

Fall 2005

## Reading through Brown Eyes: Toward Developing a Culturally Congruent Reading Curriculum

Clara Taylor

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READING THROUGH BROWN EYES: TOWARD DEVELOPING A  
CULTURALLY CONGRUENT READING CURRICULUM

by

CLARA TAYLOR

(Under the Direction of Sandra Murray Nettles)

ABSTRACT

This inquiry examined the reading motivations of African American middle grade males and investigated why some African American males are more successful academically in reading than others. This investigative pathway traveled through the possible interconnected barriers relative to reading achievement and reading motivation using the research strategy of critical narrative inquiry and the theoretical lens of critical race theory. Simultaneously, this qualitative analysis investigated racial/ethnic identity as it relates to background, popular culture, and learning styles as motivational factors for engaging African American males in reading and the learning process. African American, middle-grade males guided this path of exploration in telling stories of their public school experiences and academic experiences in reading. Six African American males, two from each grade level of sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade participated in this research study. The students attend Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, an inner city school in The Atlanta Public School System.

The students completed a reading interest inventory, online learning styles assessment, and an interview. These young men met the following requirements: low social economic challenges (SEC) status as determined by free or reduced school lunch enrollment and the following characteristics: three students, one from each grade level (sixth –eighth) with Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) scores in the 349 or higher range representing the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher, and three students, one from each grade level (sixth – eighth) with scores in the lower range of 299 or less representing the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile or lower on the total reading test.

**INDEX WORDS:** Literacy, Critical Race Theory, African American males, Critical Narrative Inquiry, Race/ethnic identity, reading achievement, Middle-Grades, Popular Culture, Reading, Learning Styles, Identity

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2005

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December 2005

## DEDICATION

To my mother, Mary Frances Matthews, a hard-working matriarch and single parent of seven children. Mom, you taught me to love God, perseverance despite challenges, a strong work ethic, and compassion. This is the paper that you asked me weekly, “Baby, how many papers are you writing?”

To my daughter, Danica Peoples, another hard-working African American female and my heart. In 1996, you asked me, “Mom, where is my legacy?” Well baby, your legacy includes this and all that my mom shared with me: a love for God, perseverance, a strong work ethic, and compassion. Danica, I am so proud of you and what I see in your heart. I look in your heart and I see God. Stay Godly!

To my husband, Henry Taylor, thanks for all of the support and sacrifices. I know this has not been easy, but you stayed the course and supported my efforts. Thanks for being my other set of eyes.

To my sisters and brothers, Brenda Windham, Deborah Green, Leanetta Matthews, Esther Green, Clarence Matthews and William Matthews for being understanding during all of my many absences from family events and get togethers. I could not attend so many activities because I was always working on school “stuff.” I look forward to making up for all the missed fun. “No Excuses”!

To my loving nieces and nephews, this is for you. Continue to pursue your dreams even when you are counted out. It is up to you!

In memory of Rosita Alston, the Angel God shared with us. This will be a constant reminder of you and our friendship forever. Finally, to the highest of the high, my God. I give all honor and thanks to you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was not possible without the support of many friends who were there always nudging, always supporting, and praying for me. To my many friends and loved ones who stood firm with me from beginning to end, I really appreciate you. Especially Gloria and Ronald Scott, you are always there, and I love you. Also, thank you to Simone Burke and the rest of MRP1 Cohort, a group of outstanding women that are destined to change education. Dr. Carolyn Huff and Tresa Riney, you continued to support and encourage me. Thank you to Linda Mixon and Cassandra June for the many times you edited my work.

I would like to extend a special thank you to the students that participated in this study and the parents that supported their participation. I am grateful to the Atlanta Public Schools System for supporting this research.

I would like to express my appreciation and sincere gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Saundra Murray Nettles. Your guidance and support will remain with me forever. You have provided invaluable knowledge and expertise throughout this experience. Dr. Ming Fang He, you are a special and unique individual, and I am so thankful for all of your suggestions and support. Thank you to Dr. John Weaver, Dr. Eric Brooks, and Dr. Ronald Bailey for your support, time and helpfulness on my committee.

Dr. Rolle, my advisor from my graduate studies, your inspiration and support guided me in this direction. Your encouragement and assistance made this all possible. Thanks for pushing me and not letting me give up.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

A strong workforce is dependent on literacy as an important ingredient for a country's economic opportunities and growth. Yet, a large segment of youth labeled as "at-risk" academically in the United States experience reading problems, which in turn may affect their ability to participate in and contribute to society and their own economic security. These students are often labeled "at-risk" because of their race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economics status. Not only are reading skills required for success in education, they are just as important for successful economic and social interactions in a global society. Although, the United States of America is considered a world leader based on its wealth and technological advancements, a large portion of minority, immigrant, and poor children experience minimum success in reading literacy and academic achievement.

The growing population of minority students in public schools further exacerbates the problem. Carbo (1995) estimated that one out of every three students in American schools would come from a minority group before the year 2000. As early as 1955, Flesch expressed concerns about illiteracy and made the following predictions:

Some 27 million American adults are functionally illiterate, and 45 million more are marginally literate. The number of adult problem readers is increasing by 2.3 million each year. At this rate, we'll soon join the ranks of such undereducated Third World countries as Bangladesh, Haiti, and Uganda. (p. viii)

Flesch (1955) and Carbo (1995), along with many educators, researchers and society at large validate my concerns about a large percentage of “at-risk” students with reading problems. African American males are particularly at risk. The racial gap has fluctuated more in reading than in any other subject. In 1971 black students at ages nine, thirteen, and seventeen were appallingly far behind whites, ranking in the 14<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> percentiles, respectively (Chubb & Loveless, 2002). Chubb and Loveless also indicated that in 1988 black nine-year-olds ranked in the 23<sup>rd</sup> percentile, thirteen-year-olds in the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile, and seventeen-year-olds in the 29<sup>th</sup> percentile. In 1999 the two older groups scored about the same as they had fifteen years before, and nine-year-olds were performing at the low level they had achieved twenty-four years earlier.

The remainder of this chapter highlights the importance for conducting research about African American males and reading as one vessel for developing a culturally congruent reading curriculum. First, I provide background information of the problem of low literacy among African American males. Next, critical race theory is introduced as the conceptual lens to frame the research, the third section provide the research questions, personal rationale, the personal connection, and understanding of why this topic was selected to research. The proceeding sections include the purpose and significance of study.

#### *Problem of Low Literacy Among African American Males*

It is well documented that many African American male students are reading substantially below grade level (Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003; Kunjufu, 1995). Most of the data report the achievement gap based on ethnicity and gender in subgroups, but fail to provide specific data about African American males in the area of reading. The

Achievement Gap Analysis of the State of Georgia reports that 28% of eighth-grade black students do not meet the reading achievement standard as compared to 12% of eighth-grade White students as measured on the 2003 Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) (Georgia School Council Institute, 2004). The Georgia School Council Institute (GSCI) report also indicates a large percentage of students failing to meet the standard for reading fall into the following subgroups: economically disadvantaged (29%), special education (57%), and male (23%).

Comparatively, Kunjufu's (1995) analysis reports African American children comprise 17% of public school children in this nation; 41% of African American children are placed in special education, and 85% of those African American children are male. This validates the high percentage of African American males in the special education category. Equally important, reading scores for Black students nationally increased over the years from an average score of 237 in 1992 to an average score of 244 in 2003 (Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003). The average reading score for male eighth-graders declined 2 points between 2002 and 2003; the average score in 2003 (258) was higher than in 1992 (254) (Donahue et al., 2003, p. 43).

The significance of the plight of an individual's position in the labor market and their socioeconomic status, specifically African American males, is linked to literacy achievement (Sowell, 2000). A brief literacy survey by Smith (1996) shows a correlation between basic skills and literacy skills with occupational skills (as cited in Sowell, 2000, p. 97). The study concludes that a correlation exists between literacy and occupational skills and suggests that the workplace demands an increased level of basic skills, and the

amount of education and skill that workers have affects their occupation, performance, and pay.

Based on my professional experience as a reading teacher, I propose that this reading problem among African American males is not primarily a lack of student ability or even skill, but is fundamentally a lack of culturally compatible educational conditions that foster student motivation. Many African American males have become socially alienated by the current curriculums and methods of schooling, which are incongruent with their cultural identities, and, as a result, these young males have motivationally disengaged with school reading and learning in general (Gause, 2000; Gordon, 1990, 1993; Harrison & Harrison, 2002; Hilliard, 2003; Hilliard, Payton-Stewart, & Williams, 1995; Hudley, 1997; Kunjufu, 1990, 1995; McMillian, 2003/2004; Tatum, 1999, 2000, 2003; Watkins, 2000). Having taught reading for six years in the public school system, I have first-hand experience and knowledge of the critical needs of “at-risk” African American male students in the area of reading instruction. A major question to consider is: What makes some African American males succeed in reading when so many others experience a high level of failure from similar economic backgrounds? I propose that critically important for investigation are the cultural factors that may facilitate or diminish the personal reading motivations of African American males.

#### *Critical Race Theory as a Conceptual Lens*

Fifty-years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, African Americans continue to experience inequities in education. As the nation commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Brown* decision, it is important to recognize that *Brown* was only the beginning. African American students still attend the worst schools and have the worst academic

performance (McNeil, 2004). Black youth continue to have the lowest test scores, are disproportionately placed in special education classes, and have the highest rate of expulsion and suspension (Ware, 2004).

Critical race theory (CRT) originated as an attempt to understand contemporary legal debates concerning the effectiveness of past civil rights strategies in the current political climate (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Olmsted 1998). Critical race theory holds that racial background determines people's perspectives of any and all experiences in any context (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Olmsted 1998). The concept of race is much more than skin color; it is a complex construct of all aspects of culture.

Critical race theorists suggest that the low number of African American males represented in higher level classes, receiving high school diplomas, receiving bachelor degrees from college, being represented in high numbers on the unemployment rolls, and in low paying positions is not just ironic but racially motivated (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Olmsted 1998). Bell (1992), a leader in the development of critical race theory, argues that racism is so ingrained in American life that no matter what Blacks do to better their lot, they are doomed to fail as long as the majority of Whites do not see blacks' own well-being threatened by the status quo. Derrick Bell hypothesized that *Brown v. Board of Education* may have resulted more from the self-interest of elite Whites than a desire to help Blacks.

Primarily, the main agenda for CRT is to study and transform the relationship among race, racism, and power in association with economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and feelings and unconscious (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Delgado

and Stefancic proposed, “Many in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use CRT’s ideas to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing” (p. 3). This explains why CRT is important as the conceptual lens to guide curriculum inquiry in addressing the educational needs of the oppressed and marginalized to the forefront in curriculum studies. Prior to the reconceptualization of the curriculum field in the 1970s, race was regarded as marginal to the effort to develop curriculum and caused curriculum scholars to overlook race for this reason (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000).

Critical race theorists emerged in the mid-1970s after the civil rights movement in response to the continued outcry of racism (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Olmsted 1998). CRT grew out of a boycott of law school classes at Harvard University in 1981, when popular law professor Derrick Bell temporarily left Harvard, and students requested a nonwhite person be hired to teach Bell’s “Race, Racism and American Law” course. A decade after this boycott several nonwhite professors at some of the nation’s top law schools organized a workshop in Wisconsin on racism and the law. Some of the professors in attendance included Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Kimberley Crenshaw, Charles Lawrence III, Richard Delgado, and Patricia Williams. These professors attacked the legal profession claiming that the law is subject to racial and class bias (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Olmsted 1998).

Olmsted (1998), Delgado and Stefancic (2001), and Crenshaw et al. (1995) surmise that the various propositions about racism have several components. The first

component addressed race as endemic, inherent, and normal in American life and therefore difficult to cure or address. Racism is ordinary, and the usual way society does business, the common everyday experience of most people of color in this country.

The second component is that both White supremacists and people of color support racism through a process of hegemony. Often referred to as “interest convergence” or material determinism, hegemony is based on an understanding that racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working class people (psychically). This makes it difficult for a large segment of society to have an incentive to eradicate racism.

The third component is that words are powerful and should be used to create counter accounts of social reality, also referred to as “social construction” thesis. Social construction thesis holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations and are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient. Fourth, the individual life experiences of people of color should be recognized and made public as a unique voice of color. This should be accomplished using language, narrative, speech, and words. Just being minority, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism. Fifth, society racializes different minority groups at different times in response to shifting needs such as the labor market, during the time of war, and media stereotyping. In totality, these propositions provide the foundational understanding of race as it relates to education and providing the lens for this study.

However, critical race theory did not begin to frame the conversation about race and education. Prior to the emergence of critical race theory, the grandfather of critical race theory, critical inquiry/theory emerged from a group of writers connected to the

Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. Critical inquiry/theory became an attempt to challenge underlying human interests and ideologies that dealt with rejecting oppression of the dominant group by means of resistance and empowerment (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

Prior to critical inquiry, two great leaders of the Black community in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century emerged, W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, but they had opposing philosophies on strategies for educating Blacks as well as social and political progress related to Blacks. Washington preached a philosophy of self-help, racial solidarity, and accommodation (Public Broadcasting Service, 2003). He urged Blacks to accept discrimination for the time being and concentrate on elevating themselves through hard work and material prosperity. He believed in education in the crafts, industrial, and farming skills and the cultivation of the virtues of patience, enterprise, and thrift. Washington's solution was "industrial education" in practical jobs like farming, construction, and housekeeping tasks; he argued that vocational training was better suited for the circumstances that Blacks encountered on a daily basis (Williams, 2004). Williams (2004) emphasized that Washington opposed classical education in the form of Greek and Latin because such learning--or in French grammar and concert piano which Washington had criticized in "The Awakening of the Negro" (1896)--did not help Blacks live in any practical way.

In the Atlanta Exposition address, Washington stated (Francis, 2004):

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify

and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life....No race can prosper till it learns that here is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. (¶ 6)

Washington's major critic was W.E.B. Du Bois who believed that Washington's strategy would serve only to perpetuate White oppression. Williams (2004) reported Du Bois' perspective on Washington's suggestion about education. From a Du Boisian perspective, education often tended to support the established order rather than necessarily improving society; because of the limited range of education and occupations available to Blacks, education only furthered economic exploitation and hence helped to perpetuate oppression. The Southern public schools of his era all too often trained Black children to be servants, laborers, and mechanics. Du Bois described these positions as "the handmaidens of production" (1920b, p. 209, as cited by Williams, 2004). Du Bois further believed many Whites in America, including White philanthropists, wanted Blacks to be educated in occupations with which they had historically been associated namely, farming, carpentry, sewing, cooking, domestic tasks, etc. (Du Bois, 1915a, p. 124; 1918, p. 168; as cited in Williams, 2004). Also, Du Bois believed that industrial education proposed by Washington trained people for jobs, rather than training them for life. This form of education concentrated too narrowly on manual skills, and Du Bois proposed that education must train the whole person. He argued that social change could be accomplished by developing the small group of college educated Blacks he called "the Talented Tenth" (Public Broadcasting Service, 2003). Du Bois focused mostly on curriculum related to college education, especially with regard to fostering racial uplift and social struggle, and schools should begin the educational process from where

students were situated in a socio-historical sense and move towards more general principles (Williams, 2004).

