching TV. *I remembered that Leabua had indicated that he gets home at 7:00 or 8:00. I reminded him of that, knowing it would then be almost impossible to watch six hours of TV. He rethinks the answer and provides band practice as an example. The example justifies the answer.* When I have band practice... let's say I get home at six, do my homework, depending on how much I have that day; I mostly finish up in 30 minutes to an hour. And pretty much watch TV until I fall asleep.

The amount of time I spend reading during the week depends on the mood I am in. Sometimes, when I feel like I'm in the mood, when I don't want to watch TV or do nothing, and there's a magazine or book right there, I'll read it, but books that I mostly read are adventurous books and that's what keeps my head in the book. If it's something like Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings, Goosebumps, I'll pick it up in a minute. I am always listening to the radio. My radio always stays on. Even when I'm practicing my instrument, my radio stays on

My family plays an important role in my academic success. They compliment me when I do well, and they encourage me to always do my best. They tell me things like "good job, do better" just to keep my mind going, just to make me keep up my hype. Try to make me keep going further and further. My mom is the most influential person in my

life. The first time that I made honor roll, they asked me to go up and do a little speech at my private school. They asked me the same question that you asked. I said my mom. They asked my why? I said because out of all the people that I know in my family. My mom, she [has] always been like right there. She always encourages me. Even though I slack off, she's right there to put me back on track. She's just always there. My mom disciplines me when I get bad grades. All right, say I get a bad grade [like a] C in math because math is supposed to be my strong subject. [If I get a C in math, I get yelled at, get the TV taken away...the phone, video games, just everything. Including the radio.] But if I come home with an F... there goes outside, movies, everything is gone. She just takes everything away. It is all out the door. Gone. Also, if she catches me using bad English, she says "Correct your English." I have to redo the whole scene. Retrace my steps and start all over again. I have to back up the way I came down. [Some things that your parents have told you about being an African American male]. It's harder on you; the laws, people and society have already labeled you, so you are out to basically prove that society is wrong. Prove that you can accomplish more than what they expect. Because the way I see it, it is the boss putting us down. I know that it ain't no black boss; can't no black boss put no African American down. So it got to be the white man. That's what I call him, the big white man boss. We are basically out here to prove them wrong, and so far, I'm proud of my race. They are proving them wrong and doing great things. No.

## Community Experiences

Table 2: Questions Relating to Experiences in the Community

1. Name any program in your community in which you have participated in that helped to develop your leadership skills, social skills, or encourage academic excellence.
2. What youth activities are you involved in at your church?
3. Name a role model within your community. What makes that person someone that you want to emulate?
4. Do you have a mentor? What are some of the activities that you and your mentor have done together?
5. Have you been treated differently because of your ethnicity or gender? Meaning, do you think that because you are male or African American that you have been treated unfairly by anyone?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your community experiences?

### *Bakari*

I'm not involved in any community programs. Honestly, I haven't been to church in about a year. When I did go, I participated in the choir. I don't know that many people doing stuff for my community. My mentor is my stepfather. He talks to me about life itself. He tells me how to be humble, and all that kind of stuff. We really don't do activities together; we just sit and talk. I have not been treated differently because of my race or gender.

### *Erasto*

We ain't got no programs in our community. I participate in Sunday service. I attended the 12 – 13 age church service, and the youth services. I attended Bible study. All this happened when I was living in Ohio. Since moving here, I have gone to church, but I really haven't participated in any activities. There's this dude about three houses down. His name is Brian, and I consider him as a role model. He has a big house and a navigator. He came out of the hood and made something of himself. My uncle is my

mentor. We do lots of stuff together. For example, we go out of town, get something to eat, go to the movies. No, I don't think that I've been treated differently because I'm an African American male.

*Hamidi*

I get my leadership, my social skills, all of that from Duncan Park basketball, football, and Burdette basketball. It keeps you disciplined. I go to church with my friends one week out of the summer each year to AME Mt. Pleasant near where I live. We go to Vacation Bible School for that week. During the school year, I attend Sunday Services, but I really don't participate in youth activities. I'm sort of isolated from people. I live around a lot of white people so I don't know anyone that's like a hero or nothing in my community. We just all get along. They stay in their house, and I just stay where I live. My mentor probably has to be my dad because he's my coach, my best friend, my dad, all that. He takes me to movies, bowling, whatever. He taught me how to play tennis, basketball. He signs me up for all the recreation. He lets me play football. He tells me that if I ever bring home an F, I'll have to deal and will probably get hit upside the head. He wants me to go to college because he doesn't want me to live in his house all my life. I don't want to be no burden on him no way. So I just want to make him proud. Make him see that all his hard work will pay off. That's why I do my work and stuff. No, I haven't been treated differently because I'm an African American male.

*Kamau*

I'm not aware of any community programs. I usher and mime. I don't know nobody in my community that's a role model that I would emulate. My dad is my mentor. He takes me to the Falcon's games. He brought me souvenirs from California. He

encourages me to do good in school. If I get an F, he tells me not to come home. What he means is that you can't bring that grade in the house. No, I haven't been treated differently.

*Leabua*

I participate with the Old National Football. Also, I work with my mom with the Georgia Pregnancy Prevention Program. I'm in their big brother program. Like last year 2005 I was part of the big brother program where I would go in and talk to like I chose one little boy from the age of 10 -12, some could be my age, I just partner up with them and so they can.. See I'm an only child and they are too, so we can have communication those people in those type situations know that they can have someone to talk. No, I don't go to church during the school year here. In the summer when I go to Florida with my dad, I go to his church. I sometimes be in the youth ministry. I have sang a little with the youth choir. I also go to my uncle's church. Sometimes I'm in his youth choir. With my father, stepmother, brother and some members of his congregation, we would go into the community pick up trash and collect cans. Sometimes we would donate food to a local homeless shelter five blocks down. This dude that lives on my hill. We call him Bert Farr because when we play football, he throws like Bert Farr. He is the type of guy where he relates to children. Say, someone not from the neighborhood comes and tries to stir up some stuff. He's like the dude who has everybody's back in the neighborhood. He makes sure that nothing goes down in the neighborhood. He looks out for everyone in the surrounding neighborhood. He's not one who just stays in the house or comes outside just to get his kids. He looks out for everybody. Yes. He gets me out of the house, when mom tries to keep me in. He takes me to a baseball game. If the Hawks playing, we'll go there.

He might scrape up some Falcon's tickets. We'll go to the fair when it comes. We'll probably go to the movies. He's my mom age and real cool. Say like, a daughter and a mom. He encourages and congratulates me when I do well, and yells at me when I make bad grades. No, I haven't been treated differently.

### **School Experiences**

Table 3: Questions Relating to Experiences at School

1. How would describe your relationship with your peers? Do you assist them with their schoolwork?
2. You are achieving well while so many of your peers are not. To what do you attribute your success?
3. What extra-curricular activities have you participated in at Bear Creek?
4. Think about your best middle school teacher. What made this teacher so good? What was your best experience in that class?
5. Think about your worst middle school teacher. What made this teacher so bad, and how were you able to overcome the challenges?
6. Think about your favorite subject. Why is it your favorite subject? What was the best experience in that class?
7. Think about your hardest class in middle school. Why has it been your least favorite subject? How were able to overcome the challenges?
8. Let's discuss your discipline record. Share some information in regards to the offense.
9. Have you been treated differently because of your ethnicity or gender? Meaning, do you think that because you are an African American male that you have been treated unfairly by anyone?
10. What has the counselor done to enhance your academic achievement or social development?
11. What experience have you had with any support staff (custodian, nurse, hall monitor, media specialist, technologist specialist) which aided your academic achievement or social development?
12. How do your teachers generally present new information? Do they present it visually (like on the board), auditory (mainly talking) or tactile (hands-on)?
13. What is your preferred method?
14. What do teachers need to know about getting African American males to try harder?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your school experiences?
16. Explain your ranking of the teacher qualities. Place the numbers in categories of very important, important, least important, and not important at all.

*Bakari*

Some are cool, some try to act hard, some just talk stuff, some want to fight. Not really, I don't talk to many of them over the phone. I'll probably say my work ethic because if I know that something has to be done, then I do it, and I do my best. Also, the fact that my mother expects me to do well. I rarely participate in any activities. My best middle school teacher was Mrs. J. B., 6th grade. She was nice and whatnot. I was teacher's pet that year. I passed the class with an A of course. My best experience in that class would probably be the projects that we did in class. We did this bubble gum experiment. My worst, absolute worst, out of all my days in school, I have never seen a teacher this bad. Ms. P. W. She doesn't like me, or any other student. I think that she has a serious problem with children. From the first day of school, she gives you mean looks and looks you up and down and stuff. She don't explain nothing. She puts something on the board, the page number, and say, "Do it!" She asks if anybody have any questions, and after the question, she just looks at me, just glances at me. I would just ignore her. If she said something to me, I'd act like I didn't hear her, and I just continue with my work. My favorite subject would have to be reading because to me it's the most important subject. If you can't read, there's not much that you can do. Best experience when we would recite poetry or whatnot and write stories. In Ms. M. C.'s class, we had to write poems and write stories sometimes. My worst (hardest) subject would have to be algebra I. Algebra I was hard. I don't understand it; I still don't understand it and I passed it with a C. The only reason that I passed it probably because I had a kind and patient teacher, Mrs. B. She helped me through it.

Yes, I was very upset about the one with Mr. F. We were outside. They gave us the privilege to go outside, I came back in to use the restroom, and he said that I went through the wrong door, and he put me in in-school suspension. Fighting, yeah, that was the last day of school. It was a dude that was way bigger than me, cussing, picking on me throughout the year, and on the last day of school he approached me as if he was going to swing his fists to me, so I swung my fist at him first. Then we got to fighting. (moving to eighth grade). See, it was rumors going around, that he was saying this and that about me. I came to him to talk to him about it and what not, and he took it the wrong way as if I was, you know, trying to tell him, that he'd better you know stop this or stop that. He turned around; he swung at me and what not, but we didn't get a chance to really fight because teachers broke it up before anything got serious. I got OSS because the way they seen it, I shouldn't have said nothing to him. But I was trying to resolve the problem. The other fight was the time I had let someone borrow my CDs. They didn't bring them back, and I got upset. We passed a few words and what not. And he called me out and told me to come to the bathroom. I told him, "NO!" My class was going towards that way. As I was walking past the bathroom, someone pushed me in there, and he swung his fist at me and we were fighting. He and I are cool now. We were cool then. Just a big misunderstanding.

I don't think that I have been treated differently because I'm an African American male. I never had a conversation with the counselor. I would probably say Mr. M [*grade level administrator*]. I didn't really favor Mr. M because he was a tough person. If you went in his office, he showed you no mercy. The fact that I didn't want to go to his office made me kind of do a little bit better.

Most of the time, teachers present information visually, but then again I need to hear it, because sometime seeing it is not always enough either. My preferred method is visually, especially in math because a lot of times I need to see it to understand what is fully going on. Teachers need to know how to keep African American males interested. Let them know why it's important to learn certain things because if they have a reason to learn it, then they might try harder. Like well reading, I definitely see a need for that. If you can't read, there are not many things that you can do. Language arts, it's important to know how to talk or what not. Things like social studies, science, and algebra; I really don't see the cause for it. I still try because you know that I want to make something out of my life, but as far as getting out of school, I don't see the use for it.

I hate the fact that this is on my records. Everything is on here for fighting. They are going to think I have a violent behavior, but I really don't. The fact that I don't follow the crowd, I kind of go my own way. People see me as like a lame, nerd, or what not, so they tend to pick at me and what not. Most of the time I avoid it, but sometimes you can't avoid it. BC is not lame, because of Z team.