The concerns about modern education and race were noted by Woodson (1990), “The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies” (p. 2). The schools were used to continue the exploitation of Black people after slavery by providing inferior and third-rate education.

The current challenge is to change the oppressive aspects of life that silence and marginalize some while privileging others. There must be a new way of thinking, asking new questions, and making new commitments. Critical race theorists (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hale, 2001; hooks, 1994; Irvine, 2003; and Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1998, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) have continued the conversation about educating African Americans and other minorities.

### *Research Questions*

The study addressed the following two major questions:

1. What cultural influences that facilitate or diminish personal reading motivation are revealed in the stories of middle-grade African American males’ experiences in reading?
2. How is the motivation to read revealed in personal stories of high- and low-achieving African American middle grade males?

Investigating these research questions is important for explaining possible motivational differences and similarities in African American high- and low-level readers. How are the high- and low-level readers motivated similarly and differently? Why are the high-level readers more successful than the low-level readers? These stories

will provide some directions and point to possible action items for educators in meeting the needs of both groups of African American males in an effort to developing a culturally congruent reading curriculum.

### *Personal Rationale*

As an African American female, mother, daughter, wife, sister, and community activist, I am deeply concerned about the plight of African American males in a variety of roles in the United States and have a vested interest in their success. Second, as an African American educator, it is very important for me to provide additional views to the notions of the dominant power group that feels privileged to speak for all groups. I want to be included in the dialogue about educating students that look like me, and I want my voice heard. A well-known writer, educator, and critical race theorist, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2003), suggests that critical race theory asks the qualitative researcher to operate in a self-revelatory mode, to acknowledge the double (or multiple) consciousness in which she or he is operating. I acknowledged my double-consciousness relationship as a researcher earlier in this writing when I declared my multiple roles as an African American female in conducting this research with African American males. If nothing else, Ladson-Billings (2003) believed that critical race theory helps to raise some important questions about the control and production of knowledge--particularly knowledge about people and communities of color.

Being a middle school reading teacher for six years presented a major challenge for me to get my students actively involved in the reading process. I was often frustrated trying to follow the county mandated reading curriculum with my eighth grade students. During those six years of teaching reading, many of my students, especially African American males, experienced a high failure rate academically. On many occasions, my

students would verbalize their dislike for reading and state that it was boring. I could not understand this because I have always been an avid reader. Despite the many tactics I used, I could not get most of my minority students to adopt the concept of becoming independent readers. My African American male students showed the least amount of interest in reading. As an administrator and counselor, I have witnessed the frustration of many teachers assigned to teach reading to predominantly African American students. It appears that many of these teachers, despite their subject content certification area, hated/loathed teaching reading to a group of students who appeared apathetic and detached from the subject area. Mostly, I am concerned about the survival of the African American race as viable and contributing citizens in this global society if this mind-set continues.

It is my belief that race is an important factor in education and the global society. It is from this belief that I ascertain that race is the main thread holding together several pieces necessary to improve the academic performance and reading motivation of African American males. Race should be understood here because minority experiences have not been taken seriously as a credible voice in education.

The same educational process, which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that they are everything and have accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes the minority. At the same time, the education process makes African Americans and especially African American males feel that their race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people. This creates a self-defeated attitude within many African American males, thereby, presenting a

barrier to successful academic and social achievement. This is just one possible contributing factor to the high number of African American high school dropouts.

Critical race theorists present a better focus and understanding for me, personally, of what I have attempted to articulate for many years. My years during segregation were positive experiences with memories of teachers trying everything in their power to make sure every child learned. Despite disparities in many educational areas such as dilapidated buildings and inferior resources, truly the educational system “Left No Child Behind.” This memory is important to me because it represents a strong will and commitment of schools, communities, and parents working together to make sure that every child was valued and encouraged to be successful academically. I am inspired by the commitment of critical race theorists to level the playing field and create equality for all people. Critical race theory aims to reexamine the terms by which race and racism have been negotiated in American consciousness among African Americans and other people of color--a tradition that was discarded when integration, assimilation, and the ideal of color-blindness became the official norms of racial enlightenment (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Critical race theory recognizes that political interventions which overlook the multiple ways in which people of color are situated (and resituated) as communities, subcommunities, and individuals will do little to promote effective resistance to, and counter-mobilization against today’s newly empowered right. As a researcher, I have experienced an awakening because of a better understanding of how race is constructed in our society. This awakening has caused me to make several changes in my life as a person and as a professional.

For the reasons stated above, critical race theory was used as the framework for examining the role of race in education and as a link to understanding reading motivation of middle-grade African American males. Critical narrative inquiry was used as the vessel for presenting the findings for this research.

#### *Purpose and Significance of Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine several influences on the reading motivation of low-achieving and high-achieving middle-grade African American males. Further, the intention of this study was to investigate the influence of cultural/ethnic relevant reading material (reading material which provides connections to daily lives and experiences, such as popular culture, and matching teaching and learning styles), on African American males.

This study of African American males and reading motivation is significant because it addresses important concerns that influence society such as powerless groups, achievement gap, and economic gap. Even though public schools are charged with the task of dispensing knowledge equitably to all students as a means of narrowing the economic gap, they have experienced limited success. Research shows that children who are unable to read at grade level by fourth grade face a downward spiral (Jones, 2002). They won't be able to complete reading and writing assignments or pass tests that help them move into higher grades or high school. According to Jones (2002), these kids often end up in special education and spend a life of under-achievement. It is my belief that the instructional disparities in teaching reading to minority, immigrant, and poor students, and especially African American males, is a major contributor and is largely responsible for such failure.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 makes this study even more significant. According to the U. S. Department of Education (2004), accountability is a crucial step in addressing the achievement gaps that plague our nation. For too long, African-American, Hispanic, special education, limited English proficient, and many other students have been left behind because schools were not held accountable for their individual progress. President George W. Bush and his administration set the goal of making sure every child knows how to read at grade level by the third grade. The Bush Administration believes that reading opens the doors for children who otherwise would struggle through school, lacking the skills to succeed and grow. Literacy is a vital skill for a successful student and a deficiency in reading skills impacts achievement in all other areas of education. Under the NCLB, every state is required to set standards for grade level achievement and develop a system to measure the progress of all students and subgroups of students in meeting those state determined grade-level standards. Each state establishes a definition of “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) to use each year to determine the achievement of each school district and school.

This research is also significant because it uses critical race theory as a framework for examining the subject of reading and African American males. It expanded the limited research examining reading motivations of high-achieving African American males and low-achieving African American males in the area of reading. Furthermore, the literature reveals limited discourses outlining success stories of high-achieving African American males using the factors of popular culture, culturally relevant teaching and learning styles, and critical race theory to explain the reading motivation of African American males.

The social significance of this research study is to challenge the incongruent curriculum that may be responsible for so many African American males' reading deficiencies and low or lack of reading motivation. This research will also highlight those factors that facilitate the economic advancement of high-achieving African American males. Unfortunately, many high-achieving African American males experience the same barriers as low-achieving African American males when it comes to economic status. Despite some of the barriers experienced by high-achieving African American males, some are strongly motivated to succeed by a desire to escape their economic circumstances (Hrabowski, Maton & Greif, 1998).

As a preview, in Chapter II I review the relevant professional literature for this study. Chapter III explores the method of inquiry, critical narrative inquiry. The presentation and cross-case analysis of the data is found in Chapter IV. Finally, Chapter V concludes with the discussion, limitations, implications of this study and the conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews previous curriculum inquiries and discourses that have contributed to our understanding of the failure of African American males in the area of reading. I used critical race theory, which presents several avenues for consideration. The first section consider topics pertaining to cultural identity, including race, gender, and popular culture. The second section provides research on achievement performance as it relates to culturally relevant teaching and learning styles (primarily focusing on learning styles of African American males); incongruent textbooks, and teacher expectations and parental expectations.

#### Identity

Much literature is written about the failures of African American males in many school settings and for many reasons. In my literature search, I found very few studies that addressed the reading motivation deficiencies and successes of African American males. Although the writings used in this literature review may not be specific to African American males, the issues and concerns are important to their plight. The lack of research on this subject highlights the importance of continued research examining African American males and reading motivation.

African American males are often considered an “endangered” species in the school halls of the United States of America. Many African American males suffer from a negative or distorted identity for many reasons. The negative or distorted identity may present a barrier in reading motivation.

Guthrie and Wigfield (1999) set the stage for understanding why reading is not mechanical, technical or automatic, but a personal interaction between text and reader. African American males must have a connection to reading either through the content or reading materials. Guthrie and Wigfield noted constructing meaning during reading is a motivating act. Reading is a personal act and cultural identity is important to the interaction of text and self. Guthrie and Wigfield defined reading motivation as the individual's goals and beliefs with regard to reading and indicated that reading motivation influences the individual's activities, interactions, and learning with text. An individual interacting with a text for the purpose of understanding is behaving intentionally. During reading, the individual performs deliberately and purposefully. Conversely, a person is unlikely to comprehend a text by accident. If the person is not aware of the text, not attending to it, not choosing to make meaning from it, or not giving cognitive effort to knowledge construction, little comprehension occurs (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999).

As reviewed by Perry (2003), Porter (1997) and Morgan and Mehta (2004), public education has influenced the identity of African American males and the relationship between self-concept, academic achievement, and reading motivation. Perry (2003) asserted that in order for African American children to achieve in school, they have to negotiate three distinct social identities: their identity as members of a caste-like group, their identity as members of mainstream society, and their identity as members of a cultural group in opposition to what Whiteness historically and contemporarily continues to define. The African American theory of knowledge and philosophy of education has captured the essence of the philosophy of freedom for literacy (to be allowed to read) and

literacy for freedom linked literacy and education to the social identity of African Americans (Perry, 2003). African American families have historically associated obtaining freedom from oppression with acquiring an education. To acquire an education, requires African Americans to become literate by achieving in reading. This identity represents the very notion of what it meant to be African American and to struggle and to yearn for freedom (Perry, 2003). This philosophy is in contrast to what takes place daily within the walls of schools, based on a dominant power structure centered on the Eurocentric philosophy of education.

Porter (1997) made several observations about the education of the African American male. One observation was that the American public education system made “Black male” synonymous with “disabled” through the creation of the labels “Behavior Disorders” (BD) and “Emotional Disorders” (ED) perpetrating the thought that African American males cannot behave without special treatment, juvenile probation, and in many cases, drugs. These labels condemn these young men to the bottom of the educational ladder—few architects, teachers, business owners, doctors, or others will come out of BD classes.

Porter (1997) indicated that African American boys have become public education’s monster—feared, mistrusted, and hated, mere animals to be confined to cages (special education classes). Porter espoused that Public Law 94-142, which granted a free and public education to any United States citizen 20 years old and under, was passed to allow Caucasians a way to become desegregated and segregated at the same time. This law allowed for the school within a school setting such as gifted classes, and this segregated Caucasian students in many public schools. The number one concern was the

African American male in America's educational system. Each African male in America was, and still is, perceived in the European historic mindset as a potential 'Black freedom leader' such as Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan, W. E. B. Dubois, and others, a threat. The mindset of Caucasians operates based on the understanding that it is in the nature of men to be in charge of their destiny and the destiny of their people. Therefore, it is a threat to have educated African American men, and there was a need to decrease the number of successfully educated African American males in their midst (Porter, 1997). Many aspects of this law would decrease the number of successful African American males influencing society.

The Eurocentric curriculum serves as a tool of alienation because of the lack of racial/cultural/gender relevance of the information presented. According to Porter (1997), many of the African American males are detached and turned off from the information presented in classrooms and become disruptive as a natural response to having something forced upon them---even if they believed its "truth" (p. 61).

According to Morgan and Mehta (2004), threatening stereotypes interfere with African American males' everyday educational performance in school, especially on important tests, because Black students try too hard to avoid the low performance as implied by stereotype threat. Morgan and Mehta, using the results from laboratory experiments of Steele (1992, 1997; as cited by Morgan & Mehta, 2004) asserted that the relatively poor test performance of black adolescents is partly a subconscious response to groundless but pervasive stereotypes of inherent black inferiority labeled "stereotype threat." It is suspected that over time, Black students adapt to their predicament, and this adaptation results in disidentification. To maintain positive self-images, Blacks inoculate

their global self-esteem against performance evaluations in schooling. In so doing, they disidentify with educational achievement in general to claim a psychic victory that preserves self-worth. Disidentification directly lowers motivation and an individual's own performance expectations, further depressing future achievement.

Morgan and Mehta's (2004) study is based on the premise that testable implications can be derived and evaluated with existing survey data using the following three implications:

Implication 1: The relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement should be weaker for Blacks than for Whites.

Implication 2: The relationship between global self-esteem and academic self-concept should be weaker for Blacks than for Whites.

Implication 3: The relationship between global self-esteem and academic achievement should be weaker for Blacks than for Whites, and if disidentification mounts throughout high school, the relationship should weaken over time. (pp. 84-85)

The three main empirical findings in this study were mixed. First, when Black students formulate self-evaluations of their own academic competence, they are less sensitive to external performance evaluations. Second, when Black students select levels of global self-esteem, however, they are as likely as are White students to rely on their own evaluations of their academic competence. Third, when Black students select levels of global self-esteem, they are as likely as Whites to rely on their own academic performance. These findings support implication one and contradict implications two and three the disidentification explanation (Morgan & Mehta, 2004). This study is

important because it provides another form of discussion about the importance of identity and how it impacts student achievement and motivation to achieve in school in narrowing the achievement gap.

Another study addressing identity and academic disengagement of African Americans was conducted by Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, and Hart-Johnson (2003). This model focuses on the implications of the content of racial-ethnic self-schemas (RES) for disengagement. It is postulated that risk increases when individuals are either “aschematic” (do not have an RES) or “in-group only” RES schematic (when RES risk decreases) when RES contains both in-group and larger society. According to the researchers, this latter RES can take the form of a “dual identity,” in which one is a member of an in-group that must fight to overcome obstacles to attain larger societal resources (Oyserman et al., 2003, p. 333).

This model proposed a self-schema framework as a broader, encompassing model that provides novel hypotheses about how racial-ethnic self-schemas can reduce disengagement and promote engagement with school. The model predicts when minority youths will be able to preserve motivation and focus on academic performance and when they are likely to disengage and stop trying in school. The researchers proposed that one’s RES makes certain social roles (e.g., good student) self-relevant, along with the normative rules and behavioral routines attached to those roles. By making some social roles but not others self-relevant, RES frames and organizes experience, recruits and maintains motivation, and promotes self affect.

The analysis showed that RES influenced disengagement, whether measured over the course of the school year or in an experiment manipulation of salience. Youths with

in-group focused RES and youths who were RES aschematic made worse grades in school than youths with RES focused on both the in-group and the larger society. The content of individuals' RES moderates the impact of stereotypes about one's racial-ethnic group. The findings in the study corroborate the central hypothesis regarding the potential for positive effects of RES on academic performance when RES include both the in-group and the larger society (Oyserman et al., 2003).

The forgoing review of literature in the area of social identity attests to the importance of positive identity formation and the relationship to positive student achievement. African American males have many reasons or situations in which they encounter negative influences that may be barriers to developing a positive identity. In particular, cultural identity is important to consider. Cultural identity is broad and ever changing based on an individual's experiences. Cultural identity is defined as (Cultural Identity, n.d.)