#1 is intelligent. If she doesn't know it, then she can't teach it. The more you know, the more you can teach. #2 is fair to everyone. It wouldn't be fair to the other students if you only focused on the male students or female students and the other students didn't learn the same things so you are basically setting them up for failure. #3 is patient. You have to be patient with students because they may not learn as quickly as others or as quick as you want them to. #4 is makes the course culturally relevant. I have a huge problem with passing the class if I don't see why I'm going to need it or if I'm going to need it later. Adding extra stuff that's not needed doesn't make sense and is a

waste of time. #5 is humorous or friendly. It makes the year go by quicker and smooth. If the teacher isn't always strict and mean. Smile every once in a while. #6 is enthusiastic. If the teacher comes in drawn out like she's about ready to go asleep, then it's not going to make me participate and active and do work. I'm gonna want to go to sleep along with her #7 flexible [*no comment*]. #8 is creative. As long as students are getting it, there's not much of a need to be creative unless there are a group of student that learn better if you're creative. #9 is go above and beyond. A student going to do what's required and not to many students will go above what you tell them to do. They just want to pass and go on. To challenge the student means to give them more than you're actually suppose to. #10 is gives rewards. That's not important at all. It has nothing to do with educating the students or helping them pass the end-of-course test. All of the characteristics are important to me except #10. It's just some are more important then others. Number 10 is so elementary. I had to put them in categories, numbers 1-4 would be very important, 5-6 important, 7-9 least important, and 10 not important at all.

*Erasto*

Some are cool, some try to act hard, some just talk stuff, some want to fight. I don't help others. I like math; I've always been good in math. Club Z, that's it. Dr. G was my best middle school teacher. She taught us stuff easy. One experience I got was having the best lab in the class one time when we were doing something with fire. Mr. B., 7<sup>th</sup> grade, language arts teacher was my worst teacher. She always use to spit when she talked. And I told her that she spit when she talked and she would do it even more. Then I accidentally spit on her when I was talking and she wrote me up. Every time when she would come and try to talk to me, I'd walk away. Math because it's the easiest thing

to do to me. My best experience when I passed the end of the year. I had a perfect score on the math section of the CRCT. My worst subject is...my hardest subject is science. Cause the group that I was in failed the roller coaster project and it was hard to bring the grade back up. [Erasto has no discipline record]. No. I've never spoken with the counselor. The computer technician at my old school in Ohio knew my mother. After school, he would let me work on the computer. We would do math. They mostly do talking. Talking and hands on. Have more patience; encourage them to talk more in class.

#1 is fair to everyone. So everybody can learn equally. So everyone can have a chance at earning the same things. #2 is intelligent. So she can know what she is doing. It gives me confidence in her ability to teach. #3 is creative. We just don't want to work in books. She can teach us different learning ways. For example, doing posters and projects, hands-on stuff #4 is flexible. So she won't get mad easily and work with the students if they need extra help. That is being flexible. They can do more than one thing, like, teacher won't easily get mad. She can work around stuff. #5 is patient. Teacher needs to be patient so she won't get mad at the kids. If they don't know all that stuff. #6 is challenge students. That's in the middle. #7 is makes the course work culturally relevant. That's just in the middle too. #8 is enthusiastic and energetic. I don't know about that. To be enthusiastic and energetic is only important sometimes. #9 is humorous or friendly. Teachers are supposed to just teach us without having to feel that she's connected. #10 is gives rewards. Not important. Teachers are supposed to teach us. If I had to put them in categories, numbers 1-4 would be very important, 5-6 important, 7-9 least important, and 10 not important at all.

*Hamidi*

We're all cool; we get along. Sometimes when they act too crazy for me, then I got to let them have their moment. I just sit there and chill. Probably every once in a while. Just being dedicated; just hard work. I have a long list; basketball, track, band, music festival, Creekside jamboree, volleyball, spirit week, hat day, Operation Outreach Basketball, academic bowl in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and we won. My best teacher would have to be Mr. F's, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, math teacher. Because he had gave me this scholarship for math, and we just had a lot of fun. I came out of the class with an A. He just helped me bring out my full potential and junk. One experience is this one project. We had built this whole theme park. I didn't do that good, but he still gave me an A or B grade on it. S, he was just a cool man. Let me see. I'll have to say that my worst speaker would have to be Ms. L. S. Because out of all my teachers every year since I've been here, it seems like she had it out for me and a couple of my friends, and I can't really understand why. Come to class, she just wants to yell at you for no reason. She wants to yell at you for stuff that happened last week. She wants to bring stuff up. She just had problems with me. Eventually, she just kinda laid off me a little bit. My favorite subject was science. Because in science you always do hands-on activities, experiments, and stuff like that. The test is easy. It be like math, but easier. I can breeze through that. The best experience was kinda funny. It was me, my friends Hosea, Torry, and Lauren. Someone joined the group late so we kicked Lauren out and picked up someone else. We got an 86 or something and passed. It was just fun. My worst class would probably have to be math too. Ms. C. D, eighth grade. It was Algebra 1. All throughout the year, I always got a C. I was trying to keep it at a B. Some of the work, you have to catch on quick. I had to really

buckle down and try to study and listen to the teacher and write down notes. Just be ready for my test. And just go out there and do good. I didn't want to be back in Algebra next year. I wanted to go ahead and move on. And I did. I'll going to geometry next year.

I don't remember the bus misconduct in sixth grade nor unexcused absence/tardy in seventh grade. I don't think that I was skipping to get the unexcused absence/tardy. I was probably just late. I don't remember the bus misconduct referral [no action was taken according to disciple report]. The public detention was for skipping. I really wasn't skipping. I was going to orchestra room and then I was talking to the orchestra teacher, and he told me to leave so I could go to PE. Then Mr. M [assistant administrator] came and saw me. He wrote me up for being late for class. I tried to explain, but he didn't really care. I don't know. I don't remember any times. I haven't had too many white teachers. No interaction at all with the counselor. Probably the basketball team [the coaches]Academically you have to maintain good grades to stay on the team, so in addition to playing basketball they encourage you to keep your grades up.

Probably hands on and then just the book. Probably just know what his [African American males] habits are and know what kinds of things motivates him more to do his work and just try. School is lame. We could have had more activities.

#1 is challenges students because once I get to college and stuff and If I never had to do anything better, if I just had to settle, and but always just got by then I wouldn't know what to do, then I would be stuck, but not on a higher level. #2 is fair to everyone, regardless. I wouldn't want nobody to be rude to me just because of the color of my skin, or because I talk different or something. I just want everybody to be treated the same way. #3 is patient I don't want anybody to rush anything and not give me time to do

anything and I be and then I'll just look like I don't know what I'm doing at all. #4 is flexible. Sometimes the teacher needs to be flexible sometimes like I might be slipping or something, and then I might need some help and they can just stay after school for tutoring or something. #5 is intelligent. I come to school to learn so I need somebody that knows more than me to teach me, or I could just teach myself or whatever. That's why they need to be intelligent or more smarter than me. #6 is creative. I like to have fun in class and be creative; do different things like hands on stuff. #7 is humorous or friendly. I like to get along with everybody, and I want the teacher to be kinda funny. I'd hope the teacher would be kinda funny. I don't want to be in a strict class where it is boring and stuff. I might fall asleep. Keep me into the lesson. #8 is enthusiastic and energetic. Same reason as #7. Keep me involved in class so I won't fall asleep. #9 is makes the course work culturally relevant. It helps. This year, my language arts teacher tells us how everything is tied into the world. That way, when I get on my own that way, I'll know what it's for and how to use it. #10 is rewards. It's always a good thing, but definitely not that important. You really don't need it; it does make you feel better to know that you are doing good. In placing these qualities into categories, I would say that numbers 1-5 are most important, 6-7 important, 8-9 least important and 10 is not important at all.

*Kamau*

We're cool. My mom, my dad, and my grandma. My grandma, definitely. She didn't get a high school degree. She quit school. I haven't participated in anything. My 7<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher, Ms. C. She gives you a lot of quizzes and test to help you pass. I came out with an A in that class. My worst teacher was Mrs. F. You could do a little thing, and she would get mad at you. Math is my favorite because I'm good in it, and you

can learn new stuff. My best experience was when I got the highest test score out of everybody in the whole algebra class. My worst subject has to be science because I keep failing projects, but I still have an A/B in the class because I passed all my tests. I don't play around during class. I only play during connections and lunch. I'm not a perfect student. I just know how to avoid trouble. I've never talked to the counselor I didn't even know his name. Nobody. I don't bother them, and they don't bother me.

Teachers generally present information auditory. I like hands-on. Teachers should push African American males harder. Don't take nothing less than great from them. That's it.

#1 is fair to everyone. If you deserve an A and she gives you a C, and she gives the other person who deserved a C get an A. It's not fair so they should be fair to everybody. #2 challenges students to go above and beyond. Teachers shouldn't want students to be just average, you want them to exceed average. #3 makes the course work relevant.

*Kamau paused so I asked if he knew what that meant. I explained that teachers explain why you need to know the information and then relates it to something in which you are familiar. Kamau originally scored this as a nine. With a better understanding, Kamau changed the ranking. It went from a nine to a three.*

It's important for students to know why you are doing things. You do things for a reason and not just "out of the blue".

*When I asked about how the school year was going with his literature class, Kamau told me that he had already told me that he was reading a book about Dr. King in his literature class and he didn't like the book. I asked if the teacher made the course*

*work culturally relevant did he think that he would like the book better. He responded, "Naaaa."*

#4 is intelligent. You don't want your teacher to be too smart nor too dumb. But not too smart, because she'll think that she knows everything. When she gets something wrong, and you tell her that it's wrong, then she won't get mad at you. #5 is creative. You have to be creative so you can enjoy it better and get more learning experience out of it. #6 is humorous or friendly. If you expect teachers to be humorous, then you'll expect 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to be friendly to you and usually they are not. #7 is enthusiastic and energetic. That scares me sometimes, like she's a little crazy. #8 is patient. In high school, they don't expect you to take your time. They tell you what to do in an expected period. That would make it easier to make the adjustment in high school. #9 is flexible. If she diverts from a plan, if she goes to another lesson without finishing the one currently on, there could be something important that is missed. #10 is gives rewards. You don't give students rewards. If they do good, you give the rewards, and after they do something else good, they want another reward. So they will keep doing something good only for rewards. In addition, when you run out of rewards, they won't do good anymore. It's better not to even start it. Rewards don't make students do any better.

*Leabua*

My peers, we're all close. We always got each other's back. Like say... oh if you get in trouble for something minor, like putting gum under the teacher's desk, then we ain't gonna rat. But if you steal a cell phone, oh yeah, you're on your own on that one. We won't say anything, but you're on your own. If you get caught, don't put our name on

it. We have a close relationship. I only helped one person with their homework and they failed it. So no, I don't help anyone. Well, this is how I always see it. I see it like if I'm in a group, I mean, I have friends, I'll always have friends, but some friends they just need each other. And me, I just go my own way. Track, band festival, jazz band, Creekside High School Marching Band, field day, and student council sponsored special days such as "hat day and flash back". I volunteered with Operation Outreach. I participated in the technology fair at the regional level, and honor's band. Coach M's class was my favorite class. He was the coolest teacher. In the class well, you can do little work, yet learn a lot from his stories. A lot of stuff happened in his class. It was just fun. I didn't want to mention this, Mr. D, my band director was my worst teacher. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade, we had Mr. L. He was cool. He made band interesting. Mr. D. wrote me up for nonsense. I had to skip his class to do a project, and he wrote me up. I had to work on chorus to get ready for our field trip the next day, and he wrote me up. I skipped his class the last week of school because I didn't want to go, and he wrote me up. How can you write me up? Out of all the people in your whole band, it was three people that basically carried your band. He wrote me up for a project, I had to help my chorus go on a field trip, and he still wrote me up. All he does is yell in class. And he tries to act like us. He tries to sag his pants on Fridays. You know when teachers dress down. Out of my whole middle school life, I'll say the class that was hardest would be Ms. C., seventh grade pre-algebra. Why, because in seventh grade she's not like she was in eighth grade. In seventh grade, she would see, I was in the bad class. I was in the class surrounded with just a few names: J, C, and E. That was a struggle, because it was more talking, and she kept going so fast that you can't catch on to it. When you ask her to slow down, she keeps going.

She tries to push you. I mean that I always try my best to keep up, and I maintained. She just tries to keep moving you that extra mile or extra two miles when you could only go that extra mile. To overcome the challenges, without being told I just moved to the other side of the classroom, and I stayed over there for the rest of the year.

I didn't know that I had so many write-ups. First, I'd like to say, "America, I am not a bad kid. I just had some struggles in eighth grade.

*Let us look at sixth grade.*

The bus write-ups came from me still being excited about being in middle school, being grown-up. My bus was kinda off the chain, and sometimes I got carried away. The bad language came when someone said something to me so I said the same thing back to him.

*Let us look at 7<sup>th</sup> grade.*

I don't remember the one for disregarding rules from Mr. T. Mr. D wrote me up for disregarding the rules because I wouldn't come to his class that day. I had to finish a project that was going to keep me from failing the class. I asked him the day before if I could miss band. I was like, "I'm going to fail." He was like, "I don't care." So I like, had to do what I had to do. Grades come first.

*What about 8<sup>th</sup> grade?*

Mr. D. all those unexcused absences. This is the thing about Mr. G. I'm gonna tell you like I tell everybody. The only reason that he did anything, that he looks good in front of my peoples, because he had a dynamite band. It's not fair that you would write me up, and I've gone the farthest to put you on the map. So I mean because I got those

unexcused absences and two of these are in the last month of school and it's all in second semester, I mean. I did all this, and you want to not do this.

*What about the fighting?*

The fight was because I had. Well, we were cool. We were cool after the fight and even before. He had burned CD's. At first, I didn't know that I had given him the wrong CD because it was blank. So I had gave him an Outcast, but then he started getting up in my face so I was like nah, I'm ain't going to give you your CD back until you get out of my face. So I'm saying I'm going back and forth and then the day before the real big fight, it was like a semi-fight on the bus ramp. We were both missing; nobody doing nothing. I even sat down my mother that night and told her that I was going to try to give him the CD back. I was going to give it to my homeboy to give to him, but he tried to make a move, so I had to make a move with him.

*What about the sex offense?*

It was this girl. She's crazy. I ain't never seen no female do this in such life. Well the way it was, she swore up and down on the Bible the next day that she was pregnant. She told the principal and other people that she fixin to call rape on me. Lesson learned. Don't trust everybody. Because of two infractions within a two-week period, that kept me out of school for a total of eight days. When I got my report card after I came back, I had 3 F's. I brought all them F's up in 4 1/2 weeks to 2 B's and 1 C.

No, not at all. The counselor and I weren't on the same page. I would walk down the hallway. I'll be holding hands with a girl or something and he'd say, "Step into my office." I'd go into the office and he'd say, "Don't touch on these young ladies like that." She would then come up in there and say, "It's okay, we're dealing with it." Like he takes

a poll for what every guy do, but he doesn't step up to the ladies. Ms. S, the school janitor. Socially and academically, she encourages me. I can talk with her more than I can talk to anybody in the whole school. She's the type of lady who will put you on the track that you need to be. Sometimes when she gives me advice, it works.

Teachers generally use a combination of all three. I prefer visual. It's going to be kinda complicated because the way I say I'd just say try to find out, try to observe how they act around peers and in the classroom. Collaborate together to find a way that you can reach them without making them feel as if they are selling out or nerdish. Try to reach their way and still let them feel like they are comfortable and can handle both environments. Cause that seems like that's what happening. If you don't think you are the big man on campus, you ain't suppose to be in school looking in the books. By the way, "I'm the Big Man on Campus and I still look in the books. That's pretty much the advice that I can give. I would like to thank my teachers at BCMS for their hard work and dedication for the last three years. My favorite year was sixth grade. My favorite teachers were all in eighth grade. It's been a hard road, but it's time to say good-by now.

I ranked challenges students to go above and beyond the assignment as most important. I would rather have a teacher who encourages me not to just do my work, but exceed my work. Take care of the business at hand, and then reach farther, because there are farther places than the stars to reach. Humorous or friendly is #2. I need a teacher that I can get along with. If you don't like me, and I don't like you, you won't meet my #1 goal. I can deal with a little attitude, but be funny. Try to relate to me because I'm a funny guy. I'm friendly, and I'm humorous. Don't try to be so hard, just kinda lighten up. Fair to everyone is #3. How are you going to teach a classroom where there are multi-

racers and you only thinking about one? Say if you had a Hispanic teacher, and he don't like African Americans and his whole class is full of African Americans, like 90 %. What you gonna do? Fail 90% of them. Flexible is #4. A teacher that is flexible, she sticks to one topic, but tries to reach out and pull things into that one topic. Patient is #5. Sometime I might come up in there, be like I don't even like you, don't talk to me, don't mess with me, don't start none, won't be none, so you got to have patience with me because I might just be having a bad day that day because that really isn't my personality. Creative is #6. Be creative, but don't be too creative cause being too creative can side track you, get you off your main focus point. Intelligent is #7. You have to be intelligent to be a teacher. That is a given. The thing about it is a teacher can teach you what is in the book. I can teach a chemistry class by reading everything in a book, but that doesn't mean that you're teaching based on your knowledge. As long as they can read a book and follow directions, it's good. Makes the course culturally relevant is #8. It's not important to make the course work relevant. Well, I'm going by the state of Georgia. Because they say that you have to teach the curriculum. You have to teach the book. You don't have a choice. If it ain't important you still got to learn it. You gonna learn it or you ain't gonna pass. Enthusiastic and energetic are #9. A lot of teachers are up in age. They are not going to be as enthusiastic as some of the down in age teaches, but they still try so I mean you don't have to be the most hip person to be a teacher. Rewards are least important. you shouldn't be rewarded for what you are suppose to do.

The narratives proved to be very informative. There were a number of different factors in the home, community, and school that contributed to the academic success and social development of the African American adolescent males. Participants' academic

success and social development depend on everything from a supportive family to having teachers that are willing to go above and beyond. At home, the participants in my study have been taught to take responsibility for their own behavior. They have been taught that there are consequences for not working up to their potential. Their parents have instilled in them why it is important for them to succeed as African American males. In the community, some of the participants took advantage of athletic activities to develop skills. In schools, teachers and support staff made a difference.

Instead of falling victim to the stereotypes of society in regards to African American males, these participants are accepting no limitations. The home, community, and school are working together to develop academic and social skills. If the three links continue to provide the support that these individuals need, then their academic and social skills will be fully developed in creating unlimited experiences whereas participants will have “a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole” (Bell, 1997, p. 1). The critical examination of home, community, and school experiences develops “a sense of their own agency.” Only then can students see the relationship between educational opportunity, power, and pedagogy of social justice.

### **Reflections on Bakari**

I was quite impressed with Bakari’s responses. More than any other participant, Bakari spoke in complete sentences, he rarely paused to collect his thoughts, and he frequently used age appropriate vocabulary. For example, he spoke of his grades declining. The way in which he spoke and his viewpoint on different things enabled me

to see why his teacher stated, “He could paint a mental picture so vivid in the eyes of the reader.”

From the interview questions, but mostly from the conversations Bakari and I had when I drove him home, it appears that his home had the greatest influence. Although he was raised in three of Atlanta’s roughest housing development, attended three elementary schools and three middle schools, the love, concern, and support within his home has been the greatest influence upon his academic achievement. Although he has no memory of his father, he uses his father as an inspiration to achieve and excel. He shared that his father was murdered because he chose to be with Bakari and his mother, and that makes him proud. I was shocked when he shared that he was thankful that he had grown up in those housing development. The thought that ran through my mind was, “Who would be thankful for being raised in housing developments that were known for being drug-infested, dwellings for single-mother raising unruly children, and violent confrontations on a daily basis?” He must have read my thoughts because he then provided further explanation. His points were well taken. Bottom line: Bakari believed that his former environment made him into a better person, and because of those experiences, he is more appreciative of his current experiences.

On the other hand, his former environment caused problems in schools. He indicated that while living in the housing developments, fighting was a means of survival. Now it is not, but making the transition has not been easy. He admits that his current discipline record looks bad, but it is better than before, and he sees it as improving even more this year. The interpretation of events on his discipline record was definitely a counter narrative. After listening to his side of the stories, I wished there was some way

that I could erase the offenses. The views that he presented reminded me that there are definitely two sides to every story. However, only one side is revealed in the written discipline reports.

Whereas most adolescents come to school to socialize, Bakari was more interested in being educated. Kind and patient teachers made the difference with him. Socializing with peers was unimportant. Since peers did not know “from whence he had come,” they did not seem to understand him. That did not appear to hinder Bakari at all. I would say that he is self-motivated and did not need any validation from his peers.

An element of surprise was Bakari’s claim that he is not treated differently because of his ethnicity or gender. Bakari is one of a few students who wear his hair in dread, and he stands out. I was surprised that he did not say anything about students questioning or teasing him about his hair. Last year I taught a student who wore dreads, and he constantly complained that students teased him about his hair. Bakari seems to possess high self-esteem and considering that Bear Creek was his third middle school, he is a well-adjusted student. The odds are against Bakari because a single parent who earns minimum wage is rearing him. However, I see him living up to his name: Bakari, one who will succeed. I am very glad that Bakari was included in this study. His stories were quite powerful. His home experiences seem to be the greatest contributor to his academic and social success.

### **Reflections on Erasto**

Erasto was in my language arts inclusion class. He generally came to class prepared, but he rarely participated in class discussions. He is quiet and reserved and during the interview he spoke so softly that I kept checking the tape recorder to ensure that his

voice was being recorded. Even though I knew him as being quiet and reserve, I was surprised when he did not volunteer any information about receiving an award for the highest score on the eighth grade CRCT in math. Not only was it the highest score, but it was a perfect score, and that information was pried from him.

Erasto's recent relocation to Atlanta could be the reason that he is not that involved with the community, but the significant of his test score could initiate several new relationships. First, Erasto indicated that he had never spoken to the counselor. Erasto's math score presented an opportunity for the counselor to introduce himself and to inform Erasto of the many mathematical possibilities that are available for him. One role of counselors is career awareness; the options for someone who excels in math are unlimited. Secondly, in addition to having his uncle as a mentor, a community member whose profession is in the field of math could establish a mentorship with Erasto. Schools have business partners, and it would be easy to check with an already established business partner for mentorship. To my knowledge, the school did not initiate any actions that would maximize Erasto's mathematical academic abilities. This was the perfect opportunity.

Erasto's quiet and reserve personality probably had an influence upon him having no discipline record. Whereas I thought it was admirable that Erasto had no discipline offenses, the group viewed it as if it was dishonorable. Erasto seemed embarrassed and responded as if to redeem himself. He indicated that he had not been at Bear Creek long enough to get into trouble, but he had gotten into trouble at his other middle school. Whether the group is large or small, this validated the premise that adolescents want to fit in and not be different from the crowd. That adolescent way of thinking may explain why

the majority of the participants had a discipline record, which is the opposite of what I expected. Nevertheless, Erasto's true side is probably closer to what one teacher said. She stated that Erasto was never confrontational, and he would let things slide in order to avoid conflict. Despite what Erasto said, the teacher's analysis is consistent with his discipline record. Erasto's home experiences seem to be the greatest contributor to his academic development. I see the school as failing him.