Cultural identity is the (feeling of) identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as she/he is influenced by her/his belonging to a group or culture. Common habits, characteristics, ideas may be clear markers of a shared cultural identity, but essentially it is determined by difference: we feel we belong to a group, and a group defines itself as a group, by noticing and highlighting differences with other groups and cultures. (¶ 6)

Three aspects of cultural identity will be discussed below: race, gender, and popular culture. These areas will be considered in an attempt to further understand the African American male in the education setting.

## *Race*

Several studies used critical race theory as a framework to examine the many perspectives of race as it relates to education (Berry, 2003; Connor, 2004; Lynn, 2001; Marx & Pennington, 2003). These studies have emerged to address issues in education as they relate to the goals of critical race theorists, which are to develop a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that examines the role of racism in education and how to eliminate racism from education (Tate, 1997). Each of these studies affirms my decision to use critical race theory as my framework of reference in presenting the voices of African American adolescent males in this study about their reading motivation.

One study of particular relevance to the present study was conducted by Berry (2003), who presented the stories of African American male middle school students who had experienced success in mathematics. Using a phenomenological method, the researcher investigated the limitations these students encounter and the compensating factors these students use. Critical race theory of education was the theoretical framework for this study, because it recognizes the role racism has played in the shaping of schools and schooling practices (Berry, 2003). Student interviews, parent/guardian interviews, teacher interviews, classroom observations, review of documents, and mathematical autobiographies were utilized to capture the stories of the students. The stories of each student were told in the context of descriptive portraits.

Berry's (2003) study investigated two research questions: (a) what limitations do African American male middle school students enrolled in Algebra I encounter? (b) What compensating factors do African American male middle school students enrolled in Algebra I experience? Half of the participants in this study achieved Academically Gifted

(AG) placement despite their teachers' failure to recognize them as AG. Without AG placement, the academic experiences of these students could have potentially been drastically different. Teachers failed to recognize the intellectual potential of these students because they did not value the ways these students participated in school. The lack of value of the students' ways of participations was based on cultural dissonance and lowered expectations. The teachers interpreted cultural ways of knowing in terms of behavioral issues; the teachers saw this as problematic. Consequently, six of the participations experienced behavioral issues (playing in class due to boredom, talking in class and not completing homework, dancing while walking, and yelling out answers without being called on) early in their academic experiences because of cultural dissonance or because their teachers failed to challenge them academically. The limitations that African American male middle school students in this study encountered were aggregated individual discrimination, cultural dissonance, and lowered expectations (Berry, 2003).

Strong parental support and the ways the participants empowered themselves were compensating factors that helped the participants overcome the limitations they encountered (Berry, 2003). Additionally, participation in church activities, athletics, and special academic programs served as compensating factors. The parents protected their sons from low expectations, supported their sons academically, and advocated for their sons to ensure they received equitable treatment. In addition, the parents informed their sons that discrimination and racism exist and that they must work hard to overcome it. The participants were self-empowered because they were motivated to succeed in mathematics, and they believed that they could be successful. Participation in church,

athletics, and special academic programs surrounded the study participants with students who had similar aspirations, outlook, and values (Berry, 2003).

In using race and culture to make connections to literature, Connor (2004) examined how a group of biracial female adolescents responded to a range of texts depicting biracial characters, young adult and children's literature, essays, poetry, autobiographical vignettes, and songs containing themes that, at times, closely mirrored their life experiences and culture. Participants responded to the texts in multiple formats including conversation, writing, poetry, and art. Findings in this study offered the field new information about how biracial female youth make their voices heard, express their beliefs, explore their world, and understand their position in the world through literacy. The findings also broaden previous notions of multicultural education, the role of multicultural and multiethnic literature in the lives of adolescents, and support the belief that teacher education programs should develop cultural critical consciousness about racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity for students in a diverse society. Connor used the art of storytelling as framed by critical race theory to give voice to the complexities of growing up biracial and female in contemporary society. Connor (2004) shared some profound comments that are relevant to my study,

Having found parts of themselves in the literature, Haley was introduced to characters who, like her, were, "constantly evolving and growing" and Patrice was thankful for being introduced to books where biracial authors took "hurtful and painful moments from life and write about them." (p. 142)

The above comments affirms the connection that exist between identity and

literacy. Additionally, Conner (2004) postulates that identity and literacy are socially constructed and practiced within relationships of race, gender, language, class, experience, and space.

Another view of critical race theory as a theoretical framework was used in a study about White racism. Marx and Pennington (2003), White female teacher educators, used critical race theory to openly address Whiteness and White racism with their White teacher education students. This was in an effort to help the students become more aware of the advantages and biases inherent in their positionality as White teachers. This consisted of two separate but similar studies.

Marx and Pennington's (2003) study began as an exploration of the thoughts and beliefs of a group of three White student teachers who chose to do their student teaching in a school populated mainly by students of color, one in which 98% of the children were of Mexican origin, most of whom were native speakers of Spanish. Marx and Pennington's intent was to bring up the topic of Whiteness that had never been mentioned in any of the coursework with these preservice students as an extension of their field experience. Their overall concern was about racism and the place where it interacts with White identity in preservice teacher programs. They had a belief that educating preservice educators would change the way race is addressed.

Marx and Pennington's study emerged out of a desire to do something about the White racism they had become accustomed to hearing and seeing in and around the parameters of the teacher education class during their time in graduate school. The goal was twofold: first, to map the ways in which the preservice teachers seemed to be influenced by Whiteness and White racism, and second, to draw the attention of study

participants to the influences that were mapped in hopes of fostering some changes. Nine White women in the Second Language Acquisition class volunteered to participate in this study, tutoring an English-language learner in a public school for 10 hours during the semester.

The findings of the study suggested several implications. First, they proposed that all teacher-preparation programs allow room for the study of Whiteness, which has been avoided in teacher preparation programs due to the perceptions that it is either immaterial or “dangerous.” Second, these researchers suggested that Whiteness and White racism be introduced as a necessary component of any discussion with children and teachers. Third, teacher educators must become familiar with the body of work on critical race theory, Whiteness, White racism, and White identity development. The researchers acknowledged they were influenced by and affected by Whiteness and White racism just as much as the participants/students. Marx and Pennington (2003) stated,

As White people, we believe that there is no way to shake off the biases and limitations this imposes on our perspective. However, as researchers and students of Whiteness and White racism, we also realize that we were further ahead on this journey towards understanding than our students who had rarely, if ever, critically addressed topics before our respective studies. Thus, many aspects of Whiteness and White racism that were invisible to them were visible to us. (p. 94)

To move forward in educating students of color, I believe it should be mandatory for teacher education programs to develop some format to open similar dialogues about racism. The subject is important in breaking down barriers for self-examinations for all parties, especially for teachers in diverse school settings.

A counter story was presented by Lynn (2001) examining the role of Black male educators in urban schools situated within the framework of critical race theory. This study utilizes Portraiture as a way in which to examine the life stories, experiences, and pedagogies of six Black male teachers who work in three schools--an elementary, middle and high school--that serve the largely Black working-class community of Strivers Point in South Central Los Angeles. Lynn (2001) used Portraiture because it is a qualitative approach to examining the lives of people and documenting their voices with an intense focus on the use of narratives, as a way in which to tell stories. Critical race theory is used as a way in which to examine the links between race, gender, and class oppression for Black men educators.

The educators in this study articulated a vision for a pedagogical practice, which is responsive to the emotional, intellectual, and social needs of African American children, as a result of their own experiences. The data show that the overwhelming factor in the Black men educators' success as teachers of urban students was their own experiences with alienation. Lynn posits that it was through the lens of their own domination that Black men are able to see clearly the racial subordination with which students of color are faced.

Several critical race themes emerged. First, the study of Black male teachers committed to the wellness of Black children presents a challenge to dominant ideologies in its very conception (Lynn, 2001). Second, the study seeks to further the goal of social justice by illuminating Black men teachers' experiences with subjugation in their lives and at work. Next, the study is conceptualized, executed, and analyzed with the notion that race is central and that it intersects with other forms of domination such as gender

and class oppression to create unique life experiences for Black men. Finally, the major finding of the study is that personal experiences are to be valued, honored, and utilized as a basis by which to construct theory that analyzes the life experiences of racially subordinated people (Lynn, 2001).

### *Gender*

It is important for this research to consider the question: Is there a relationship of gender and academic performance to motivation? Rouse and Austin (2002) presented a study focused on this question. The study involved a comparison within three ethnic groups of the relationship of GPA and gender to motivation. The three groups involved were African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Caucasian-Americans. The instruments used were the Assessment of Academic Self-Concept and Motivation and Assessment of Personal Agency Beliefs. Both instruments provide a goal-focused, multidimensional, and comprehensive assessment of motivation (Rouse & Austin, 2002). The participants included high- achieving and low-achieving students from both gender and ethnic groups.

The gender hypothesis was supported, and mixed results were produced (Rouse & Austin, 2002). In most cases, males demonstrated more motivation. However, in the African American sample, high-ability females demonstrated the most motivation in beliefs about ability, beliefs about control, and beliefs about value/importance, while low-ability females demonstrated the least amount of motivation. High-ability African American females had the most adaptive motivational pattern in those areas, while the low-ability African American females had the least adaptive motivational pattern, with African American males somewhere in between (Rouse & Austin, 2002). Low-GPA

African American adolescents do not feel that their academic environment is supporting them nor facilitating their achievement (Rouse & Austin, 2002). More differences exist between the ethnic groups than similarities. These differences in ethnic groups and within ethnic groups underscore my focus on the motivation of or lack of motivation of African American males, specifically in examining reading motivation. It is imperative that curriculum address these differences to encourage success in academic achievement for all students.

Additionally, the concern about gender differences is shared in an additional article written by Saunders, Davis, Williams, and Cribbs (2002). These writers believed there is increasing divergence in the academic outcomes of African American males and females. By most accounts, males are falling behind their female peers educationally as African American females are graduating from high schools at higher rates and are going on to college and graduate school in greater numbers. Some have suggested that school completion and performance is associated with how students feel about themselves.

This study by Saunders et al. (2002) explored gender differences in the relationship between self-perceptions and two academic outcomes among a sample of 243 African American high school sophomores. The results suggested overall that females are more favorably oriented toward high school completion. Both male and female students with more positive self-perceptions have stronger intentions to complete the current year of high school. Higher grade point averages were more strongly associated with greater self-efficacy for females than for males (Saunders et al., 2002).

### *Popular Culture*

Popular culture is a derivative of cultural studies. Popular culture is created from

the common approval of expressive materials intended for a large audience. Earle (2000) provided an understanding of popular culture as one form of cultural studies. Cultural studies involve an examination of the history of people lives and how these lives have been produced by structures handed down from the past. Each version of cultural studies is joined by a threefold concern with cultural texts, lived experience, and the articulated relationship between texts and everyday life. Within the cultural text tradition, some scholars examine the mass media and popular culture as sites where history, ideology, and subjective experiences come together. Popular culture represents common culture based on movies, television, music, magazines, newspapers, toys and computer games that contribute to everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and contributing to constructing identity (Earle, 2000).

For many African American males, popular culture is an area that is easily communicated and expressed in many forums. I make this statement based on my own personal observations and experiences with African American males' exposure to rap/hip-hop music, video games, the "urban-wear," BET/MTV videos, and other aspects of popular culture infiltrating their daily lives. This is present in the way students dress daily in and out of the school setting, the strong interest for most of them in the type of music they listen to and can be heard singing in classrooms and hallways around the school, and the conversations about video games. The infusion of popular culture is important because it plays a dominant role in the ways in which people and especially young people construct, sustain, and maintain notions of self, history, and community (Dimitriadis, 2001).

The formal educational setting is an area proven to bear negative fruit for many African American males. If they are not learning in this arena, then what and where are they learning and creating knowledge? Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) provided multiple views on the subject of popular culture. Society is proliferated with the many sounds of rap and hip-hop music. This proliferation of music styles and genres has opened up new avenues for identity and identification. From rap music sampling to the new links between world music and dance culture, musicians today are conjuring up and creating new kinds of social affiliations that challenge the ready-made theoretical constructs of educators and pedagogues alike.

Gordon (1993) suggested a point for teachers to consider is that the struggle for authenticity in so many students has given rise to corresponding authentic popular culture, as depicted in some music, discourse, and dress. Students have the capacity to authentically express themselves by producing cultural artifacts and knowledge. Various forms of rap music, for example, provide youth a socio-political popular discourse that they identify with, embrace, and emulate. Gordon commented, "The Black aesthetic is a medium through which to teach has potential to provide an understanding that all humankind is symbolically kin related rather genetically bonded or separated" (1993, p. 224).

Urquhart (1996) expounded on the many aspects of popular culture and how boys become men. Urquhart suggested that popular culture perpetuates narratives that tell ourselves about deep-seated wishes and fears about ourselves, and the relation that we have as individuals to the world and other people. The developmental process of forming an adult masculine identity means that boys read gender-specific solutions to anxieties

that deal with identity, its vulnerability, and the desire for safety and a sense of predictable world. These solutions allow males at a particular stage of their development to explore what it may mean to become a man.

Children's class, gender, and ethnicity also affect how particular fictions and how the very activity of reading is perceived. Additionally, Urquhart (1996) investigated the social and cultural aspects of reading popular fiction among boys. For boys, talking about popular culture to friends seemed to emphasize the social representation of masculinity. Accordingly, Urquhart postulated that although the act of reading can be a solitary activity, the boys often used popular culture in their interactions with each other. They role-played scenes from films; they exchanged computer games and evaluated their interest-level; they watched TV together or later shared their reactions to TV and video programs, and they played together with their Box Master toys or compared their collections of mini-Boglines. Boys began to tell other boys about being a man, and to play out and act out and talk out the representations of masculinity they had taken from the narratives they read and watched.

Urquhart (1996) makes the following recommendation:

By working with boys' experiences, boys' desires for competence and self-representations as masculine, by accepting levels of meaning and understanding that go beyond instrumental parallelism between fiction and reality, by showing interest and creativity in how we ourselves understand boys' absorption in the popular culture and its warrior-fantasies; perhaps in these ways we may succeed in helping boys to widen their repertoire of narratives, consider the gaps and slippages between different texts and their real lives, so that their needs and

experiences are not excluded from school, where learning is, as it should be, related to the understanding, and development of the real desires that frame their lived experience. (pp.181-182)

According to Taylor (1999), sports images are another aspect of popular culture lavished with promises for men and especially for African American males. Schools in the United States are also saturated with images of Black athlete stereotypes, recognizable on every playground and in every classroom. The reinforcement of physical ability over intellectual capability diminishes the potential of young Black men and perpetuates the myth that the road to success is paved with sports contracts and not diplomas.

Marsh (2000) conducted two qualitative research projects in exploring the potential that popular culture has for motivating young readers and writers and providing enriching opportunities for literacy development inside school. The research in these projects indicated using popular culture and the media in literacy curriculum can be very motivating for many children and can offer them the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise in the classroom. For many working class-children, these popular culture texts form the greater part of their cultural lives.