### **Reflections of Hamidi**

Hamidi is an unassuming student who is conscientious, mannerable, and well organized. I indicate unassuming because initially he appears to be quiet, but once surrounded by certain students, he becomes more vocal and active. Hamidi was in my inclusion language arts' class and throughout the year the general education teacher and I acknowledged his organized method of studying. Once, when given a list of about 80 prepositions to learn, Hamidi immediately grouped the words that he would study each night. On other occasions, when given a ten-to-twenty page double-sided packet of language drill practice, he would first count the number of pages in the packet. Next, he divided that number by how many days he had before the due date. Then he wrote a day of the week at the top of each page. Those would be the pages done for that particular day. Each time he did that one of us would verbally praise him before the whole class. The intent was to acknowledge his organizational skills, as well as demonstrate to the other students a method of getting everything done in a timely manner as opposed to procrastinating.

Hamidi gets along exceptionally well with the majority of his peers. However, in the classroom he grouped himself and conversed with the most capable students, one

identified as talented and gifted and the other as a high achiever. Hamidi has the same potential as those students, and I wonder if more time was dedicated to academics and less to athletics if his grades would have been higher. When considering the amount of time on homework, watching TV, listening to music, etc., the times were balanced. I then reflected upon the mindset of too many teachers. The majority of students does not complete homework assignments and because of that, as the year progresses the homework assignments decrease. Hamidi completed whatever homework assignments he was given, but that only took from 30-40 minutes. Even though the majority of Hamidi's school experiences were good, I saw the school as failing to adequately prepare Hamidi for high school and college.

Finally, I was surprised when Hamidi indicated that he wanted to be a lawyer because he likes to argue a lot. I have never heard him argue in class; discuss yes, argue, no. He is mild-mannered, not pushy, forceful, or loud. I feel that Hamidi has not reached his full potential, but I think that he will. From parent-teacher conferences, it is obvious that his mother has a strong hold on him, and the interview revealed that his father has a strong influence. It is evident that the support of his family influences his academic achievement and social development. More than any other student, home, school, and community experiences seem to be balanced for contributing to Hamidi's academic and social development.

### **Reflections on Kamau**

Kamau was a student in my fourth period language arts inclusion class. He was well-disciplined, mannerable, mature for an eighth grader, and intelligent. He excelled in most categories, and submission of homework assignments were completed in a timely

manner. Yet, Kamau was very quiet in class. Unless called upon, Kamau rarely participated in oral discussions. Although opportunities existed to discuss life and home experiences, Kamau shared little about his family. I was elated when Kamau indicated that one of his influences was his uneducated grandmother. At one time education was highly prized in the African American community, especially by those who were uneducated. Instead of being ashamed, Kamau was proud of his grandmother who had quit school. I commend Kamau for that. Few students acknowledge that their parents or grandparents are uneducated; fewer believe that an uneducated person can teach them or influence them in anyway.

When Kamau spoke of how often he sleeps at home, it reminded me of several incidences in class whereas the general education teacher and I nudged or asked him to sit up. While reading or listening to stories on tape or watching a movie or program on television, he would lay his head on his desk. The teacher and I felt that it was a display of inappropriate classroom behavior, especially if an administrator walked in the room. It would appear as if Kamau was disengaged. In actuality, he was on task. If handouts had been distributed for completion while reading, listening, or watching TV, it generally was complete and accurate. Evidently, it worked for him; he concluded the year with a grade of 90 in language arts. From this observation, I learned that in some cases, as long as mastery of content is demonstrated by students, some body positions can be permissible (i.e. laying head on desk, slumping in chair). It all depends on the student. This requires flexibility on the teacher's part.

Kamau impressed me with two specific responses. First, when referring to the lack of a discipline record, he acknowledged his humanism by stating that he was not a perfect

student; he just knew when it was appropriate to play and when it was not. A teacher validated this by describing him as “knowing when to separate himself from trouble.” Another aspect of his humanism is that he knows the value of friendship and being his brothers’ keeper. Another teacher complemented him by adding that he was always willing to help others, especially his close friends. These are principles taught in church. Secondly, Kamau talked about assisting his parents with cooking. Initially, I thought this was an admirable way to support his parents, and demonstrate the culinary skills. However, after conversing with his mother, I discovered that assisting with the cooking is one of his chores. In addition, to influencing academic achievement and instilling character, his parents are ensuring that Kamau will be self-sufficient. Home, community, and school all seem to influence Kamau’s academic and social skills.

### **Reflections on Leabua**

Leabua was the first person that I interviewed, and he was a delight. Other than speaking to him in regards to participating in the study, this was the first time that we had a lengthy conversation. During the interview he spoke with confidence; he was methodical in many of his thought. Leabua has such a pleasant personality. He is serious, yet comical. When talking about denied privileges, he was very dramatic even putting on a sad dog’s face. One can tell that he truly respects his mother and finds pleasure and motivation in doing well just for her. At one point during the interview, before responding he asked for confirmation that the responses were confidential. When discussing his discipline, he never would repeat bad things that he had said or done. He only said that it was bad, bad, bad. I can tell that most of his peers like him, probably because he is comical. I do not know how I managed to go throughout the entire school

year without noticing him. His classes are on my hallway, and he must pass my room at least four times each day. His career aspiration of becoming a lawyer is definitely within reach for him. He has a sense of humor as well as the gift of gab.

On the other hand, Leabua's comments clearly reveal that he does not fully demonstrate his best ability in class. His mother makes sure that he does everything he needs to do at home to become successful, but he does not transfer that discipline to school. Even though his grades are respectable, they could be better. He indicated that when it comes to the influence of his peers, he is his own man. Yet, the influence of his peers appears to have both negative and positive effects upon his academic achievement and social development. Negative in the sense of being the class clown in one class and acknowledging moments of playing cards in another class as the teacher slept. A positive indicator of peer influence was in getting assistance with homework. Even though he acknowledged his pleasure in attending Bear Creek because of the number of academic activities, he clearly did not take advantage of them. The potential and capability are there, but he left the sense that he never worked to his full potential.

Leabua's discipline record was two pages long with 12 infractions. Three occurrences were in sixth grade. Three were in seventh grade and six infractions were reported in eighth grade. Initially I was not going to include Leabua in the study because of the number of infractions. However, after discussing it with several teachers, the advice was to consider the individuals that reported the action and the infraction itself. After much consideration, Leabua was included in the study because none of the infractions resulted in a tribunal, few resulted in Out Of School Suspension, and a content area teacher wrote only one. That teacher, known for having poor classroom management

skills, is now retired. Not that it diminishes the importance of appropriate classroom behavior, but much of his inappropriate behavior was due to bus misconduct, misunderstanding and miscommunications. He is achieving academically, yet far below his expectancy level, and his social development maybe considered borderline. Leabua's home, school activities, and community activities seem to influence his academic and social development.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influences of home, community, and school experiences on the academic achievement and social development of African American adolescent males. Further, the study analyzed the importance of qualities of classroom teachers. The overall objective was to determine whether home, school, and community experiences can foster a pedagogy of social justice. The overarching research question was: How do the home, school, and community experiences of African American adolescent males foster pedagogy of social justice? Three key questions were: (1) What home, school, or community experiences contribute to African American adolescent male students' academic achievement? (2) What home, school, or community experiences contribute to African American adolescent male students' social development? (3) What do African American adolescent males feel are the important qualities of classroom teachers?

Critical race theory was used to examine the home, community, and school experience of adolescent African American males. A critical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999) was used to assist in collecting stories of the students. The voices of five African American adolescent males from metro Atlanta recounted their home, community, and school experiences as they related to academic achievement and social development.

In this chapter, I present one major research finding which led to six other research findings. The major finding is that there is a need to develop a pedagogy of social justice. Pedagogy of social justice is at the core of democracy. Academic

excellence and positive social developments equip students with the tools for advancement towards participatory democracy. Pedagogy of social justice means finding ways at home, in the community, and in schools for students to practice democratic education using experiences from their own lives. Drawing on the knowledge derived from my participants and my inquiry, I have found that to develop a pedagogy of social justice we need to recognize the significance and incorporate the following six findings that emerged from my study, into educational practice. The six findings that help foster a pedagogy of social justice for African American adolescent males are as follows: (1) A value system, work ethic, and self-discipline are noted for students who are academically and socially developed. (2) Parental involvement is directly linked to positive academic outcomes. (3) A positive sense of ethnic/racial identity serves as a cultural motivator. (4) A connection to the community is limited or absent based on participation in community activities. (5) Some African American males are participating in their own educational marginalization by failing to recognize the significance of culturally relevant teaching. (6) An ethic of care and justice demonstrated by school personnel is significant to students. Implications for these findings are discussed at the conclusion.

### **Finding 1: Value System, Work Ethic, and Self-Discipline**

Although a value system, work ethic, and self-discipline were not addressed in the literature review, those concepts emerged as contributing influences to academic success and social development of African American adolescent males (**Finding 1**). There were guidelines that students were expected to follow at home and at school, and each student had an after-school routine that entailed daily or weekly household chores. These chores included not only included students maintaining their own space, but also spaces shared

by other family members. Leabua, Hamidi, Erasto, Kamau, and Bakari, for instance, cleaned the kitchen, took out the trash, folded clothes, cleaned other sections of the house (i.e., living room, hallway, downstairs, bathroom), mowed the lawn, washed the automobile, and cooked. All chores were completed before or after homework. “A lack of responsibility” is often associated with African American males. These students demonstrated responsibility by contributing to maintenance of the household. Assuming responsibility is an important task for academic and social development. Once the concept of responsibility is learned at home, it is easier to transfer it to the practice of socially responsible behaviors and being responsible for one another. Both socially responsible behaviors and being responsible for one another are important in the pursuit of social justice.

Possession of a work ethic and being disciplined serve as keys to academic success and social development. For example, Hamidi contributed his success to “just, just hard work” (p. 128). Erasto simply took the time to study, and Bakari claimed “if I know that something has to be done, then I do it, and I do my best” (p.123). Completing homework assignments received top priority, and when two-to-three week projects were given, each student made a specific plan for completion. Leabua completed his projects in three steps: (a) gathering information, (b) gathering materials, and (c) putting everything in order. The remaining students spread their projects out, working on them periodically until they were finished.

Furthermore, students were disciplined enough to balance their time. Although they failed to read magazines, newspapers, or books on a regular basis, the amount of time spent per week watching television, playing video games, and listening to music was

approximately the same. The relatively low amount of time they spent on homework may have been attributed to a lack of assignments, as suggested by Kamau. Along with the activities listed above, the students engaged in other typical adolescent pastimes. For instance, Leabua talked on the phone and played sports. Erasto looked through his class work for the day and surfed the web, Hamidi played sports, Kamau helped his mom and dad cook, and Bakari prepared himself for upcoming tests. With all consideration, time spent doing various activities was equally distributed. In summary, the value systems, work ethic, and self-discipline of these students contributed to their academic success and social development. Their daily plans, step-by-step methods of doing things, and allowance of time to get everything done created a positive code of conduct.

### **Finding 2: Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement in children's education is linked directly to positive academic outcomes (**Finding 2**). Parents can influence their children directly through family interaction patterns and indirectly through interactions with other settings in which their children are involved. Students who are achieving academically and socially received support not only from immediate family but also from extended family members. When discussing reasons for being successful or when naming influential persons, students mentioned their mothers, fathers, grandma, brothers, cousin and uncle.

For Leabua and Bakari, the most influential person was their mother. Leabua's mother provided him with encouragement. When he began to slack off, "she is right there to put me back on track" (p. 118). Bakari's mother kept an open line of communication with him. They talked about how important school is, and she often reminded him that he "can't fall off because the Black male race isn't really doing that well" (p. 110). These

findings concur with those of Yan (1999), who determined that parents of successful African American students demonstrate higher levels of parental involvement in areas of discussing school experiences and future plans, spending time on cultural activities, participating in school activities, family rules, and educational expectations. For Bakari, the spiritual presence of his deceased father proved valuable.

I want to please my father. He died before I reached the age of one. I think that he's always looking down on me. I think if I do good in school, you know, it will make him happy. (p. 111)

Hamidi and Kamau's older brothers were just as influential. Although Hamidi's brother has stuttering problems, he attended college and would soon graduate. Constantly, he reminded Hamidi that anything is possible as long as [he] keeps his eye on the prize" (p. 113). Kamau's brother received Cs, Ds, and Fs in middle school. His high school grades, in contrast, had been As and Bs. "If he can do it, then I know that I can do it", Kamau reflected (p. 115).

In addition to words of encouragement, family members rendered support by assisting students with homework, serving as their partners in preparation for tests, and rewarding them for excellent grades. Rewards ranged from verbal statements of praise such as "Good job!" (Leabua, p. 117) to jubilant rejoicing as though the student had "just won a million dollars or something" (Hamidi, p. 113). Other forms of celebration/reward, students reported included dining out, purchasing a new pair of sneakers, or offering money. Two students received monetary rewards: one acquiring \$100 for all As or \$5 for each A, and \$3 for each B.

Equally important is that students viewed family members, not entertainers, athletes, or rappers, as mentors. Hamidi stated that his mentor was probably his father because he was more than just a dad. “He is my coach [and] best friend” (p. 120)

Hamidi explained:

He taught me how to play tennis [and] basketball. He signs me up for all the recreation. He lets me play football. He tells me that if I ever bring home an F, I’ll have to deal with him and will probably get hit upside the head. He wants me to go to college because he doesn’t want me to live in his house all my life. I don’t want to be no burden on him no way. So I just want to make him proud. Make him see that all his hard work will pay off. (p. 120)

Kamau also named his father as his mentor. Kamau’s father encouraged him to do well and let him know that he expected only the best from him. Bakari’s stepfather took the time to talk to him about life. “He tells me how to be humble” (p. 119). Erasto looks to his uncle for guidance and encouragement.

The best place for children to learn to take responsibility for their own behavior is at home. Consistent discipline has been associated with positive achievement-related outcomes for children and adolescents (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002). Instead of receiving verbal warnings for inappropriate behaviors, students faced consequences. Inappropriate behaviors included being disrespectful, not completing chores, declination of grades, and getting into trouble at school. Students’ loss of privileges for one-to- two weeks might consist of exclusion from outdoor activities and confinement to one’s bedroom without television, radio, telephone, and/or video games. The parents of one

student did not consider him too old for “whippings.” Leabua’s comment summed up everyone’s situation:

All right. Say I get a bad grade, like a C in math because math is supposed to be my strong subject. I get yelled at, get the TV taken away, the phone, video games, and the radio. But if I come home with an F, there goes outside, movies, everything is gone. She just takes everything away. Yes, it’s all out the door.

Gone. (p. 118)

Well-disciplined students take responsibility for their own learning and their behavior, neither making excuses nor blaming others for their problems.

The home environment is a critical factor in African American adolescent males’ achievement and social development. In an investigation of parents of African American male students who were excelling in math and science, six key parenting strategies were uncovered that provide students with experiences that help them to become successful (Hrabowski, et al, 1998). First, parents demonstrated love through involvement in the children's education, provided support and encouragement, and fostered a belief in self. Second, parents established limits on behavior and provided discipline when appropriate. Third, they set high expectations for success in academics and other areas. Fourth, they developed open and strong communication channels with the children. Fifth, they established positive identification as males and as African Americans. Finally, they emphasized taking advantage of available community resources.

### **Finding 3: Positive Ethnic/Racial Identity**

A positive sense of ethnic/racial identity serves as a cultural motivator (**Finding 3**). As stated in the literature review, Phinney (1990) described adolescents’ ethnic

identity development as composed of three distinct stages: unexamined, exploration, and achieved. Individuals at an achieved stage of ethnic identity have a working knowledge of their ethnic heritage, a clear idea of the meaning of their ethnic group membership, a commitment to their ethnic heritage, an evident demonstration of ethnic group qualities, and a commitment to their ethnicity and the role it plays in their lives. The students in this study have reached the achieved stage.

While none of the participants was allowed to watch television or talk on the telephone during homework, Leabua, Hamidi, Erasto, and Kamau were permitted to listen to music. According to Leabua, "I'm allowed to listen to music because music calms me down and helps me stay focused" (p. 116). Parents may have recognized that movement, a rhythmic orientation manifested in music, is one of the qualities of Boykin's (1983) belief system. Many learning situations of African American children are manifested in this West African belief system.

Despite the low prestige that Black English carries, the students' parents allowed them to use it to engage in conversation. When questioned about what happens when they spoke non-standard English as opposed to Standard English, students offered several positive responses. Hamidi and Kamau described being able to use slang or Ebonics without being corrected by their parents. Bakari said that he was able to use some words, but not "nigger," or "ain't." In contrast, when Leabua spoke slang or Ebonics, his mom responded, "Correct your English" (p. 118) and demanded that he replay the entire scene by re-entering the room.

Knowing that the majority of the staff at Bear Creek are African American, and like receptive to Black English Vernacular, students were able to master Standard English

while maintaining their links to their homes, communities, and peers. Students' mastery of Standard English was reflected in their grades of A and B in language arts classes. However, their cultural language was validated at home and at school (Delpit, 1995; 2002; Smitherman, 2002). Furthermore, pedagogy of social justice requires that students and teachers recognize cultural differences in grammar, syntax, discourse style, and language use (Delpit, 2002). This provides a "psychological sanctuary" that helps to ensure that African American males do not succumb to unfounded language bias when exposed to the dominant culture (Wynn, 2002, p. 206). Students and educators need to understand the depth of language oppression, whereby others view the use of cultural language as an indication of ignorance, backwardness or lower socioeconomic status (Delpit, 2002). When students comprehend language oppression, they recognize that those who do not have access to the "politically popular dialect," are less likely to succeed economically (Delpit, 1995, p. 53). In the name of pedagogy of social justice, while allowing use of home and cultural language, teachers must expose students to an alternate form and allow them the opportunity to practice that form "in contexts that are nonthreatening, have a real purpose, and are intrinsically enjoyable" (Delpit, 1995, p. 54).

Another aspect of racial/ethnic identity as a cultural motivator was revealed in information that parents shared with their sons concerning being an African American male. Bakari viewed representing the race as his responsibility. He explained, "My mother says that as an African American male, I need to strive harder for the race itself because most of us end up in jail or dead or in some type of gang" (p. 111). Erasto's response that "I can be whatever I want to be and "don't let nobody tell you what you can't do" (p. 112) suggests the existence of an assumption that because of his race and

gender, he has limited potential. Hamidi's response that "people are always trying to down you...they don't be trying to help you out" (p. 114) implies that African American males find few avenues of support yet, they know that "you have to work harder to get what you want" (Kamau, p.115). Leabua summed it up best:

It's harder on you, and the laws, people, and society have already labeled you so you are out there to prove that society is wrong. Prove that you can accomplish more than what they expect. Because the way I see, it is... the boss... putting us down. I know that it ain't no black boss; can't no black boss put no African American down. So it got to be the white man. That's what I call him: the big white man boss. We are out here to prove them wrong and so far, I'm proud of my race. They are proving them wrong and doing great things. (p. 118)

Although racial/ethnic identity was developed in these adolescents, (Wakefield and Hudley, 2005; Cross, 1991; and Cross, Parham, and Helm, 1991) no evidence surfaced that students had established a "defensive mode." According to Cross, et al., a person with a well-developed defensive modality is "aware that oppressive and racist factors are realities in everyday life in America and that personal encounters with racism should come as no surprise" (p. 328). When asked if they had been treated differently because of their ethnicity or gender, all students responded in the negative. This response was surprising, given that it is during adolescence that environmental cues trigger an examination of racial identity (Tatum, 1997). More surprising was the tone of voice students used in their responses. Each tone was different, but they all seem to scream, "Of course, not! And I do not expect to be!" I wondered if students knew that women clutch their purses tighter when being approached by African American males. I wondered if

they knew that when African American males are huddled together on corners near traffic lights, people check immediately to see if the doors are locked. I wondered if they have heard “the elevator stories.” Pinar (1993) contended:

We are what we know. We are, however, also, what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves-our history, our culture, our national identity-is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity-both as individuals and as Americans-is fragmented. This fragmented self is a repressed self, that is, it “contains” repressed elements. Such a self lacks access both to itself and to the world. Repressed, the self’s capacity for intelligence, for informed action, even for simple functional competence is impaired; its sense of history, gender, and politics is incomplete and distorted. (p. 61)

These African American males realize that they were confronted with obstacles and hurdles, yet they maintained a positive ethnic/racial identity. That is the good part. On the other hand, they seemed ill prepared to handle racism when it surfaced. It was as though they knew that racism happens, but they did not believe that racism would happen to them. Pedagogy of social justice entails putting all the fragment pieces of history, culture, and identity together so that racism can be recognized.

#### **Finding 4: Lack of Connection to the Community**

Offering youth opportunities to contribute to the community, as well as choices in how to do so, strengthen their academic, social, and vocational competence. A connection to the community is limited or absent based on participation in community activities (**Finding 4**). Students were asked to identify programs in the community in which they engaged that helped them to develop, or enhance, leadership skills, social skills, and

academic excellence. Hamidi and Leabua mentioned basketball and football programs sponsored by other communities. Hamidi's comment regarding athletic programs was "It keeps you disciplined" (p.120). Additionally, sports served as motivation for maintaining good grades. Even though all the students resided within a 10-mile radius of each other, Bakari, Kamau, and Erasto indicated that they were unaware of any programs in the community; thus, their participation in community recreational programs was nonexistent.

Other than athletic programs, participation in community programs was minimal. Because of his mother's position as executive assistant at the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program, Leabua had been able to volunteer as a big brother. According to Leabua, "I just partner up with them and so they can have someone to talk" (p. 121). The partnership enabled Leabua to enhance leadership skills because the youth he mentored was younger. Participation in sporting activities or occasional mentorship with a younger person serves a worthwhile purpose. Yet none of those activities is designed specifically to help students acquire competences in social skills, communication, problem solving, critical thinking, effective citizenship, and identity in relation to ethnicity as evidenced by other types of community-based programs. Sports develop athletic skills, but rites of passage programs appear to be the link for connecting African American males to their African heritage while instilling values of respect for self, family, elders, and community, responsibility to self, family, and community, and development in areas of education, health, and economic development (Warfield-Copper, 1992; Hill, 1992).

Mentoring is a key element in supporting African American adolescent males' negotiation of the environment and the challenges before them. Mentors help to move African American males to a place and time in life where they can develop a healthy and bright future (Parham, 2006). When asked to name an individual in the community who served as a role model, Bakari, Hamidi, and Kamau could not name anyone. Isolation and lack of interaction with neighbors were the reasons they articulated. Among those who did respond, the reasons given for naming individuals focused upon being "a protector of the neighbor" (Leabua, 2006) or owning material possessions (Erasto, 2006). There is nothing wrong with "the dude who has everybody's back in the neighborhood" (Leabua, p. 121) or the man who "has a big house and a navigator [that] came out of his environment and made something of himself" (Erasto, p. 119). Those men are to be commended for their efforts, but mentoring toward pedagogy of social justice requires more. Such mentoring provides psychological nurturing, guidance, and support.