According to Asselin (2001), research about popular culture in literacy education is grounded in two major concepts besides learner-centeredness. The first concept uses the expanding definitions of literacy that reflect the range of media besides print that people use for business, entertainment, and communication. The International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English (2000) stated, "Being literate in contemporary society means being active, critical, and creative users of print and spoken

language/as well as the visual language of film and television, commercial and political advertising, and more” (as cited in Asselin, 2001, ¶5). Asselin notes that this is important because much of popular culture is embodied in media other than print, and this links the notion of media literacy to popular culture.

Secondly, Asselin (2001) espouses that critical literacy is central to research and pedagogy about popular culture. The use of social and cultural theories of critical literacy emphasizes individual cognitive processes through analysis of how texts are used to construct economic and political inequities in an effort to effect social change.

To further examine popular culture and its impact on African American males, it is important to consider how television viewing relates to reading achievement. Medved (2002) reported that African Americans watch an average of 74.4 hours of television per week, a figure that represents 21.5 hours more than all other households. Kunjufu (2002) affirmed this:

African American children lead the country with 30 hours per week of television viewing. Many low-income parents have four televisions or more in their homes. We could close the achievement gap if African American families would turn off the television for two hours each weekday night in favor of reading. (p. 134)

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (2000) reported that African Americans watch the most television, just over 4 hours and 40 minutes per day. Hispanic youth averaged 3 hours and 50 minutes and White youth watched just less than 3 hours. Situation comedy and drama were the most popular types of programs for all three groups, but Whites were disproportionately attracted to drama compared to the other two groups.

The mere statistics stated are alarming and problematic for a host of issues for African Americans and specifically the African American male. Several writings have established a correlation between television viewing and school achievement levels (Brown, 1997; Hershberger, 2002; Lehr, 1986; Office of Research and Education, 1994; Toppo, 2005). According to Lehr (1986), there is some evidence that children who are heavy television viewers dislike reading and tend to read materials of lower quality. Lehr highlighted a study by Williams and her colleagues (1982) that showed that some television viewing was beneficial, with viewing up to 10 hours a week correlating positively with reading achievement. Beyond this amount, the correlation is negative; reading achievement declines sharply with increased viewing. Hershberger (2002) conducted a study with findings that supported the hypothesis that the more television high school students watch, the lower their GPAs. Affirming this writing, Brown (1997), with Child Trends, Inc., reported that excessive television watching is negatively related to children and youth's academic attainment. Children and adolescents in grades 4, 8, and 11 who watch five or more hours of television per day have substantially lower test scores averages than do other children. Brown (1997) continue to note that the percentage of children who report watching excessive amounts of television declines with age and larger proportions of boys than girls are watching television for long periods of time. Consequently, Toppo (2005) commented on a research study involving researchers in New Zealand that indicated that children who watched the most TV from ages 5 to 15 were least likely to graduate from high school or college by age 26.

Lastly, Smith (1990) discussed the impact of television watching on reading achievement of children. A study indicated that the average writing proficiency of

students in grades 4, 8, and 12 drops substantially when they spend 6 or more hours daily watching TV. These students also had significantly lower reading proficiency scores than those watching 0-5 hours daily. The number of hours of watching TV may interfere with opportunities for leisure or for cognitive activities such as recreational reading that may enhance school-related skills and competencies.

Surely, the multiple aspects of popular culture for African American males will provide positive and negative impacts at different opportunities. Many of these aspects provide learning opportunities that should be capitalized on, even television viewing. The challenge is for educators to be flexible and learn how to make the best of teachable moments and learning connections.

#### Achievement Performances

To solve the underachievement problem of African Americans, more attention must be paid to the African American male population (McMillian, 2003/2004). McMillian suggests that education must reframe the academic achievement gap as a treatment gap. It is important to understand why African American males are underachieving.

Kunjufu (1990) contends there are six factors that have greatly influenced the decrease in academic achievement of African American males, including (a) decline in nurturance and an increase in discipline problems, (b) decline in teacher expectations, (c) decline in parental involvement, (d) lack of male teachers, (e) increase in peer pressure, and (f) lack of understanding about students' preferred learning styles (e.g., cognitive, auditory, visual, or kinetic).

Reglin (1994) suggests that a blueprint for actions to promote academic and personal success for the African American male students begins with an analysis of cultural factors in the lives of these students, starting with family structure. According to Reglin, the shortage of positive African American male role models, the perceptions of societal racism and victimization, and the existing African American male subculture work against academic achievement. To counter these forces, the blueprint by Reglin (1994) recommends: High but realistic expectations, parent and family involvement, parent centers, emphasis on the whole child, building self-esteem, cooperative learning, cross-age and peer tutoring, learning-styles instruction, prevention and assessment of chilly classroom and environments, integration of African American males into class activities, and enrichment of the classroom with African American male role models.

Tatum (2000, 2003), the director of a reading clinic at Buffalo State College and an African American male, shared his experiences and research about the African American male and literacy in several discourses. Tatum (2000) made several comments retrospective of James Baldwin's work, "A Talk to Teachers" (1963). Tatum surmised that this essay was a call to strike against the current trends occurring in the reading education of poor, urban African American adolescent students who are marginalized by the political exclusion, economic disenfranchisement, and social isolation of their families by poor, and inadequate instruction. The education of these students needs to go far beyond curriculum dictates satisfied by test-driven instruction that prevent more comprehensive approaches for teaching reading, thwart critical competencies, and unfairly consign this group to the bottom of the economic, social, and political ladder.

Tatum (2000) provided several recommendations for reducing the discrepancies in reading achievement. Students should be provided with the possibility to understand who they are in ways that are different from identities formed by the dominant culture. Differences should be discussed, and these differences should be organized within combinations of inequitable existing race and class relations. Opportunities must be created for repeated and meaningful applications of reading skills.

Furthermore, Tatum (2000) explained there must be a thrust toward comprehensive reading instruction and authentic opportunities to read culturally relevant materials that challenge students to think about the historical context of the African American struggle: substantiating existence/identity formation and political, economic, and cultural critiques. Attempts should be made to connect the historical to the temporary so that students view the reading curriculum as meaningful and relevant. Examining historical and social constructs would help students understand how images of African Americans were constructed to exploit labor, define class distinctions, and create hegemonic distinctions present today.

However, many African American males will have their chances for success marginalized until their teachers create environments in which curriculum orientations and instructional practices are structured to advocate for them. These negotiating grounds must offer literacy opportunities that move Black males away from the idea that a diploma or a degree leads to a dead end job (Tatum, 2003). Tatum stressed that African American males must be taught that earning a high school diploma or college degree does have the power to transform their world.

More so, for Tatum (2003), Black males are often viewed as culpable for their academic failures, while teachers and schools are absolved of responsibility. The perception of the troubled Black male permeates the subconscious of many teachers in U. S. classrooms. Black males are often labeled “at risk” accompanied by very few positive recorded accounts of the Black male, thereby causing what he considered the myopic perception of Black males from youth through adolescence that comes between them and their literacy development and this disconnection becomes heavily pronounced. In many cases, this leads to a reiterative pattern in which Black male literacy is limited by instruction that is inadequate or of poor quality. Black males are not being granted equal opportunities for quality instruction programs according to Tatum.

It is Tatum’s (2003) belief that despite all the turmoil that surrounds Black males in the U.S., particularly for the ones who are born into poverty, many continue to value literacy. Tatum recommended that teacher educators must reconstruct their representation of Black males so that they are accurate and meaningful and so future teachers are put in positions to advance their literacy.

The remaining section of the literature review discusses some of the key areas impacting the academic performance of African American males. The remaining literature review addressed issues of concern about educating African American males such as, culturally relevant teaching and learning styles, incongruent textbooks, and teacher expectations and parental expectations.

#### *Culturally Relevant Teaching and Learning Styles*

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make

learning more appropriate and effective for them by teaching to and through the strengths of these students. Gay postulates that culturally responsive teachers teach the whole child by promoting academic community of learners, teachers respond to the students' need for a sense of belonging, honored their human dignity, and promoted their individual self-concepts.

According to Gay (2000) culturally responsive teaching embodies several characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routines taught in schools.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages. (p. 29)

Gay (2000) suggested that in order to teach the different learning styles of students, activities would reflect a variety of sensory opportunities-visual, auditory, and tactile. Also, literature in the classroom should reflect multiple ethnic perspectives and literary genres.

Additionally, Ladson-Billings (1992) promotes the development of a culturally relevant approach to teaching as a way to foster and sustain the students' desire to choose academic success in the face of so many competing options. In developing a culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching, what people are taught to read is as significant as the fact that they read. Ladson-Billings use the term culturally relevant teaching to describe the kind of teaching that is designed not merely to fit the school culture to the students' culture but also to use student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge. Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy of opposition that recognizes and celebrates African and African American culture. Ladson-Billings indicated that the primary goal of culturally relevant teaching is to empower students to examine critically the society in which they live and to work for social change.

He and McKenna (2005) explored culturally responsive approaches to reading in the multicultural classroom. According to He and McKenna, culturally responsive approaches to reading life-based multicultural literary texts with a focus on those written in children's voices as a means for children to make sense of the lived world, to create bridges to worlds other than their own, and to see themselves in the stories of others. They believe that culturally responsive approaches to reading help children develop an empathic understanding toward others, enable them to learn to acknowledge and respect the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups and their own, and improve their dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to reading in the multicultural classroom. Also indicated, is that few reading programs are designed to encourage children to search for their cultural roots, to reflect on and respect their backgrounds 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 interact with others in the classroom, and how they perceive the world.

He and McKenna (2005) suggest that teachers could invite students to bring their personal experiences to the context of reading through discussions, reflective reading journals, autobiographical sketches, narrative imagination drawing, music circles, show-and-tell, parent or guardian interviews, and collaborative group work. Additionally, the following are suggested lessons for the culturally responsive reading teacher by He and McKenna:

- Create and nurture a classroom climate that honors and appreciates the diverse origins of students.
- Begin by making mainstream students aware (and by becoming more fully aware yourself) of the multiple cultures present in the class.
- Select literature, both for students to read and for teacher read-alouds, that embody relevant cultural experiences.
- Focus discussions of this literature on cultural differences and on the universals that underlie them.
- Be cognizant of how cultural differences can affect comprehension and be creative in attempting to address discrepancies in prior knowledge. (p. 285)

Bridging the gap between learning, culture, and teaching styles may positively impact student achievement in the area of reading motivation. Bennett (1995) identified teaching styles as the teacher's pervasive personal behaviors and media used during interaction with learners. Bennett makes another essential observation:

As teachers we tend to teach the way we learn best, unless we make a conscious effort to do otherwise. We can therefore, discover a great deal about our teaching style by analyzing our learning style. Indeed, this is important, for just as students may be negatively affected by learning style mismatches, teachers are often negatively affected by teaching style mismatches. (p. 185)

This research stressed the importance of creating a match of culturally relevant teaching styles with the learning styles of African American male students. Several studies are highlighted to demonstrate the importance of congruence of learning styles and teaching styles as well the importance of culturally relevant texts. The study by Peacock (2001) was conducted in Hong Kong about teaching and learning styles. However, the results of this study are applicable to other culture groups such as African American males. Learning styles are a student's "natural, habitual, and preferred ways" of absorbing and processing a second language (Peacock, 2001, p. 2). Peacock's study investigates Reid's (1987) hypothesis that a mismatch between teaching and learning styles causes learning failure, frustration, and demotivation. Data were collected through Reid's questionnaire, interviews, and tests using 206 English Foreign Language (EFL) students and 46 EFL teachers at a Hong Kong university. It was found that learners favored Kinesthetic and Auditory and disfavored Individual and Group styles, while teachers favored Kinesthetic, Group, and Auditory styles and disfavored Tactile and Individual styles; Western teachers also disfavored Auditory styles. There was, therefore, a mismatch regarding Group and Auditory styles. Interviews revealed that 72% of the students were frustrated by a mismatch between teaching and learning styles; 76% said it affected their learning, often seriously; and 81% of the teachers agreed with Reid's hypothesis. The correlations between learning style, proficiency and discipline were also checked. Learners who

avored Group styles were significantly less proficient. The study's conclusions were that EFL teachers should teach in a balanced style in order to accommodate different learning styles.

A study conducted by Rickford (2001) on culturally relevant texts using traditional ethnic folk tales and contemporary ethnic narratives in a middle school classroom of ethnic (mostly African American) minorities, low-income "at-risk" students, also provides proven success. The results indicated that ethnic folk tales and contemporary narratives have the advantage of increasing cultural congruence and motivation for multicultural students through their inclusion of themes, situations, perspectives, language, and illustrations with which they can relate. In addition, Rickford's (2001) study demonstrated that the inclusion of stimulating and higher level comprehension questions motivates and engages the "at-risk" students in the reading process with the narratives. This study affirmed the importance of providing literature that is culturally relevant and similar to real life experiences of the targeted population as a strategy to enhance reading skills.

A study by Jackson-Allen and Christenberry (1994) identified and compared the learning style preferences of low-achieving and high-achieving African American males. Half of the students were randomly selected from a pool identified as low-achievers and the other half from a pool identified as high-achievers. The pools were identified based on grade averages in core academic courses. The Dunn, Dunn, and Price Learning Style inventory was administered to each of the two groups. Independent t-test comparisons of mean raw scores on each of the learning modalities yielded only three significant differences between low and high achievers. High-achievers had stronger preferences for

motivation and were more parent motivated than low achievers. According to Jackson-Allen and Christenberry, low achievers, however, had stronger preferences for learning experiences that involve opportunities for mobility. Jackson-Allen and Christenberry suggested that young African American males who are identified as either low or high achievers are more alike than they are different in their preferences for various learning modalities.

### *Incongruent Textbooks*

Over the years a great deal of research has been done to determine if textbooks are dealing adequately with groups of color and cultural diversity issues. Textbooks, workbooks, worksheets, and virtually all materials teachers use have a powerful impact on learners' cognitive and affective domains (Manning & Baruth, 2000). Gay (2000) explored the importance and use of textbooks in schools. Importantly, textbooks are often thought to be a foolproof means of guaranteeing successful teaching and learning. These practices and associated attitudes are so strongly entrenched in the minds of students and parents that the value of courses without textbooks is sometimes suspect. Manning and Baruth (2000) also proposed that textbooks provide factual information, but through their words and pictures, they also affect students' attitudes toward and beliefs about themselves, other people and cultures, and the world. Textbooks that have ignored cultural diversity or have dealt with individual cultures erroneously or in stereotypical terms have inflicted damage on children over the decades (Gay, 2000, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Manning & Baruth, 2000).

Moreover, Manning and Baruth (2000) outlined several factors that can affect the influence of textbook characterizations on children and adolescents. First, the amount of

time interacting with the materials may determine the extent to which children internalize and retain attitudes and stereotypes. Second, children vary in their emotional involvement and identification with the individuals and situations portrayed. In reading, mathematics, and social studies, for example, students' performance is enhanced when they perceive content to be relevant and interesting. Their belief is that the absence of characters and situations with which children are able to identify may contribute to and reinforce feelings of security, inferiority, or superiority depending on an individual's group identity.

Gay (2000) noted that most textbooks used in schools are controlled by the dominant group (European Americans) and confirm its status, culture, and contributions. European American subjective experiences and interpretations of reality are presented as objective truth. Gay stressed the importance of understanding the treatment of textbooks based on ethnic and cultural diversity and their effects on teaching and learning.

Gay (2003) also examined the importance of textbooks in educating students and as a major component of the social studies curriculum. Research on textbooks has provided evidence that instructional materials designed for K-12 students published as recently as the early 1990s continue to avoid controversial issues related to ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity. Gay noted that social studies textbooks practice an extreme form of deracialization by excluding race-related issues, events, and experiences. Befittingly, this was considered troubling since so much of what social studies education is supposed to be about would have direct implications and opportunities for analyzing racial challenges, resisting racism, and developing the knowledge and skills needed as citizens of a race-conscious society and world. Ladson-Billings (2003) stated, "In social studies courses

other than history, African Americans are virtually invisible” (p. 3). According to Ladson-Billings, this is the hidden curriculum that articulates social locations and social meanings. The official curriculum only serves to reinforce what the societal curriculum suggests that people of color are relatively insignificant to the growth and development of democracy and this nation, and they represent a drain on the resources and values.

In addition to textbooks, the inclusion of information about ethnic and cultural diversity in supplementary instructional materials, such as children’s picture books and fiction written by ethnic authors and about ethnic groups, is important. Gay (2000) recognized this importance of ethnic literature as curriculum content by highlighting a previous work of E. Kim (1976) that stated that fiction can provide valuable and otherwise unavailable insights into the social consciousness, cultural identity, and historical experiences of ethnic groups. Gay (2000) further articulated that

Making explicit connections between instructional resources used in classrooms and lived experiences of students outside of school improves the mastery of academic skills as well as other dimensions of learning, such as interest, motivation, and time-on-task. Ethnic literature and trade books are conduits for achieving these goals, as well as reducing fear of and prejudices toward “unfamiliar others.” (p. 118)

Manning and Baruth (2000) provided guidelines designed to help educators detect racist and sexist bias in children’s story books, picture books, primers, and fictions.

1. Check the illustrations. Look for stereotypes, oversimplified generalizations about a particular group, race, or sex that generally carry derogatory implications.

- A. Look at the lifestyles of the people in the book.
2. Check the story line. Civil rights legislation has led publishers to weed out many insulting passages and illustrations, particularly in stories with Black themes, but the attitudes still find expression in less obvious ways. The following checklist suggests some of the various subtle forms of bias to watch for:
    - A. Relationships: Do Anglo Americans in the story have the power and make the decisions? Do culturally diverse people function in essentially subservient roles?
    - B. Standard for success: What does it take for a character to succeed? To gain acceptance, do culturally diverse characters have to exhibit superior qualities-excel in sports, get A's and so forth?
    - C. Viewpoint: How are "problems" presented, conceived, and resolved in the story? Are culturally diverse people themselves considered to be "the problem"? Do solutions ultimately depend on the benevolence of an Anglo American?
  3. Consider the effects of the book on the child's self-image and self-esteem. Are norms established that limit the child's aspirations and self-esteem? What does it do to African American children to be continuously bombarded with images of White as beautiful, clean, and virtuous, and Black as evil, dirty, and menacing?  
(p. 211)

### *Teacher Expectations and Parental Expectations*

Teachers' low expectations of a student's ability to perform academically are evident in the inferior instruction provided to minority students. In addition, the way in which the teacher interacts with these students has a direct impact on reading achievement. These perceptions are also notable in how students perceive and react to each other based on these low expectations. Unfortunately, African American males from the inner-city receive the greatest brunt of disrespect and low expectations (Kunjufu, 2002). Kunjufu described these students as African American males in the upper grades--dark skinned, speaking Ebonics, and trapped in remedial classes.

The majority of the White teaching population is considered even more of a threat in exhibiting low expectations for African American students. While the demographics of the teaching profession remains constantly dominated by the White female, the demographics of the classroom are experiencing just the opposite. In 1970, the student population was 79% non-Hispanic White, 14% Black, 1% Asian and Pacific Islander and other races, and 6% Hispanic. In 2003, 60% were non-Hispanic White, 16% Black, 4% Asian, and 18% Hispanic (United States Census Bureau, 2005). An earlier report by the U. S. Census Bureau (2000) projected that the ethnic composition of the U.S. population has shifted dramatically, and those groups with lower education levels, such as Hispanics and Blacks, are becoming an increasing proportion of the population. Blacks and Hispanics are projected to grow from 24% to 37% of the population in the period 2000 to 2050.

Consequently, the incongruency between student demographics and teacher demographics presents major problems in educating minority students and again, especially African American males. An excellent point was shared by Kunjufu (2002),

On one hand, the importance of role modeling should be obvious. Can you be like anything that you have not seen? In my book *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* I advocate for more Black male teachers. I am very concerned about the large number of schools where there's not one Black man in the building, and if the man is present, he is probably a custodian, security guard, PE teacher, or principal, not a classroom teacher. There are African American children who have gone from kindergarten through sixth grade and have not experienced an African American male teacher....We know quantitatively that if African American students have Black teachers for one year, they improve 4 percentage points in reading and math. (p. 41)

Jones (2002) suggested the following:

Regardless of gender, White teachers in both public and private schools often have low expectations of Black children and may be biased in their thinking about what Black students are capable of achieving academically. That attitude is based on a host of negative stereotypes that they buy into, mainly that Blacks are inherently intellectually inferior and, therefore, won't be able to handle the schoolwork. (¶ 12)

In contrast, Kunjufu (2002) noted that an increasing number of middle-class African American teachers are lowering their expectations of low-income African American students. The dynamics of race and class are strongly intertwined in the

education of African American students, and Kunjufu exposes the argument of some that “if Black teachers lower their expectations for low-income African American students, it’s not only classism but racism” (2002, p. 35).

High quality instruction strategies and better-prepared teachers will provide a workable intervention to counteract the low expectations of teachers. Good (2001) conducted research involving first grade low-income minority students based on the expectation theory and a proposed general intervention plan. Expectation theory revealed a correlation between teacher and societal expectations of low expectations and perceptions of student achievement. According to Good, “teacher’s expectations may affect student performance because teachers decide what students are assigned to learn and judge how well they do” (2001, p. 2). Based on these perceptions and expectations, students begin to formulate their thoughts, and some of them react accordingly by internalizing these low expectations and an “I can’t do” attitude.

In support of the “I can’t do” attitude, a research-based strategy recommended by Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) supports the theory that reinforcing effort can help teach students one of the most valuable lessons they can learn—the harder you try, the more successful you are (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). But first, teachers have to believe in the students’ ability to be successful, and this must be communicated genuinely from teacher to student. According to the research by McRel, “People generally attribute success at any given task to one of four causes: ability, effort, other people, and luck” (p.50). Personally as an adolescent, my teachers’ beliefs in my ability to achieve at high levels motivated me to be empowered academically. My teachers had high expectations for me, and I did not want to let them

down. This instilled in me the power of a “can-do” attitude, which is responsible for my current work ethics.

Hilliard (2003) stated, “Typically, in communities where children have a history of low performance, educators have tended to be satisfied with “grade level” performance, even below-grade-level performance. That is because those educators have an implicit Bell Curve ideology in mind” (p.143-144). Many teachers are guilty of having low expectations for low achieving students and again, especially African American males. Much of the research indicates these shared thoughts about teacher’s perceptions and the impact on student achievement.

Just the same, Warren-Sams (1997) suggested that teachers form expectations for students’ achievement that influence the actual achievement of individual students, including the decision to drop out of school. The nature and degree of this effect are likely to vary based on teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning as well as specific characteristics of the teacher and his or her students. Also, Warren-Sams reported studies show that White students may elicit higher expectations from teachers than Black and Latino students. Research has established that teacher expectations are influenced by several factors that often affect children of color more than White children. Warren-Sams (1997) noted the following factors:

- Placement-- Teachers may view students in special education programs or in the lower-academic track, where students of color are over represented, as having less intellectual ability.
- Gender – Girls in general are asked fewer questions than males, and receive less precise feedback, criticism, and time to respond.

- Class--Teachers often expect more from middle-class students. In one study, teachers held higher expectations for students who exhibited middle-class-like behaviors regardless of the social-class background.
- Temperament-- Teachers tend to reject students who they perceive as overly active and distractible. (¶ 13-14)

Based on these factors, African American males would receive negative or unfavorable expectations/perceptions in the area of placement and temperament. Awareness of these factors is important in closing the achievement gap.

Rothman (2001/2002) shared detailed information about contributing factors relative to how several schools closed the achievement gap. Not surprisingly, teacher attitudes were identified as an area of concern. In one of the schools discussed, in Fort Wayne, the district tried to get a handle on teacher and student attitudes by conducting annual climate surveys. They found that African American students had more negative relationships with teachers than White students.

Equally important to teacher's perception is parents' perception. Darling and Lee (2003/2004) espoused that while formal education has a tremendous impact on a child's development, research consistently points to parents as the originating source of literacy experiences for their children. Nettles, Mucherah, and Jones (2000) conducted research on the influence of social resources such as parent, teacher, and school support on the resilient outcomes of children and adolescents using the resilience literature as a theoretical framework. Findings from several projects conducted at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) indicate that access to social resources such as caring parents who have high expectations for their children

and are involved in their children's schooling, participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., after-school sports), and supportive relationships with teachers have positive benefits for students' academic performance. Family and parental support also protects students at risk from the effects of stressful events and circumstances. CRESPAR also highlighted the importance of effective instruction as a focal strategy that contribute to self-efficacy, another important adaptive system associated with mastery experiences in schools.

Barbarin and McCandies (2003) speculated that among the cultural values that African American families tend to pass on to their children are notions of interdependence, perseverance, and group efforts for common interests in addition to self-sufficiency. Flowing from these are parenting styles that are depicted as firm or authoritarian, which have been associated with higher achievement levels for African Americans. Specifically, among African Americans, parents who create a calm and controlled environment, who reinforce clear interpersonal boundaries between themselves and their children, and who impose fair rules foster academic competencies in their children. Low-income African American families parental expectations were one of the only consistent predictors of academic achievement, once other demographic variables were controlled. Parental expectations seem to affect children's school performance by increasing children's own expectations and perceptions about their own competence. Parents of African American children who excel academically tend to stress the importance of education and encourage the development of self-esteem and belief in personal efficacy. At the same time, they acknowledge that their children may encounter racial prejudice and discrimination and try to prepare them to cope with it.

According to Anderson (2000), The Commission on Reading found that parents, not the schools, laid the foundation for a child's learning to read. Further, Anderson reported that parents stimulate their child's adult intelligence and lay the foundation for formal reading instruction. There is a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and the expectation level of the parent. Parents who expect their child to do well in school are more likely than others to provide books and academic games, to read to their child, and to take their child to the library. However, children from working class families generally performed at below-average levels on reading tests than children from families with a higher socioeconomic status. As reviewed by Anderson, some research suggests that resources such as trips to the library, learning-based television programs, learning packets provided to families by schools, and a quiet place to study are linked to high school achievement. Income levels and attitudes links are due to differences in environment rather than to income level, thereby indicating that parents of lower social status may not have the resources, time, or training to help promote strong reading skills but is not indicative of the importance they have for education as a whole or reading specifically.

Additionally, Patrikakou and Weissberg (1998) concluded that parents whose children attend inner-city schools make significant efforts to be involved in their child's education both at home and at school in spite of adverse conditions such as low education and social economic status (SES). Certain parent practices which have been shown to be extremely important for children's cognitive and academic development were not as widely practiced as expected; for example, reading to their child was something few parents (26%) practiced regularly at home. The study validated that despite SES, ethnic

group, parent's previous negative experiences with school, and other barriers, most parents are concerned about how well their children perform in school and tend to encourage their children to do their best to be successful in school.

Consequently, in the African American community today a conflict is brewing over ideologies and words spoken by a well-known actor, Bill Cosby. In a speech addressed at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Gala to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* in May 2004, Cosby made the following comments (Eidenmuller, 2001/2005):

Ladies and gentlemen, the lower economic and lower middle economic people are not holding their end in this deal. In the neighborhood that most of us grew up in, parenting is not going on. In the old days, you couldn't play hooky because every drawn shade was an eye. And before your mother got off the bus and to the house, she knew exactly where you had gone, who had gone into house, and where you got on whatever you had on and where you got it from. Parents don't know that today. (¶ 3)

This was an outcry against low-expectations and lack of expectations of parents for their children. Cosby challenged parents to start parenting. Many African American parents and community leaders were outraged at these comments. However, Tucker (2003) noted that pushy parents are the best boost for Black boys. In her writing, Tucker (2003) stated, "But parents, not teachers, play the most important role in children's education. Every Black parent ought to insist on academic excellence; they must combat the perverse view among many Black kids that serious scholarship is "a White thing" (¶

10). Low expectations from both teachers and parents are detrimental to the success of any student.

### Summary

The literature reviewed above outlined a variety of research findings and points of views pointed to the reading motivation and achievement of African American males. The literature examining cultural identity addresses the importance of developing a positive identity and how African American males have endured many situations and stereotypes, which have created more negative barriers to learning experiences than positive.

From studies using critical race theory, we learn that students of color tell stories of racialized educational experiences as a result of the systemic annihilation of students of color. The voices of African American males are rarely heard in literature. The various studies provide a dialogue about the possibilities for schools to openly engage in conversations about race, gender, and ethnic subordination in order to transform society.

The reading process is a personal experience, and we must look deeply into all areas to solve the puzzle of the achievement gap of African American males in the area of reading, while simultaneously seeking an understanding of what motivates some African American males to succeed despite the fact that some face the same barriers as low-achieving African American males do. As educators, we must look under every rock and leaf. We know that popular culture is the fabric that defines many of our adolescents. The literature explores this definition. This is why teaching and learning must be culturally relevant to the student. Just the same, we must examine some of the programs and

strategies currently being used in schools and how they're benefiting the plight of African American males.

Textbook bias exists in many forms and the concern about how important it is to have books to match the culture of the people could be found immediately after the Revolutionary War. Noah Webster, a teacher in Connecticut, made the first step using the school as a forum for building a nation out of the thirteen colonies. Webster eliminated the British textbooks from American classrooms (Mondale & Patton, 2001). The idea was to ensure that students were immediately introduced to the current regime and speak only of Washington. The same enthusiasm is necessary now for the learning experience of minorities in the use of print instructional materials.

Culturally responsive approaches to educating students must be considered to improve student achievement. Congruent teaching and learning styles are important to the success of the teaching and learning experiences of all students. Teachers must ask the question, "What are the learning styles of my students?" Inarguably, teachers and parents who work together and who have high expectations for African American male students are instrumental to their academic achievement.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD OF INQUIRY

This chapter describes the method used to address two research questions in this study:

- 1) What cultural influences that facilitate or diminish personal reading motivation are revealed in the stories of middle-grade African American males' experiences in reading?
- 2) How is the motivation to read revealed in personal stories of high- and low-achieving African American middle grade males?

The questions refer to the stories of African American males as the main source of data. Critical narrative inquiry, which will be considered first, is the method used to guide the collection and analysis of in-depth information about the participants.