Mentoring requires getting personally involved in the lives of children when necessary, with few firmly preconceived limits to that involvement. They [mentors] are good listeners. They treat both children and their parents with respect but also with a gentle firmness that refused to condone breaches of reasonable and clearly defined norms. They are dependable and "they practice what they preach. (Ferguson, 1994, p. 67)

Building successful relationships is essential for effective mentoring. Once this task is accomplished, the basics of teaching toward democracy, justice, and care can be established. Those basics are "engagement, thoughtfulness, connectedness, [and] valuing youngsters as three-dimensional beings with their own hopes, dreams, and capacities to

build upon” (Ayers, 2004, p. 18). In order to build a pedagogy of social justice for African American adolescents, men in the community from the ages of 25-65 need to “report for duty” for group or one-on-one mentoring (Grimes, 2006, personal communication). Mentoring is an important construct that can compensate for the loss of traditional forms of leadership in the community. Individuals often fail in areas in which there is no mentorship.

Traditionally, in the African American community, the church has been a powerful resource for those seeking to overcome adversity, and to meet social needs and educational challenges (Haight, 2002; Hrabowski et al., 1998; Ross, 1998, 2003). Although all students had attended church during Vacation Bible School, during the summer while visiting relatives, or when residing elsewhere, church attendance and involvement had not occurred on a consistent basis for most students. Only one student had attended services and engaged in youth activities regularly. Does this lack of involvement in spiritual activities among African American males indicate that the church has outlived its utility for the African American community? Che Lumumba, a young African American community activist, thinks so:

Churches and bars on every block

Competing for lost souls

One with the word the other with the bird

Both designed to keep you deaf, dumb, and blind. (Fine & Weiss, 1998, p. 74)

Another African American male concurred, stating it another way:

I keep faith, but at times, I do have questions, especially around social issues. I cherish faith, trust, hope, despite the despair, and the church taught me this.

Taught me to be community minded and help others; to pass beggars and give, and hope that God will bless you. Keep me out of trouble...But when it comes to social issues, we don't deal. We used to work for affordable housing then the church got into the business of housing for profit, corruptions, greed, and hypocrisy. (Fine & Weiss, 1998, p. 75)

To develop pedagogy of social justice, community entities, such as churches, recreational programs, and community-based youth organizations must develop links that seek to empower youth. The success of youth programs requires sustained attention to poverty and racism, the two factors that necessitate the creation of focused programs for minority youth (Pittman & Zeldin, 1994). Community-based organizations “give voice to the complexity of their [adolescents] lives and struggles in a way that school does not” (Dimitriadid, 2003, p. 42). Such organizations allow adolescents “to translate a different kind of cultural capital into an alternative kind of success (Dimitriadid, 2003, p. 43). Through community organizations, young people can render service to peers, neighborhood residents, or to the community in general, thereby receiving citizenship education that enables them to see their fates as intimately tied to that of people throughout the world and to understand why a “threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (King, 1994, p. 203).

### **Finding 5: Participation in Own Marginalization**

The majority of research indicates that cultural relevant teaching is important to the success of marginalized and oppressed individuals (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 1994, 1995, 2001; Delpit, 1995; 2002). However, in the ranking of teacher qualities in which students gave qualities of teachers a number of one (most important) through ten (least

important), sixty percent of the students gave “makes the course work culturally relevant” a rankings of seven, eight, and nine. This placed culturally relevant teaching in the category of “important” and “least important”. What these students failed to realize is that they were participating in their own educational marginalization by failing to recognize the significance of culturally relevant teaching (**Finding 5**). Leabua’s response indicated that he did not fully understand the concept of culturally relevant teaching:

Well, I’m going by the state of Georgia, because they say that you have to teach the curriculum. You have to teach the book. You don’t have a choice. If it ain’t important, you still got to learn it. You gonna learn it or you ain’t gonna pass.” (p. 137)

He did not recognize that in order to be equipped to struggle against racism, students “must go beyond merely filling in test sheet bubbles with Number 2 pencils” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p.140).

These results differ significantly from those of other studies on African American males’ perspectives about culturally relevant teaching. In Polite’s study (1993), for instance, one student voiced,

D. Bloom was challenging, real challenging. It was hard to get a “B” in his class. He had us reading every day, but he spent half the course teaching us about the Holocaust and World War II, interesting stuff, but he never taught us about Black things. I don’t think that was right, but he was a good teacher. (p. 345)

A similar response came from another student in Polite’s study.

I think that some of the classes were interesting...And then you need to have things that strike a special interest...I never liked reading when I was in high

school and middle school. But when I started reading on my own [after high school, such books dealing with Malcolm X or the history of Egypt...those are factual things. And I think that if such things were required in high school, instead of things [books] like *War and Peace*, and all these fictional tables that I read for understanding, kids would learn more. There are a lot of factual reading that you can learn and the same type of research on as far as creativity and the content. So, I think that was one of the things that wasn't there [interesting and relevant materials]. (p. 345)

The failure of the students in this study to see the relevance of culturally relevant teaching may have been the result of the structure of their educational experiences. Bear Creek staff is majority African American. Each team has at least one African American male teacher. The principal, two assistant principals, administrative assistant, psychologist, social worker, and one counselor are African American males. Although students might not see their history, culture, or background represented in the textbook curriculum, many of their teachers used multicultural literature. Furthermore, it is often difficult for student to perceive student tracking, and other evidence of oppression. Finally, students were probably unaware of the inequalities in terms of facilities and resources between North and South Fulton County Schools. Thus, the connection between power and privilege was more “covert” than “overt.”

When reflecting upon the data, I realized that I should have provided students with more information about the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy. Initially, I explained that culturally relevant teachings use students' home and community culture to help build knowledge and skills. To ensure that the students fully understood the concept,

I should have added that culturally relevant pedagogy helps students to understand history, oppression, racism, and inequality. Ultimately, appreciating the elements of power and privilege allows students to think critically, solve problems, make decisions, and become engaged in the democratic process of citizenship.

Participating in one's own marginalization leads to a false ideology. According to Shank (2002), a false ideology leads to thinking and acting in ways that are against one's self-interest. Believing that culturally relevant teaching is not important causes harm to the psychological self. First, students fail to realize that culture relevant teaching facilitates the learning process for all students. Second, failure to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum allows students to continue to believe the mainstream history books and media and ignore their own contributions. Third, students fail to realize that individuals from different ethnicities and cultures have different perspectives on issues and events. Finally, students fail to recognize that incorporating different voices into the curriculum assists them in making sense of the subject matter within their own realities (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). Students need to be able to recognize culturally relevant teachings to avoid further miseducation of being "bamboozled" or "hoodwinked". Whether students agree or not, "it is incumbent upon teachers...to deliberately create cultural continuity in educating ethnically diverse students" (Gay, 2000, p. 25). Culturally relevant teaching is part of pedagogy of social justice.

#### **Finding 6: Teachers' Demonstration of an Ethic of Care**

An ethic of care and justice demonstrated by school personnel is significant to students (**Finding 6**). Material, tangible objects do not demonstrate care. Thus, the least

appreciated quality in teachers is giving rewards. When asked to rank teacher qualities, “gives rewards” was unanimously ranked tenth. Students’ comments that “teachers are supposed to teach us” (Erasto, p 127), “it has nothing to do with educating the students or helping them pass the end-of-year course test” (Bakari, p. 126); “it’s always a good thing, but definitely not that important” (Hamidi, p. 130); surfaced as reasons that giving rewards does not demonstrate an ethic of care. Kamau captured this idea by stating,

You [teachers] don’t give student rewards. If they do good, you give the rewards, and after they do something else good, they want another reward. So they will keep doing good only for rewards. In addition, when you run out of rewards, they won’t do good anymore. It’s better not to even start it. Rewards don’t make students do any better. (p. 132)

Instead, African American students prefer teachers who are caring (Foster, 1997; Polite, 1993; Siddle Walker, 2000). When asked to rank qualities of teachers, forty percent of the students gave “fair to everyone” a ranking of #1 and a ranking of #2; one person gave it a ranking of #3. Forty percent of the students gave “challenges students” a #1 ranking, and one person ranked it as #2. Forty percent ranked patient as #3 and #5. Comments made in regards to fairness: “So everyone can have a chance at learning the same thing,” (Erasto, p. 127); “If you deserve an A, she gives you a C, and she gives the other person who deserved a C get an A. It’s not fair”, (Kamau, p. 131); “It wouldn’t be fair to the other students if you only focused on the male students or female students and the other students didn’t learn the same things. You are setting them up for failure” (Bakari, pp. 125); “I wouldn’t want nobody to be rude to me just because of the color of my skin, or because I talk differently or something. I just want everybody to be treated

the same” (Hamidi, p. 129); and “How are you going to teach a classroom where there are multi-races and you only thinking about one? Say if you had a Hispanic teacher, and he don’t like African Americans and his whole class is full of African Americans, like 90%. What you gonna do? Fail 90% of them?” (Leabua, pp. 137)

Thus, for the majority, fairness to all, challenges students to go above and beyond, and patient ranked in the “very important category.” These rankings were relatively consistent with the interviews. When describing favorite teachers, Bakari used the phrase “kind and patient” (p. 123). Because of a caring teacher, he had been able to pass his Algebra 1, his worst class. As he discussed his worst teacher, a lack of care surfaced.

Ms. P. She doesn’t like me, or any other student. I think that she has a serious problem with children. From the first day of school, she gives you mean looks and looks you up and down and stuff. She don’t explain nothing. She puts something on the board, the page number, and say, “Do it!” She asks if anybody have any questions, and after the question, she just looks at me, just glances at me. (p. 123)

Even when narrating about his hardest class, Leabua stated that the teacher “tries to keep moving you that extra mile or extra two miles when you could only go that extra mile” (p.134). Hamidi received support from his teacher by being nominated for a scholarship to attend a math camp, and he recognized that “he [the teacher] just helped me bring out my full potential” (p. 128).

In addition to teachers, every staff member (i.e. counselor, custodian, nurse, hall monitor, cafeteria workers, resource officer, media staff, and technology specialists) play roles in the academic achievement and social development of every student. Leabua named the custodian as having aided his academic achievement and social development.

Socially and academically, she [custodian] encourages. I can talk with her more than I can talk to anybody in the whole school...she's the type of lady who will put you on track...and tell you what you do...sometimes when she gives me advice, it works." (Leabua, pp.136)

Another support staff member identified was the computer technician. One participant benefited from a relationship between the computer technician and his mother. Because of this relationship, the participant was allowed to stay after school and practice math concepts on the computer. This student was the individual who achieved the highest score on the CRCT. A college degree is not required for either position; however, there are no big roles and little roles within educational institutional. All personnel, classified and certified, are valuable and greatly needed for the influence they can provide while demonstrating an ethic of care.

Although unintentional, actions of teachers send the message of being uncaring. According to all the students, counselors, whose roles address the social, emotional, physical, academic, and career development needs of the students, had no influence at all on their academic or social development. Although counselors advance with their grades, four of the students had never interacted with their counselor. Only Leabua had spoken with the counselor, and that was in response to Leabua's inappropriate interactions with a female. Leabua's remark to that conversation was "We [Leabua and counselor] weren't on the same page" (p. 135). This concurs with Polite's study (1999), in which the students indicated that a lack of good guidance and counseling resulted in them intentionally shying away from challenging math courses. Even though many indicated that they had postsecondary plans for careers in electronics, health care, mathematics, and

sciences, few had enrolled in courses beyond Pre-Algebra I and II and Algebra I because counselors provided little knowledge about prerequisites for specific college programs and jobs.

In a previous study of Polite's (1993), similar statements about care were articulated.

Well, to me, I just wished...that the teachers would have cared more. For example, I went through like my senior year carrying a 3.4. I never brought books home, and everything was just easy. You know, no teachers cared. Then when I go to college I found out that it was a lot different... 'Cause you know I was really good friends with Mr. Peterson, so I could leave any class any time and go to the gym. We used to play basketball... The teachers didn't care. Like Ms. Davidson, she gave us open-note tests and then she'd basically-she gave us a review the day before the test. So you know, we just take in all our notes. And in her class if you finished with all your tests, you just hand your notes back to one of your friends.

(p. 344)

Haberman (1992) argued that the primary issue for teachers is not the ability to teach a particular subject. It is the ability to teach that subject to a group of children who attend a particular school, in a particular community, given the institutional constraints and the children's out-of-school lives. He insisted that merely knowing subject matter or being skilled in various teaching strategies does not equip teachers to work with African American students. In other words, star teachers are those who demonstrate ethics of care. Star teachers know that "caring is concern for person and performance" (Gay, 2000, p. 47). "Care is action-provoking and caring prompts effort and achievement" (Gay,

2000, p. 48). Caring is a multidimensional process because teachers demonstrate “commitment, competence, confidence, and content” (Gay, 2000, p. 52).

Considering the number of discipline referrals and suspensions these students had, an ethic of care must be tempered with an ethic of justice (Foster & Peele, 2004). Enforcing rules is necessary for a safe and orderly environment. However, when dealing with students whose lives are often void of care, fairness, and justice because of their race, prior experiences, or social standing, one should blend care and justice. “The school experience must not be dictated by a misguided need to maintain ideological imperative that do not serve the needs of students” (Foster & Peele, 2004, p. 129).

When discussing discipline offenses, Hamidi indicated, “he [the assistant administrator] wrote me up for being late to class. I tried to explain, but he really didn’t care” (p. 129).” Leabua commented, “America, I am not a bad kid. I just had some struggles in the eighth grade” (p. 134). Bakari concluding remarks during the individual interview were

I hate the fact that this is on my records. Everything is on here for fighting. They are going to think, I have a violent behavior, but I really don’t. The fact that I don’t follow the crowd. I kind of go my own way. People see me as a lame or nerd, so they tend to pick at me and what not. Most of the time I avoid it, but sometimes you can’t avoid it. (p. 125)

Thompson’s study (2002) indicated the need of balance for care and justice.

There was one teacher I had a problem with. He was messing with me the whole quarter. I think he didn’t like me from the first day. He was like, “You play football?” and I said “Yea.” He said, “So you gonna have trouble in class?” I had

my jersey. It was my first day of tryouts. I kept telling my mom, and she told me to stay in there, keep doing my work, and not to say anything. Whenever I was doing my work, he would stand over me. I would look up at him. Then, he'd say, "Don't look at me. Do your work." So, I would keep doing my work. And if he was standing around, he would always stare at me for no reason, with a mean look on his face.

One day, he said I fronted him off. I had ringworms for a while and I had this beanie on because I was going to get my haircut. It was raining. I took my hat off and sat it on my leg. The teacher tried to snatch it. I was trying to tell him what it was for and he got mad and snatched it from me. Then, he started writing a referral for me.

I had a jacket on, so I put my hood on. I was standing by the podium waiting for him, and I guess he got scared when he saw me standing there. He ran to the phone and called security, and security came to get me. The teacher said that I fronted him off and approached him in a mean manner or something like that. In other words, he said I tried to fight him. I hadn't done anything. I was just standing there. I might have looked mad. I probably was mad, but I don't believe in smart talking. (Thompson, 2002, p. 65)

Whether the offenses are minor or major, Foster and Peele (2004) contended,

The consequence of any action must be empowering and enlightening for the parties involved. They must perceive the outcomes as fair and appropriate. To do so means implementing a judicial process in which students' actions are considered in the appropriate context, intent is weighted in relation to the offense,

and both students and teacher are active students in the process. This type of action by the school system can show that despite differences in power, economics, social standing, race, or any other condition, people can be treated as equal worth. It requires an extra measure of care if treatment is to be genuinely fair for children who ordinary experience life as unjust. (pp. 128 – 129)

In pedagogy for social justice, teachers must discuss the realities of students' lives and incorporate themes of care into the curriculum. In so doing, they can enable students to make just and caring decisions.

### **Implications**

The belt on his baggy, faded jean is unfastened and the strings in his \$129 high-tech sneakers untied. He's leaning low to one side, arms taking turns trailing behind him as he works a heavy stroll down the corridor. He knows he's as cool as you wanna be. But to the gray-suited, wing-tipped principal up ahead, the profiling Black teenager is sending off a flurry of bad vibes. In fact, he's got all the markings of a troublemaker. His walk alone seems unfriendly enough, but the sexually provocative messages of the loose belt makes matters worse. And, besides what kind of Black kid can afford hundred-dollar sneakers anyway?

(Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 8)

This "cool pose" may appear to represent dysfunctional behaviors, but in African culture, "coolness" represents "a sense of control, an ability to exhibit grace under pressure, a notable confidence, and a mystic coolness of character in an oppressive environment" (Rasheed & Rasheed 1999, p.31). In other words, the sneakers, the loose belt, and the walk are merely cultural expressions of African American male identity.

Such postering does not indicate that African American adolescents are unteachable or are menaces to society. It says nothing about their academic ability or social development. The passage above is somewhat descriptive of the students of this study, African American adolescent males who are achieving academically and socially. Understanding the construction of their identity, this researcher analyzed the home, community, and school experiences that influenced their academic and social development.

Participants' families created environments that encouraged learning and expressed high expectations. The involvement of immediate and extended family members proved valuable by instilling discipline in completing homework and chores, thereby helping to establish a work ethic. The African family values of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, restraint, religion, rhythm, and redemption were present within these families (Jeff, 1994). Students acknowledged that they had not been treated differently because of their race or gender. The absence of such experiences was an indicator that family members had provided these students with "buffers" to use when comforted with issues of racism. To help them survive in a racist society, families must offer African American males protector factors (Peters, 2002; McAdoo, 1992, 2002). When parents suffer personal humiliation and discrimination because of their race or gender, they need to explain these experiences to their children.

Another missing link in participants' academic achievement and social development was an intense connection to the community. The purpose of educating African American males is to prepare them for world citizenship and to teach them to become productive members of the community. In order for this to occur, adolescents

need practice in being productive in the community, and the community must play a key role in setting goals for the education of African American children. Other than athletic activities, the majority of the students were unaware of community events or opportunities. Suggestions to improve students' involvement include encouraging them to attend at least one city council meeting in order to obtain firsthand experience of the operation of the political process. This experience can teach the disenfranchised how to gain access to the political power they need to change the world. Furthermore, civic involvement can make students aware of community issues, while offering opportunities to present concerns that are relevant to their specific communities, along with ideas regarding what students can do to address these issues.

One issue that families can address is the lack of community centers for youth. In the Atlanta area, developers are throwing up subdivisions on every piece of available land. "Club houses", which are now standard in communities with houses beginning in the \$400,000 range, are absent from many lower range subdivisions. A "club house" is warranted in every development. For African American males, the "club house" could function as a second home, offering a safe place to deal with trouble spots in their lives while "provid[ing] opportunities to be creative in drawing on ones own skills and interests-skills and interests often eluded in traditional schools" (Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 51). Parents can work with local development groups on making such additions.

Although the African American church is a key source of support for many African Americans, it must be kept in mind that not all African Americans are churchgoers. Nevertheless, the church must take a more proactive stance against the oppression of African American males by establishing effective outreach ministries that

will communicate with all segments of the population. Using federal funds from President Bush's Community Faith-Based Initiative, the church can effectively operate such programs. As espoused by Hale (2001), "it would be a wonderful development for every school to be adopted by a church" (p. 153). Whether through rites of passage programs, tutorial services, or mentors, churches can serve as headquarters for community-based programs that foster the development of youth.

Care should be the basis of all programs offered by community organizations. The components of care include; (a) caring as nurturing whereby consistent support, comfort, and attention are given to basic needs; (b) caring as healing and treatment, whereby problems are identified and treated and unhealthy circumstances are ameliorated; (c) caring as empowerment, whereby young people's sense of independence is developed and assistance is given in understanding, analyzing, and engaging in the immediate and larger environments in which they live; and (d) caring as development, whereby clear expectations are expressed and resources that develop competencies in academic, vocational, social, civic, and health areas are available (Pittman & Zeldin, 1994, p. 52). In addition to churches, national youth organizations (e.g., The Boys and Girls Club), sports organizations, municipal parks and recreation departments, fraternities and sororities, and other organizations active within the African American community can implement programs.

Schools must also do more to ensure the academic and social development of African American males. First, the amount of time African American male students spend on homework needs to be increased. The attitude that "most students will not do it, so it is a waste of time to assign it" is detrimental to the academic success of this

population. In order to compete in a global society, African American males must become “the best of the best.” This can happen when they are continuously challenged to go above and beyond expectations. Resources, such as Homework Hotline, should be utilized more effectively. Students want high expectations, as they want to be prepared for college and the workforce.

Second, there must be a clear focus on encouraging students to set career goals. When a student’s strengths are identified, he must be exposed to the career options that are available to him. In order for this to occur, students must have greater access to counselors. Proportionate amounts of time should be given to those who are underachieving and exhibiting discipline problems and to those who are excelling. The latter can serve as mentors to the former. Mentoring programs offer opportunities to capitalize on the power of peer influence in motivating and directing the behavior of youth.

Third, schools must address zero-tolerance policies which can have long-term effects on students. As records follow students through their school careers, they can affect their relationships and interactions with teachers and administrators. There must be alternatives to expulsion and suspensions. Students who are expelled or suspended miss quality classroom instruction time. In the name of social justice,

It is crucial that an understanding of context influence the development of zero tolerance policies. Educators need to understand the cultural milieu from which they draw their populations. Moreover, students need to be aware that certain kinds of behaviors and demeanor influence educators’ perceptions and actions.

(Henderson & Verdugo, 2002, p. 58)

Students do not want to be labeled as “problems.” Thus, policies must be reasonable and equitable (Henderson & Verdugo, 2002; Voelkl, et. al, 1999; Skiba & Knesting 2001,).

Finally, to foster academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness among African American males, schools must adopt culturally relevant teaching. Teachers must understand how culture operates in the classroom, create a learning atmosphere that exhibits cultural and ethnic diversity, and facilitate high academic achievement. Furthermore, teachers must provide opportunities for students to engage in critical dialogue and to analyze the inconsistencies of different cultural systems. Finally, teachers must recognize the important influence culture has on learning and make teaching compatible with the sociocultural contexts and frames of reference of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2000).

In conclusion, I concur with McCarthy and Crinchlow (1993) that racial and ethnic identities are socially constructed, that racism, discrimination, and social injustice are produced and reproduced and, most importantly, that these problems can be resisted and altered. The links among homes, communities, and schools serve to empower students to alter the current structure and work for change. African American males must be placed high on the priority list if words like “freedom,” “justice”, and “democracy” are to become common concepts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
CONSENT FORMS

June 1, 2006

Natalie A. Lambright  
7059 Whitfield Drive  
Riverdale, GA 30296  
770-997-5762

Parent's Name  
Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a teacher at Bear Creek Middle School and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University, and I'm interested in Bakari being a subject in my research. Bakari was selected because as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader he scored at least 350 in reading and math on the CRCT, and did equally well on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade test. I believe that his experiences as a successful African American male student should be shared. Already too much literature is written on African American males who are failing and under the wards of the court. Not enough research is done on those who are achieving well, academically and socially.