My different roles and training as an educator crystallized my decision to approach my dissertation research using critical narrative inquiry as my method of inquiry. The main area that draws me to critical narrative inquiry is my counseling background and my race. My undergraduate degree focused on correctional law with an intent to help deter criminal and deviant behavior as a skilled helper, and eventually led me to expand this interest with a masters and specialist degree in professional school counseling. Why is my background important to this research? According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), we know what we know because of how we are positioned (p. 17). As a professional school counselor, I know the importance of being a good listener and allowing others to tell their stories.

## Critical Narrative Inquiry

Critical narrative inquiry represents the marriage of two forms of inquiry, critical inquiry and narrative inquiry. The term critical, within a theory of research, has been used to connote the action of social critique (Moss, 2001). Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) suggests that critical inquiry is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system. Sirotnik (1991) considers critical inquiry as a paradigm for praxis and describes it as empirical, explanatory, interpretive, deliberative, reflective, instrumental, and action-oriented. Critical inquiry must also challenge directly underlying human interests and ideologies based upon a commitment to social justice. Critical inquiry is thereby explicitly normative and focuses on underlying values, beliefs, interests, intentions, etc. (Sirotnik, 1991). Critical inquiry suggests that the paradigm offers realistic guidelines for more authentic communication, decision-making, action taking, and evaluation by people who are genuinely and actively seeking a more democratic vision of schooling. The use of critical in this study is used as an adjective to describe the disposition of the narrative research method, the narrative stories of the African American males, the use of critical race theory, and my role as a researcher (Sirotnik, 1991).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also emphasized the dynamic and dialogical nature of narrative research in their definition.

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and

in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experience that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

I view my inquiry into African American males' reading motivation as leading to radical changes and emancipation from oppressive social structures. This will happen through collaboration with this oppressed group of participants, African American middle grade males, revealed through their storytelling in this research. My use of critical race theory as my lens of focus in this narrative process creates a critical narrative approach. This is critical narrative because using race as a factor makes this more than just a narrative by presenting a counter story from a racial viewpoint. The art of storytelling is part of the African legacy and a component of critical race theorists. Therefore, critical race theory will direct and guide me during this research process in research and framing the questions for the interview process and critical narrative is the process of presenting the experiences of what was shared and learned during the research process.

One component proposed by critical race theorists is that the individual life experiences of people of color should be recognized and made public as a unique voice of color. This should be accomplished using language, narrative, speech, and words (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Olmsted, 1998). My goal is to use critical narrative inquiry to provide a loud and pronounced voice of several African American males and their story, because they are often silenced and marginalized in many hegemonic discourses. Traditionally

conducted social science research has silenced many groups marginalized and oppressed in society by making them the passive object of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Casey (1995/1996) highlighted the importance of the last 20 years that have witnessed an enormous burgeoning of oral history/narrative research projects explicitly connected to progressive political projects. An especially appealing attribute of oral history/storytelling is the way in which it can display the assets of those ordinarily considered to have none such as African Americans in general and African American males in particular. A lack of academic learning does not preclude expertise in narrative knowing or skill in narrative expression.

Ladson-Billings (2003) expressed the importance of narrative as the need to know and to be known as powerful aspects of the human condition. She stands critical of knowledge by and about people of color as being repressed, distorted, and denied by a Euro-American cultural logic that represents an “aggressive seizure of intellectual space” (p. 417). She continued to express that the value of storytelling in qualitative research is that it can be used to demonstrate how the same phenomenon can be told in different and multiple ways depending on the storytellers.

Critical race theorists have created a legacy experimenting with poetry, parables, personal anecdotes, chronicles, fiction, revisionist histories, counter-stories, music, aesthetics, nature, and short stories, all with the goal of illustrating and sharing how minority persons suffer from existing laws and the system of American justice (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Olmsted, 1998). These goals are parallel to the goals CRT encourages in the education curriculum: for students to tell their stories, to find their own voices, and to

perceive the realness that others value. The act of finding one's voice is considered a way of naming one's own reality.

Casey (1995/1996) expressed, "Theories, methodologies, and politics of narrative research are in a process of being defined and redefined as particular researchers and groups of researchers struggle to make the various aspects of their work coherent and consistent" (p. 231). Scholars of color dominate this group of researchers struggling to make the various aspects of their work first reach the forefront in qualitative research. Ladson-Billings (2003) stated,

Today, as I attempt to do my own work I am struck by the growing number of scholars of color who have chosen to go back into those fields, construction sites, and kitchens to give voices to their own people--their perspectives, worldviews, and epistemologies. These scholars, like James Gronniosaw, are attempting to have the lives of subordinated people "talk to them." Tired of bending their ears to hear the master's book talk, scholars of color are writing new texts from the lives and experiences of people much like themselves. (p.420)

The burden is on the researcher to ensure clarity, coherence, and consistency of the research process. Casey (1995/1996) advocated for the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research. It is also important to consider that learning to take respondents' storytelling seriously has had a number of unsettling effects on academic scholars, including having to suspend substantial portions of their academic training. According to Casey (1995/1996), "Whether implicit or elaborated, every study of narrative is based on a particular understanding of the speaker's self. At present, definitive features of narrative studies differ widely depending on their authors'

deeply held beliefs about the nature of self” (p. 213). Based on this statement, there appears to be a thin line between the narrative process and the researcher. Collins (1990), a Black feminist, articulated an understanding about the thin line between the narrative process and the researcher.

Finally, writing this book has convinced me of the need to reconcile subjectivity and objectivity in producing scholarship. Initially, I found the movement between my training as an “objectivity” social scientist and my daily experiences as an African American woman jarring. But reconciling what we have been trained to see as opposites, a reconciliation signaled by my inserting myself in the text by using, “I,” “we,” and “our” instead of the more distancing terms “they” and “one,” was freeing for me. (p. xiv)

Another example of this thin line between the narrative process and the researcher is represented in the story by Nettles (2001), of risk and recovery from a brain tumor. According to Nettles, the experiences and telling about them led to a new narrative whose theme was empowerment:

As a black woman, I was all too familiar with the survival narrative; for many of us, it is the only story we know – how to get from day to day. But in reentering the world. . . . I went beyond loss and survival to a new narrative. It is built on the two fundamental human tendencies that psychologists and others have identified. One is agency, expressed in strivings for power and independence. . . . The other motivational theme is connection, the strivings for love and intimacy.

(p. 148-149)

Concurrently, my intent is that the use of narrative for this research presenting the story telling of these African American males will lead to their empowerment as readers.

Additionally, Casey (1995/1996) presented a connection to my research project with the following:

In a world controlled by TV talk shows, tabloid exposés, and slogan T-shirts, telling one's story becomes exhibitionism, and listening to another's becomes voyeurism. Alternatively (or perhaps complementarily), story telling is the way to put shards of experiences together, to (re)construct identity, community, and tradition, if only temporarily. (p. 216).

African American males are often immersed into a world of voyeurism with massive images of the lives of the dominant group in our society. The stories they often see and hear bear little similarities to their own lives. Many of the reality TV shows and other sitcoms are shards of experiences that are far fetched from the everyday lives of African American males and are foreign to their identity, community, and tradition. African American males must move more in the direction of exhibitionism and less as voyeurism. This happens, as they become storytellers such as this experience of telling their stories about their experiences in reading.

Critical narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study, which is appropriate to many social science fields (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991). Another dimension that is important to me is the importance of a relationship between myself, the researcher and the participants, permitting a feeling of connectedness and a sense of equality. Hogan highlighted the research relationship as an important aspect of the narrative inquirer in the statement, "Empowering relationships feelings of

‘connectedness’ that are developed in situations of equality, caring and mutual purpose and intention” (as cited in Short, 1991, p.126). Collins (1990) developed a theoretical rubric for explicating a Black feminist standpoint that would be useful in evaluating the research relationship. Collins argues for concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in the assessment of knowledge claims, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability. As far as relationships, Collins affirmed the importance of being connected:

In terms of Black women’s relationships with one another, African American women may find it easier than others to recognize connectedness as a primary way of knowing, simply because we are encouraged to do so by a Black women’s tradition of sisterhood. (p. 212)

In beginning the process of critical narrative inquiry, it is particularly important that all participants have voice within the relationship. Britzman (as cited in Short, 1991) explain about voice in the narrative sense:

Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual and to participate in a community...The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all a part of this process. Voice suggests relationships: the individual’s relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual’s relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process. (p.127)

Connelly and Clandinin (1991) validated these sentiments with the statement, “In beginning the process of narrative inquiry it is particularly important that all participants

have voice within the relationship” (p.127). This is the voice I am seeking from the African American males in this study to help understand their personal relationship with the subject area of reading and their motivation to read. Important to consider is the problem, after all, is not with the voices that speak but with the ears that do not hear (Casey, 1995/1996, p. 223). The greatest challenge before me is to present the stories of the selected African American males in an enticing manner with integrity, which will create listening ears.

The narrative method may be divided into three stages: “Telling,” “Transcribing,” and “Analyzing” (Giovannoli, n.d., p. 29). Giovannoli specifies the importance of the researcher providing a facilitating context to encourage those who are interviewed to tell complete stories (p. 30) and using open-ended questions helps to facilitate this process. Rather than forming hypotheses, the researcher frames questions for exploration in place of measurement. This is the challenge of deeply listening to others, and instead of statistics, there are the ambiguities of thoughtful analysis of texts (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003). Narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability in presenting narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991). Some of the criteria identified are apperency, verisimilitude, transferability, the illusion of causality, topsy-turvy hermeneutic principle, and the principle of time defeasibility (p.134). Also, Connelly and Clandinin (1991) suggest that it is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research. At the same time, each inquirer must search for and defend the criteria that best apply to his or her work (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 134).

In narrative research, interviewing, listening and interpretation interact with and merge into each other (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003). Josselson et al. indicates that listening is a first step in the process of interpretation. According to Josselson et al., people's narratives reflect not only their own meaning-making but also the themes of the society or culture in which they live. This is why it is important to maintain the integrity of the interviewing, listening, and interpretation processes. Josselson et al. (2003) continues to point out that writing about what one has learned through narrative research is central. Marshall and Rossman (1991) explained that narrative inquiry may rely on journal records, photographs, letters, autobiographical writing, e-mail messages, and other data.

During the writing process, Riessman (1993) advises that the researcher begin by getting the entire interview, including both words and selected features (crying, long pauses, laughter), on paper in a first draft (as cited in Giovannoli, n.d., p. 33). While working from the draft, portions can be selected for retranscription. After narratives are identified, most researchers advise some coding or "parsing" of the retranscription (Giovannoli, n.d., p. 33). The next step is to analyze the data.

### Participants

Six African American males, two from each grade level of sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade participated in this research study. The participants met the following requirements: low social economic challenges (SEC) status as determined by free or reduced school lunch enrollment and the following characteristics: three students, one from each grade level (sixth-eighth) with Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) scores in the 349 or higher range representing the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher,

and three students, one from each grade level (sixth-eighth) with scores in the lower range of 299 or less, representing the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile or lower on the total reading test. The CRCT for Georgia reports student achievement in terms of performance levels (1-3): 1) Level 1 does not meet standard score 299 and below, 2) Level 2 meets the standard with score range of 300-349, and 3) Level 3 exceeds the standard with a score of 350 and above (Millicans, 2005).

The CRCT is designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) and the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The assessments yield information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state levels. This information is used to diagnose individual student strengths and weaknesses as related to the instruction of the QCC and GPS, and to gauge the quality of education throughout Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).

Recommendations were received from the school counselor and teachers of African American males meeting the required criteria. The teachers categorized students on a CRCT Profile Sheet using the CRCT data and submitted the CRCT data to me at the beginning of the school year. The parents of the identified students were contacted and informed of the study and possible interest in their child participating. Parents were informed of the procedures and the parental consent letter was explained. I met with the students and explained the study and at that time I sent parental permission letters home by the students. Upon the return of the permission letters, the final selections were made (see Appendix D). Students were selected randomly from a pool of individuals meeting the identified criteria. I followed the requirements to conduct the research as outlined in

the Policy and Procedures for Conducting Research by the Atlanta Public Schools System.

The process of meeting with the students resulted in two meetings. The participants completed a pre-established reading interest inventory assessment (see Appendix A), an online learning-styles inventory (see Appendix B), and a one on one inventory (see Appendix C). African American middle grade males guided us on this path of exploration in telling stories of their public school experiences and academic experiences in reading.

The students for the study are enrolled at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, an inner city school in The Atlanta Public School System. Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School (King Middle School) is an interesting school serving sixth grade thru eighth grade students. King Middle School is the only middle school in the State of Georgia offering single gender academies at the sixth grade and seventh grade levels, and eighth grade students are served in a coed environment. The student population at King Middle School is approximately 615 students. The enrollment distribution by race/ethnicity is as follows: White (4%), Black (86.7%), Hispanic (8%), and other (.13%) (Standard & Poor's, 2003-2004). King is located approximately 2-3 miles from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Social Change in the downtown Atlanta area. King Middle School is a Title 1 school with an economically disadvantaged population of 86.7% (Standard & Poor's, 2003-2004). The Criterion Reference Competence Test results from 2003/2004 for students in reading who scored at or above proficient levels are sixth grade--All students (71.4%), Whites' (70%), Blacks' (71%), Female (83.5), and Male (62.2%); eighth grade--All students (60.4%), Whites' (too few to report), Blacks' (58.4%), Female

(67.7%), and Male (53.5%) (Standard & Poor's, 2003-2004). Noticeably, students scored higher at each level in the sixth grade and declined for all subgroups at the eighth grade.

### Measurement Instruments

#### *Reading Inventory*

As a reading teacher for six years, the first week of school I would always have my students complete an informal reading interest inventory. This would provide me with information about what my students were interested in. I used this inventory as a way to dialogue with my students about their interest and to guide them sometimes in decision making for a variety of purposes. In creating a student-oriented classroom, it is important to know what motivates students, and student interest guides that motivation. Quintana (2001) notes that careful consideration should be given to the reading interests and preferences of children for whom reading material is being selected. According to Quintana, if reading is the basis for scholastic learning, then reading interest is also important in the learning process. Quintana (2001) stated,

In order to maintain and expand their reading interests, children need to be introduced to varied materials of literary excellence. The starting point is to take children where they are in terms of their reading abilities, present needs, and interests and provide them with increasingly challenging reading materials which are relevant to their individual preferences and group interests. Reading preferences and interests have been identified by educators as crucial factors in teaching and learning. (§ 2)

The reading interest inventory was selected from one that is used by the Alpine School District (n.d.) in Utah. I selected this inventory because it provided knowledge

about the reading interest and habits and popular culture interest of the participants. Also, a few modifications were made to the instrument to meet the needs of this study. An example of the reading inventory is presented as Appendix A.

### *Learning Styles Assessment*

The learning styles assessment is important in determining the different approaches to learning for the students. Bogod (1998) highlights the importance of students knowing their learning style as a strategy to help them develop coping strategies to compensate for weaknesses and capitalize on their strengths. Again, this is important for teachers to know in order to provide the assistance necessary for every student to experience success in their classroom. The online assessment is a short assessment that was used to determine the primary and secondary learning styles of these students (see Appendix B). The assessment will measure three types of learning styles: visual, tactile, and auditory learning. Bogod (1998) detailed the different characteristics of the auditory learner as learners that learn through seeing. These learners need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. Visual learners tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstructions (e.g., people's heads). They may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including diagrams, illustrated textbooks, overhead transparencies, videos, flipcharts and hand-outs. During a lecture or classroom discussion, visual learners often prefer to take detailed notes to absorb the information.

As the auditory learners learn through listening (Bogod, 1998), they learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through, and listening to what others have to say. Auditory learners interpret the underlying meanings of speech through

listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed, and other nuances. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud and using a tape recorder.

The other learning style identified by Bogod (1998) is the tactile learner or kinesthetic learner, who learns through, moving, doing and touching. Tactile/Kinesthetic people learn best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration.

#### *Interview Protocol*

My intent for the interviews was to have guided conversations rather than structured queries by making the questions fluid (Appendix C). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) recommend asking solid, meaningful, and textured questions, and make the suggestion that the basic ability to formulate a meaningful textured question and statement is a characteristic of a good researcher (p. 66). I conducted an open-ended interview to ascertain interviewees' perception's about reading habits and attitudes of students and family, educational experiences and attitudes, teaching and learning styles, and other related questions using the structured questioning process indicated by Denzin and Lincoln (2003). According to Holmgren (1996), for children, the more specific a question, the more it will stimulate discussion (p. 76). Holmgren continued to suggest that reversal questions are good to stimulate the children's imagination. Reversal questions are included in the interview. Also, students were provided opportunities to pose their own insights for further understanding.

## Procedures

My first meeting with the majority of the participants (4 out of 6) was a group meeting. For the purpose of this research, I decided to meet with the participants individually for the final interview. I decided to use the individual approach because of my knowledge and expertise of some of the characteristics of middle school students. In pre-adolescence, intellectual development is illustrated by more sophisticated and higher level thought processes (Schmidt, 1996). Wit, humor, and satire now complement silliness, playfulness, and other childlike behaviors. Socially, the middle-grader searches for peer acceptance and approval, and struggles for independence and autonomy. Often times, students are reluctant to speak honestly and openly amongst their peers about academic achievement. Since some of the questions address personal revelations about individuals' grades and abilities, it was more appropriate to meet with the students individually for the personal interviews. This eliminated students being distracted by each other and the hesitancy to speak.

The meetings with the participants took place during summer school, June 2005, at KMS. Only two of the six students were enrolled in summer school. During the first meeting with the 4 students that were not enrolled in summer school, we met in the media center. The parents provided the transportation for the students to attend the meetings. All subsequent meetings with all students were held in the main office conference room in a one on one meeting.

At the first meeting, I reviewed the agenda with the students so that they would have an idea of what to expect. I explained confidentiality and how the data would be used. Students were then provided the minor's assent form, which also explained

confidentiality and instructed students to select a “play” name to use on their documents (see Appendix E). Students completed a student profile sheet that confirmed the free and reduced lunch status and the results of the CRCT scores. The student profile included both names for my reference (see Appendix F).

After completing the student profile and minor’s assent form, students completed the reading inventory. The next step involved students going to the computer and completing the learning styles assessment. I sat with each student individually to review the process for answering the questions on line for the learning styles assessment. Upon completion of the learning styles assessment, I made two copies of the results and provided each student a copy. I reviewed the results with the students to help them understand their preferred learning style. Snacks were provided for the students during this meeting. The meeting lasted approximately one hour and thirty minutes. At the end of the meeting, I scheduled individual meetings with each student for the following week for the one on one interview.

The meetings with the students for the interview also took place at KMS in the main office conference room during the afternoon hours of June 2005. The interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. I informed each student that I would ask a series of questions and record their responses as they spoke. Students were asked to relax and give honest responses. I reminded students that they were not obligated to participate and if I asked a question they did not want to answer, we would skip it.

#### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed based on the responses provided by the students during the interviews, reading interest inventories, and online learning styles assessments. The

reading interest inventory and the interview provided the feedback to determine some of the popular culture interests and influence.

During the analysis stage, I utilized the process of coding as I looked for patterns of similarities in responses from each respondent. Practical considerations of space and imagined audience eventually determined the quantity of data contained in the written narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991). Some narrative researchers deal with detailed accounts of experience, while others prefer theory and abstraction. My critical narrative focused more on detailed accounts of experiences and less on theory. There is no one best system for analysis; the ultimate decisions about the narrative reside with the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

#### *Writing the Narratives*

Berry (2002) conducted a study that used verbatim responses to create a first-person narrative of African American males' storytelling about their experiences in mathematics using CRT as a framework. I chose the first-person narrative as the technique in sharing the voices of the African American males in this study based on the responses during the individual interviews. This allows for continuity in hearing the voices of each student as they share their experiences and perspectives about reading. The first-person narrative is a literary technique that allows the central character in storytelling to be brought to life by means of the language used to tell that story-- the narrative voice (Schweitzer, 1993). According to Schweitzer, the real strength of first-person storytelling is the "I" narrative; the story told in the person's own words provides a powerful technique that can achieve effects quite impossible with other points of view. As the students responded to the questions, I captured their responses in their own words

as they responded. Fairbanks (1996) discusses the many aspects of narrative research including a broad range of accounts in qualitative research, from first-person narratives to studies that interpret the stories others tell about their lives.

The Slave Narratives (The Library of Congress, 2001) represent a well-known use of first person-narratives. These narratives provide an invaluable first-person account of slavery and the individuals it affected. The narratives usually involve some attempt by the interviewers to reproduce in writing the spoken language of the people they interviewed. This parallels my goal as the researcher in this study to reproduce in writing the spoken words of the six African American male participants. The African American males in this study, like the slaves, also had a story to tell.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) remind us that the purpose of conducting a qualitative study is to produce findings, and the methods and strategies used are not ends in themselves. There is a danger in becoming so taken up with methods that the substantive findings are obscured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In an earlier writing, Denzin (1989) followed the conception of bracketing, which is to hold the phenomenon up for serious inspection, and suggested the following steps (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003):

1. Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.
2. Interpret the meanings of these phrases as an informed reader.
3. Obtain the participants' interpretation of these findings, if possible.
4. Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.

5. Offer a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in Step 4. (p. 65)

The bracketing process provided some strategies for me to consider during the analysis stage in reporting the findings. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that the researcher may categorize, group, and cluster the data in order to interpret the data. A major factor to be mindful of is that analysis and interpretation effectively balance description according to Denzin and Lincoln.

### *Coding Process*

The transcribing process was a lengthy process, as I made sure to capture all the spoken words of the students and maintain the integrity of the interview. I grouped responses together student by student. After transcribing, I used open coding by examining each line of the responses. I used a highlighter to code similar responses in orange and dissimilar responses in green. During the coding process, I looked for emerging themes. I coded responses that were unique to each student in blue to remind me to pay attention to the responses.

I categorized the emerging themes by grade level and managed the transcribed coded text to use in presenting the data. I referred to the coding text constantly to make sure I used the responses from the participants to convey their stories in an organized presentation. However, it was important for me to prioritize some of the data. According to Wolcott (1994), in the very act of constructing data out of experience, the qualitative researcher singles out some things as worthy of note and relegates others to the background.

As the researcher, I am charged with maintaining the integrity of interpreting the data received from the participants using thick descriptions in a written narrative format. More so, I must maintain the context of what is shared and the confidentiality of the participants.

### *Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research has the advantage to contribute to our knowledge base but only when it is conducted with a sense of trustworthiness and validity. Schloss and Smith (1999) made several recommendations for reliability and validity within qualitative research. Reliability is the consistency of measurement and the extent to which observations could be replicated by another independent recorder. As well as maintaining very detailed field notes that describe everything that occurred in an observation or during an interview, I made every attempt to adhere to this recommendation during the interview process. Further, Schloss and Smith recommended making distinctions during note taking between what actually happened and the interviewer's perceptions. My notes reflect precisely what was stated by the participants and what I observed. Some of my perceptions were based on observed behaviors of the participants.

Validity addresses the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure (Schloss & Smith, 1999). They recommend that to increase validity, the researcher should arrange to be in the setting for a period of time before he or she starts formally collecting data. This gives participants the opportunity to acclimate to the researcher's presence. I provided an opportunity for students to interact and have refreshments prior to the start of our first meeting. Also, it is important to establish rapport with participants, thereby, increasing the participants' comfort level. The

increased comfort level would help the participant to interact naturally with the researcher. Another recommendation is to use unobtrusive methods for recording data. My decision to use note taking to record the responses provided for unobtrusive recording of data without being distracted and on edge during a recorded section.

Another essential method for ensuring accuracy of perceptions in qualitative research is triangulation (Schloss & Smith, 1999). Triangulation involves confirming conclusions through more than one data source. This was accomplished in this study by using a reading inventory, learning styles assessment, and an interview to confirm the data using a variety of methods.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) shared three domains to ensure solid logic to defend qualitative research. First, all research must respond to canons of quality using criteria of soundness. This is the criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated. The use of triangulation in this research study provides for confirmability and credibility. Second, qualitative researchers must demonstrate the usefulness of the research for the conceptual framework and research questions. Third, the researcher must show the sensitivities and sensibilities to the research instrument. I have maintained sound and organized notes during the research process to ensure trustworthiness of this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF DATA AND CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyze the data from the research in this study. This chapter has two major sections. The first section is devoted to providing descriptive data from the participants. The data collected is represented from the two meetings held with the six African American male participants. The data from the three instruments used: (reading inventory, learning styles assessment, and interview) are also presented in this section. I presented responses exactly as presented by the participants. Any missing or incomplete data represents the lack of responses by the participants. The data reported in the first part is reported for each individual student in the following order: student profile, reading inventory, learning styles assessment, and interview. The student profile provides background information about the student. The data is organized beginning with the sixth grade students, proceeds to the seventh grade students, and ends with the eighth grade students. The obtained data was coded to look for prevalent themes of the participants. Participants chose pseudonyms to protect their identity and to maintain confidentiality. The interview uses the voice of the student participants; consequently, this part is in first person and may or may not be grammatically correct.

The data was coded for prevalent themes. Participants chose pseudonyms to protect their identity and to maintain confidentiality. The themes were used in an analysis of data across cases; the results of this analysis are presented in the second section of this chapter.

The data presented several areas for discussion in determining similarities and differences in the African American males that participated in this study on motivations to read. Reviewing the data across grade-levels (ex. sixth grade - sixth grade, seventh grade-seventh grade, etc...) provided a lateral comparison of the student's progress and thoughts about reading and at the same time, a vertical analysis (ex. sixth grade -eighth grade) of the same data. Differences in age, school experiences, and maturity levels in relation to the reading process were analyzed.

### *Que's Voice*

#### *Student Profile*

Que is a sixth grade student born June 27, 1993 (11 years of age). He has two brothers and one sister. Que does not pay anything for breakfast or lunch, which validates the free and reduced lunch status of this student. He scored 350 in reading on the Spring 2004 Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test, putting him in the exceed category of 60% and above. He indicated on the student profile that he is rarely late or absent from school (a few times a year), has never skipped a grade, but he circled that he had failed a grade. His overall estimated grade point average is B (83-90); he routinely engages in extracurricular activities and noted that his intentions are to attend college (Que's Student Profile, 2005). Even though Que was identified by his teacher as an above average student, he had to attend summer school for a low grade in reading. He explained to me that he got in trouble for playing in class too much this past school year and as a result his grades dropped. Que's mother and reading teacher felt that he should attend summer school. Que is a small framed young man exhibiting an eagerness to participate.

*Reading Interest Inventory*

Que responded to most of the reading inventory. However, he did not respond to certain questions. His responses to the questions are as follows (Que's Reading Inventory, 2005):

Table 1

Que's Interest Inventory

Reading Interest Inventory Questions	Responses
Would you rather visit a big city or go camping? Where?	I would want to go to Hawaii
Would you rather watch a video or read a book?	A book
What would you like to learn about? List your favorite TV shows List your favorite movies.	He did not answer Toonami Shrek2, Shark Tales
If you could choose the books for the school Media Center, what would you choose?	Adventure book
Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts (Comics, sports, news fashions, etc....)?	I read comics
Do you read magazines? If yes, list your favorite ones and tell why you like them.	He did not answer
How do you choose a book?	I want to learn something. I like adventure books.
Does anyone ever read aloud to you? If yes, when?	No
Do you ever read aloud to others? If yes, when?	Yes at home to brothers and sisters.
If someone were reading aloud in the Media Center, would you come to listen?	Probably
What would you like to hear being read?	Adventure
If you were an actress or actor, what kinds of parts would you want to play?	Fighting adventure type
What real person would you like to learn about?	Don't know
If you were an author, what kinds of books would you write?	Funny stories adventure stories

What book(s) are you reading for fun right now?	Did not answer
Why did you pick it?	Did not answer
Where did you get it?	Did not answer
I like to do the following very much	Read adventure stories; read about art/music/dancing; puzzles/assignments with instructions; read mysteries or detective stories; ride bicycles or skateboards or skate; read about painting/drawing; read comic books; play with animals; read about games; play board games; go shopping; read about famous people; read magazines; draw or paint; listen to music; read about cooking/food; and read funny books.
I like to do the following sometimes-	Build models; play trivia games; watch television, read about model cars/trains; read TV guides; read about history; play sports; read about judo/karate; play a musical instrument; go to museums; read hardback books; go to movies; read about real places; read the funnies; and go swimming.
I like to do the following very little	Read about plants

### *Learning Styles Assessment*

Que's learning styles assessment (2005) indicated he scored the highest as a visual learner (40%), auditory learner (32%), and tactile learner (27%).

### *Interview*

On the day of the interview, Que wore blue jeans with an appliqué and a gray shirt. Throughout the interview process he would sit on his hands, pull his ear while he was thinking, and often times he looked away. Other than that, he exhibited very few emotions or facial expressions. These responses are related back in Que's own words.

In elementary school I was excellent in reading. In middle school I did all right. My grades dropped from C - D to a D back to a C. I begin to start playing. I like most about reading is I like to read adventurous stories. Sometimes it will have adventure in it or be funny. The pictures – they are creative. The least thing I like least about reading- I don't like it when I get stuck on words. When story be boring-when it doesn't have excitement in it. Yes, I am good at reading, when I keep on going without stopping. When I don't get stuck on a word reading. Sometimes I ask questions what is this word? I try to sound it out-It may come out the wrong way. At home, I read sometimes on the weekend and sometimes on the days of the week three or two days. At school, I read all the time.

When he was asked how well he comprehended what he read, he answered, “What's comprehend?” I explained to him that comprehend means to have a clear understanding of what you read. Que continued to comment, “ I can understand it. I comprehend a lot.” He indicated that he enjoyed books, magazines such as the kid magazines or the teen magazines, and comic books like Dragon Ball and Yugioh. He dislikes books about cars.

Que continued to articulate readily during the interview.

At my house, my cousins might be reading. They are five and seven years old. My auntie and me might be reading. My grandmother might be reading the Bible or books to my two cousins. My aunt (28 years old) read the most about a lawyer. She is in law school. She got her bachelor's degree. I am encouraged to read by grandma and my parents. In reading, I expect to do the best I can do and try harder. My friends would describe me as alright as a reader and that I like to read

different kinds of books. Some of my friends like to read comic books.