Attached is the letter that the Internal Review Board of Georgia Southern approved for me to send to parents. I will call you sometime within the next week to find out if Bakari will be able to participate. If permission is granted, we'll set up a time for the individual interview. I hope to do those during the second week in June. Hopefully, you'll be able to drop Bakari off at Bear Creek Middle School. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at [nlambr@comcast.net](mailto:nlambr@comcast.net).

Thanks for your time, and I hope that Bakari will be able to participate.

Sincerely,

Natalie A. Lambright

**PARENT INFORMED CONSENT**

1. My name is Natalie A. Lambright. I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study entitled: An Inquiry into the Experience of Eighth Grade African American Males. A study will be conducted at Bear Creek Middle School. This study will supplement research on the experiences of African American males who have successfully achieved.
2. The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of eighth grade African American males who have successfully achieved both academically and socially. An attempt will be made to identify factors which relate to African American students' success in school.
3. Participation in this research will include an individual interview and a focus (group) interview with other eighth grade males. The intent is to meet only one time for each session. If needed, an additional individual interview may occur to clarify responses from focus group interview.
4. The risk to participants in this research is minimal to none. Participants will not be asked to do anything which might cause physical or mental harm. Personal discomfort may rise when questions are asked which pertain to race as it relates to schooling and educational matters. Discomfort may also surface when sharing a negative or embarrassing experience which resulted in a positive effect. Steps will be taken to minimize the degree of personal discomfort by explaining that the purpose of the study is to give participants an opportunity to voice their experiences as it relates to their academic and social success.
5. Benefits:
  - a. First, participant will receive personal recognition for academic and social accomplishments. Secondly, participant will be provided with exposure to a research project done for higher education while at the same time acquiring first hand experience with research. Most importantly, participant's experiences will be documented as a resource which may assist their peers with academic and social achievement.
  - b. The benefits to society include learning more about factors which develop successful African American males.
6. Student participation will last no longer than 90 minutes per session.
7. Statement of Confidentiality: All obtained data will be kept secure and confidential. Data collected in electronic and/or paper form will be kept in a secured locked file cabinet in my home whereby only the researcher will have access. This will include the interview audio-tapes, notes, and other documents pertaining to the study. Once data has been transcribed, it will be maintained on my computer hard drive. An additional back-up copy

of all typed information will be maintained on a disk and stored in the same secure location after each update. The researcher will be the only person with access to this secure location. After completion of the study and final approval of the dissertation, all materials will be maintained for one year and then shredded.

8. **Right to Ask Questions:** You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant or the IRB approval process, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843.
9. **Compensation:** There will be no inducement as an incentive to participate.
10. **Voluntary Participation:** Please note that student doesn't have to participate in this research. He may end his participation at any time by telling the person in charge, not returning the instrument or other options. He does not have to answer any questions that he does not want to answer.
11. **Penalty:** There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study. You may decide at any time they you don't want to participate further and may withdraw without penalty or retribution.
12. There will be no deception in this study.
13. I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this study, and will provide him with a simplified "assent" letter/verbal description before enrolling him in this study  
A copy of the assent letter is attached

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

\*\* Students are referred to as eighth graders since they have not yet begun ninth grade. Wording may change to adolescent as opposed to eight graders.

**Title of Project:** An Inquiry into the Experience of Eighth Grade African American Males

**Principal Investigator:** Natalie Lambright, 7059 Whitfield Drive, Riverdale, GA 30296, [nlambr@fultonschools.org](mailto:nlambr@fultonschools.org).

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Ming Fang He, Department of Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading, College of Education, P.O. Box: Post Office Box 8144, Statesboro, GA 30460-8144, 912) 871-1546, [mfhe@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:mfhe@georgiasouthern.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

COLLEGE of EDUCATION

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DEPARTMENT of CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING

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**MINOR'S ASSENT**

Hello,

I am Natalie A. Lambright, a doctorate student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study entitled: An Inquiry into the Experience of Eighth Grade African American Males.

You are being asked to participate in a project that will help me analyze and examine the experiences of African American males. I am interested in knowing more about the experiences in your life which have influenced your successful academic and social development. If you agree to help, you will be interviewed individually and as part of a group with other students. I will ask you questions about home, community and school experiences which helped you succeed academically and socially. It will take about 90 minutes for you to help me. If everything goes well, we will only need to meet twice. If additional information is needed, we will meet again individually.

You do not have to help me with this project. You can stop helping me whenever you want to. If you do not want to be a part of the group interviews, it is ok, and you can discontinue at any time. You can refuse to help me even if your parents have said yes.

None of the teachers or other people at your school will see the answers to the questions that I ask you. All obtained data will be kept secure and confidential. Data collected in electronic and/or paper form will be kept in a secured locked file cabinet in my home whereby only the researcher will have access. We are not going to put your name on the answers that you give us, so no one will be able to know which answers were yours.

If you or your parents/guardian has any questions about this form or the project, please call me at 770-997-5762 or my advisor, Dr. Ming Fane He, at 912-871-1546. Thank you!

If you understand the information above and want to help in the project, please sign your name on the line below:

**Yes, I want to help in the project:** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROMPTS

### Background Information

1. State your name and age.
2. With whom do you reside? What is her/his/their occupation? What education do your parents have?
3. State your siblings' gender and age.
4. Do you receive free or reduced lunch?
5. What are your career aspirations?
6. Name your hobbies.
7. What chores do you have at home?

### Individual Interview Questions

1. What is your after-school routine?
2. Approximately how much time per week do you spend on homework?
3. What are the rules in your home in regards to homework? Are you allowed to watch television, listen to music, or talk on the telephone while completing homework?
4. If you need assistance in completing homework, what do you generally do?
5. Approximately, how many times have you used Homework Hotline?
6. How do you manage projects that are due two- three weeks away?
7. Describe your study environment (supplies, equipment).
8. What do you do with your time when you have no homework?
9. Outside of school, approximately how much time per week do you spend watching TV?
10. Approximately how much time per week do you spend reading magazine, newspaper, or books?
11. Approximately how much time per week do you spend listening to music or playing video games?
12. You are achieving well while so many of your peers are not. To what do you attribute your success?
13. How does your family respond when you receive high grades, awards, etc?
14. Who has been the most influential person in your life? What meaningful experiences have you shared with that person which helped shape your academic growth and social development?
15. How are you disciplined at home?
16. Let's discuss your discipline record. Share some information in regards to the offenses.
17. What happens at your house when you speak slang as opposed to Standard English?
18. What are some things that your parents have told you about being black and male?

19. Have you been treated differently because of your ethnicity or gender? Meaning, do you think that because you are male or African American that you have been treated unfairly by anyone?
20. How do your teachers generally present new information? Do they present it visually (like on the board), auditory (mainly talking) or tactile (hands-on)?
21. What is your preferred method?
22. What do teachers need to know about getting African American males to try harder?

## Focus Group Interview Questions

### School experiences

1. Think about your best middle school teacher.  
What made this teacher so good?  
What was your best experience in that class?
2. Think about your worst middle school teacher.  
What made this teacher so bad, and how were you able to overcome the challenges?
3. Think about your favorite subject. Why is it your favorite subject? What was the best experience in that class?
4. Think about your hardest class in middle school. Why has it been your least favorite subject? How were able to overcome the challenges?
5. What has the counselor done to enhance your academic achievement or social development?
6. What experience have you had with any support staff (custodian, nurse, hall monitor, media specialist, technologist specialist) which aided your academic achievement or social development?

### Community experiences

7. Name any programs in your community in which you participate that helps to develop your leadership skills, social skills, or encourage academic excellence.
8. What youth activities are you involved in at your church?
9. Name a role model within your community. What makes that person someone that you want to emulate?
10. Do you have a mentor? What are some of the activities that you and your mentor have done together?

### Social Development

11. How would you describe your relationship with your peers?
12. What extra-curricular activities have you participated in at Bear Creek?

APPENDIX C  
TEACHER QUALITIES

## Teacher Qualities

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Below is a list of qualities of outstanding teachers. Rank them in order of most important (1) to least important (10).

\_\_\_ Creative

\_\_\_ Flexible

\_\_\_ Patient

\_\_\_ Fair to everyone, regardless of race, gender, learning challenges, etc

\_\_\_ Humorous or friendly

\_\_\_ Challenges students to go above and beyond

\_\_\_ Intelligent

\_\_\_ Makes the course work culturally relevant

\_\_\_ Enthusiastic and energetic

\_\_\_ Gives rewards

## Teacher Quality Ranking

| Ranking | Participant                                |  |  |  |  |
|---------|--|--|--|--|--|
|         | Bakari                                     | Erasto                                     | Hamidi                                     | Kamau                                      | Leabua                                     |
| 1       | intelligent                                | fair to everyone                           | challenges students to go above and beyond | fair to everyone                           | challenges students to go above and beyond |
| 2       | fair to everyone                           | intelligent                                | fair to everyone                           | challenges students to go above and beyond | humorous or friendly                       |
| 3       | patient                                    | creative                                   | patient                                    | makes the course work relevant             | fair to everyone                           |
| 4       | makes the course work relevant             | flexible                                   | flexible                                   | intelligent                                | flexible                                   |
| 5       | humorous or friendly                       | patient                                    | intelligent                                | creative                                   | patient                                    |
| 6       | enthusiastic and energetic                 | challenges students to go above and beyond | creative                                   | humorous or friendly                       | creative                                   |
| 7       | flexible                                   | makes the course work relevant             | humorous or friendly                       | enthusiastic and energetic                 | intelligent                                |
| 8       | creative                                   | enthusiastic and energetic                 | enthusiastic and energetic                 | patient                                    | makes the course work relevant             |
| 9       | challenges students to go above and beyond | humorous or friendly                       | makes the course work relevant             | flexible                                   | enthusiastic and energetic                 |
| 10      | gives rewards                              |

## APPENDIX D

## LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY

Bogod (1998) created this Web Site for immediate preferred learning styles results.

- [www.ldpride.net/learning\\_style.html](http://www.ldpride.net/learning_style.html)

Directions:

A) Score each statement in the columns below by giving yourself the appropriate number:

- 1 Very Little Like Me
- 2 A Little Like Me
- 3 Like Me
- 4 A Lot Like Me

B) Click on the "submit" button at the end of the questionnaire to see your score!

1. I feel the best way to remember something is to picture it in my head
2. I follow oral directions better than written ones
3. I often would rather listen to a lecture than read the material in a textbook
4. I am constantly fidgeting (e.g. tapping pen, playing with keys in my pocket)
5. I frequently require explanations of diagrams, graphs, or maps
6. I work skillfully with my hands to make or repair things
7. I often prefer to listen to the radio than read a newspaper
8. I typically prefer information to be presented visually, (e.g. flipcharts or chalkboard)
9. I usually prefer to stand while working
10. I typically follow written instructions better than oral ones
11. I am skillful at designing graphs, charts, and other visual displays
12. I generally talk at a fast pace and use my hands more than the average person to communicate what I want to say
13. I frequently sing, hum or whistle to myself
14. I am excellent at finding my way around even in unfamiliar surroundings
15. I am good at putting jigsaw puzzles together
16. I am always on the move
17. I excel at visual arts
18. I excel at sports
19. I'm an avid collector
20. I tend to take notes during verbal discussions/lectures to review later
21. I am verbally articulate and enjoy participating in discussions or classroom debates
22. I easily understand and follow directions on maps

23. I remember best by writing things down several times or drawing pictures and diagrams.
24. I need to watch a speaker's facial expressions and body language to fully understand what they mean
25. I frequently use musical jingles to learn things
26. I often talk to myself when alone
27. I would rather listen to music than view a piece of art work
28. I need to actively participate in an activity to learn how to do it
29. I frequently tell jokes, stories and make verbal analogies to demonstrate a point
30. I frequently touch others as a show of friendship and camaraderie (e.g. hugging)