Sometimes they are good at it and sometimes they are not good. They like to read new books, joke books, adventure books or drawing books. If I could write a book that would motivate other African American males to read I would write a book about people who don't have many things, people unfortunate, people who are ungrateful for what they have when other people don't have nothing at all. A book with pictures of the people who are ungrateful and pictures of people who don't have nothing. It is cool to be a good reader. Mr. Hatcher is a good reading teacher I have had. He taught me in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and he is White. He was good because he know how to express the characters. He picks out good books; he knows what the students like about books, and he encourages you to do better.

Ms. Urban is a White teacher I had in 1<sup>st</sup> grade that was not so good. She will give you a book to read and give you an activity to do and would not explain it. My teachers would help pronounce the word and sound it out all the way to help me learn to read. They would teach new words I've not had before. Ms. Carbo, my teacher in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, encouraged me to go beyond what is required in class. She encouraged me to do a lot better, to do a little bit at a time and not the same thing, and to do something else. Yes, it worked; she taught me you could keep on trying and never stop. Some students are good at reading because they don't quit. They keep on going, they try to sound out the word, they try to move on to bigger words and move on to longer books. Some students are not good at reading because they just quit and don't try to sound words out. They give up and don't want to do it any more. They don't use proper language; they don't want to. They

were never interested in reading, parents never read to them, and they may watch TV all day and never thought about it. My grandmother helps me when I am having trouble in reading. She helps me try to read new things, and monitors my reading progress. She tells me not to point at words while I'm reading to keep up with the words, and never pause while reading. I have not been involved in any kind of school or after school reading enrichment program. The textbooks are interesting and I understand the information in them. At home, I have this book my brother bought me. I have some books in the garage, and I have some magazines. In the classroom, we have mystery books. Books similar to me. I like learning in a quiet room reading about it. I like my teachers teach in a fun way. I don't like when they teach in a boring way, when you can't understand them when they keep using big words. They get you all confused. I read books written about different play station games. They would be fun because some games tell different stories. I would rather read a hard copy of a book because some times a book on the computer might be missing some words or might be scrambled and then you have to pull the book up on the computer.

*Jermaine's Voice*

*Student Profile*

Jermaine is a 12- year-old sixth grader, was born May 8, 1993. He has two sisters and does not pay anything for breakfast or lunch. He indicated that he is very rarely late to school or absent from school. Jermaine's estimated grade point average is a B (83-90) and on the Spring 2004 Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test he scored 285 in reading. This score puts him in the 35% range and indicates that he did not meet the

standard for reading. Jermaine has never failed a grade or skipped a grade. He does not routinely engage in extracurricular activities. His future plans include attending college (Jermaine’s Student Profile, 2005).

*Reading Interest Inventory*

Jermaine was thorough in responding to the reading inventory. His responses to the questions are as follows:

Table 2

Jermaine’s Interest Inventory

Reading Interest Inventory Questions	Responses
Would you rather visit a big city or go camping? Where?	I would want to go to Bahamas.
Would you rather watch a video or read a book?	Read a book
What would you like to learn about?	How to be a engineer
List your favorite TV shows	Sports, games
List your favorite movies.	James Bond, Walker from the Texas ranger action book
If you could choose the books for the school Media Center, what would you choose?	
Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts (Comics, sports, news fashions, etc....)?	No
Do you read magazines? If yes, list your favorite ones and tell why you like them.	No
How do you choose a book?	I like the author and the picture on the cover. I like adventure books
Does anyone ever read aloud to you? If yes, when?	No
Do you ever read aloud to others? If yes, when?	No
If someone were reading aloud in the Media Center, would you come to listen?	Yes
What would you like to hear being read?	Funny stories

If you were an actress or actor, what kinds of parts would you want to play?	The part that make you happen
What real person would you like to learn about?	Mike Epps
If you were an author, what kinds of books would you write?	Adventure stories
What book(s) are you reading for fun right now?	It was about snakes
Why did you pick it?	Because it look good to read
Where did you get it?	Out of the library
I like to do the following very much	Read adventure stories; play trivia games; read about animals; read about model cars/trains; play board games; play sports; go shopping; listen to music; read about sports; read funny books; go to the movies; read about cars or motorcycles; and go swimming.

### *Learning Styles Assessment*

Jermaine's results on the learning styles assessment indicated that he is equally a tactile learner (36%) and a visual learner (36%), and he scored 27% as an auditory learner.

### *Interview*

Jermaine is a very small student. He is about 4' 8" tall with an average weight of 80 pounds. Jermaine remained serious throughout the entire interview as if he was often in serious thought. These words are his words as presented to me:

In elementary school I did well. I made Bs and in middle school I made Cs. For reading I like the most, the authors, the design on the covers, the characters how they are dressed, dancing on the pictures, make books funny by putting jokes in

the books. The most I like about reading is reading teaches you stuff-learn drawing and about your life. I like least about reading when they have long pages. Yes, I am good at reading. I will practice reading sometime-practice reading hard words. I read every night at home before I go to bed. I read at break time at school and when we go to the library. To comprehend what I am reading, I continue going over words until I get it right. I comprehend some of the things that I read. I enjoy reading books and chapter books. I dislike some author books-books that have lots and lots of words. At my house, you would not see people reading. The people that you would see reading would be me and my sister who is four years old. I read Wish Bone Bob book and my sister read Callu books about little cartoon character from television. I am encouraged to read by my cousin when she comes over to the house; she's eighteen years old. In reading, I expect by looking at the pictures, learn how to read all of the hard words, and read the quotation marks in the book. My friends think I am a good reader and my friends are good too. If I could write a book to motivate other African American males to read I would write a book about life, how people should look, stop people from doing violence, and stop them that do drugs and stuff. It is cool to be a good reader. Ms. Ivey, a Black teacher, was a good teacher. She was good because she would teach me more words that I did not know and pronounce the words. She would give us hard words and help us with it and if we don't get it, she would tell us to use a vowel. When asked to describe a not so good teacher, Jermaine stated, "I don't know. Mr. Johnson, sometimes don't understand what he be saying. My teachers give me books and gave us scripts with lots of words; we had to say

them; this played a role in me learning to read.” Jermaine indicated that he had not been encouraged by a teacher to go beyond what is required in class.

Some students are good at reading because good readers keep on doing what they’re doing in reading. Some students need to practice more to be good in reading and learn words. My teacher or my grandmother helps when I am having trouble in reading. They will tell me or tell me to pronounce it out. My cousin, Latonya, monitors my reading progress. I have to tell her my grade. I read to her and she will tell me how I am doing. If I do good, she will tell me that’s good. I am not involved or have ever been involved in any kind of in school or after school reading enrichment program. Textbooks have good stories. I like the way textbooks are made telling me about the stories. There was a story about Candy Stand. They were poor and had to go to work making candy. It was teaching us that people should go to work and if they don’t they won’t have money and will live on the streets and stuff. That you should always work and don’t sit around and do nothing. Like in social studies we read about Europe, Asia, Indonesia, Panama; some relate to me and some don’t; they tell us about what is going on in the country. Some countries don’t do what other countries do. We, the US have football teams and some other countries don’t. Some textbooks relate to me and some of them don’t. I understand the information that I read in textbooks.

At home, I have books about boys similar to me. In the classroom, we have books about working, careers like doctors, engineers, sports, and cooking books. I learn by working in groups and reading by myself. I like for teachers to write it on the board and read it out to us. I don’t like when you trying to find a word and they

tell you to find it yourself, when you trying to find a page in a book and they won't help. Books about different play station games help you to try to beat the game. I read them and I like them a lot. I would rather read a hard copy of a book than the book on the computer. I don't have to find a computer; I can just look at .

### *Rico's Voice*

#### *Student Profile*

Rico is thirteen years old in the seventh grade and was born August 9, 1991. He has two sisters and is the youngest in his family. His goal is to complete high school. Rico is never late to school; however; he is absent from school a few times a week. His estimated grade point average is a C, a range of 74%-82%, with a score of 282 in reading on the Spring 2004 Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). This score on the CRCT puts Rico in the 35% group for the state reference test confirming that he did not meet the standard in reading. Rico indicated that he has not failed a grade or ever skipped a grade. He routinely engages in extracurricular activities. His free and reduced lunch status is verified by the fact that he pays fifty cents for breakfast and for lunch.

#### *Reading Interest Inventory*

Rico was thorough in responding to the reading inventory. His responses to the questions are as follows:

Table 3

Rico's Interest Inventory

Reading Interest Inventory Questions	Responses
Would you rather visit a big city or go camping? Where?	Visit big city/New York
Would you rather watch a video or read a book?	Read a book
What would you like to learn about?	Cars
List your favorite TV shows	BET
List your favorite movies.	House of Wax
If you could choose the books for the school Media Center, what would you choose?	A lot of sports, cars, chase
Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts (Comics, sports, news fashions, etc....)?	Yes, Comics
Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts (Comics, sports, news fashions, etc....)?	No
Do you read magazines? If yes, list your favorite ones and tell why you like them.	No
How do you choose a book?	I want to learn something, the picture on the cover, and a friend recommended it
Does anyone ever read aloud to you?	No
If yes, when?	
Do you ever read aloud to others? If yes, when?	Yes, nephew
If someone were reading aloud in the Media Center, would you come to listen?	Yes, if I like the book
What would you like to hear being read?	An action book
If you were an actress or actor, what kinds of parts would you want to play?	The star of the movie
What real person would you like to learn about?	T. I.
If you were an author, what kinds of books would you write?	A car book
What book(s) are you reading for fun right now?	Sports
Why did you pick it?	I like sports
Where did you get it?	School
I like to do the following very much	Build models, play trivia games, collect things, read about animals, read about world events, read about model cars/trains, read about insects, ride bicycles or skateboards or skate, read about the human body, read TV guides, read about history, play with animals, read about games, read paperback books, read

I like to do the following sometimes-	romances, play board games, read science fiction or fantasy, play sports, go shopping, read about famous people, read magazines, listen to music, read about cooking/food, read about sports, go to museums, read funny books, read about cars or motorcycles, go swimming, and read about careers.
I like to do the following the least-	Read adventure stories, go camping, puzzles/assignments with instructions, read about armies/navies, watch television, read comic books, read about plants, read about foreign lands, read newspapers, read about judo/karate, play a musical instrument, read hardback books, read about stamp collecting, read the funnies, and use the encyclopedias. Read about art/music/dancing, read mysteries or detective stories, read about painting/drawing, draw or paint, read about exercise or health, read about space or science, or read about real places.

*Learning Styles Assessment*

Rico’s results on the learning styles assessment were equal in all the three areas of learning styles. He scored 38% as a tactile learner, 32% as a visual learner, and 31% as an auditory learner.

*Interview*

On the day I interviewed Rico, he wore a White t-shirt with a red, white and black athletic jacket, denim shorts, and black athletic shoes. During the interview process, he often would put his hands in his mouth and play with his teeth. He was eager to speak

with me and smiled often. He was in summer school because he had many discipline issues, which created school absences and which put him behind this school year.

Rico explained that in elementary school he did well academically. In middle school, he stated, “I do good one semester--then I drop another semester. I get in a lot of trouble.” Rico eagerly shared his voice by responding to the interview.

What I like most about reading is that you never know what can happen and what I like least is having to do a book report after reading. I am good at reading because I was practicing on it a lot by reading comic books and newspapers and stuff. I don't read at home that much, but I read at school a lot because I want to. I comprehend what I read. I enjoy reading books about sports and cars, but I dislike reading poetry and mysteries. At my house, you would see a whole bunch of books because my mother reads a lot. My mom reads books about murders and science fiction. She encourages me to read. My expectations for myself, is to be able to read if I need to and to read to succeed. My friends would describe me as a good reader, a fast reader that read out loud fast, and I read a book fast. My friends can read; they read slowly, but they like to read. If I could write a book that would motivate other African American males to read, I would write a life story about me, about my past, about how hard it was growing up as a young Black male. It is cool to be a good reader. Ms. Goodson is a good reading teacher I have had. She would tell you something and if you still don't get it, she would pull you off to the side to help you. In the third grade, I had Ms. Overson that was not a good reading teacher. Ms. Overson would fuss, and if you don't get it, she would get mad. My teachers taught me if I was reading a book and didn't get it,

they taught me how to break it down. I have been encouraged by a teacher to go beyond what is required in class. If I have a failing grade, the teacher would let me stay late so I can do more work so I can pass. Yes, the encouragement worked. Now I know how to read better and I can sound out difficult words. Some students are good at reading if they read a lot of books. They are not good if they don't try-they just don't care. When I have trouble reading, my mom helps me at home. If I don't get the word she helps me. She checks to see if I remember; if not, she still helps me. My sister also monitors my reading progress. They tell me if I'm reading too slow or stopping too many times. I went to Sylvan Learning Center and it helped me with reading. Instead of reading all the way down, I had to stop at the periods. The science and math textbooks are interesting. The sixth grade language arts I had already seen it. They relate to things I do like riding bikes and sports. I understand them unless it is something new that I am just being introduced to. At home, I have magazines, sports stuff like Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan, and movies. In some classes the books were nice and in some others they were messed up. I learn from computers instead of flipping pages. I can click it and learn by seeing. I like for my teachers to use overhead projectors, computers, or something. I don't like for my teachers to tell us to look it up in a book and telling you to read long chapters. I like books written about different play station games. It tells about what is coming out and what is on them. I would read them. I would rather read a book on computer, visual, and move the mouse. Rico made a suggestion to me about how to get more boys to read books, "Give them books they like to read; then maybe they would be more interested."

## *Kobe's Voice*

### *Student Profile*

Kobe is a thirteen-year-old seventh grader soon to be eighth grader born November 11, 1991. Kobe is one of five children, three sisters and one brother. Not only does he plan to complete high school, his plans are to attend college and graduate. He has never been absent from school and very rarely arrived late to school. He has never failed a grade or skipped a grade. He routinely plays basketball as an extracurricular activity. He receives free lunch. Kobe estimates his grade point average as a B in the 83% to 90% range, and he scored 371 in reading on the Spring 2004 Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test. His score on the CRCT puts him in the 60% group across the state with other seventh graders taking this test.

### *Reading Interest Inventory*

Kobe's responses to the reading inventory paint a clear picture about his sports-oriented interest. This explains why he chose the name of Kobe Bryant as his pseudonym. Kobe articulates other interest as noted in the reading inventory.

Table 4

#### Kobe's Interest Inventory

Reading Interest Inventory Questions	Responses
Would you rather visit a big city or go camping? Where?	Visit Texas
Would you rather watch a video or read a book?	Watch a video
What would you like to learn about?	I would like learn about history
List your favorite TV shows	Martin, In the House, and The Fresh Prince of Bel Air

List your favorite movies.

If you could choose the books for the school Media Center, what would you choose?

Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts (Comics, sports, news fashions, etc....)?

Do you read magazines? If yes, list your favorite ones and tell why you like them. How do you choose a book?

Does anyone ever read aloud to you?

If yes, when?

Do you ever read aloud to others? If yes, when?

If someone were reading aloud in the Media Center, would you come to listen?

What would you like to hear being read?

If you were an actress or actor, what kinds of parts would you want to play?

What real person would you like to learn about?

If you were an author, what kinds of books would you write?

What book(s) are you reading for fun right now?

Why did you pick it?

Where did you get it?

I like to do the following very much

I like to do the following sometimes-

I like to do the following the least-

The longest yard, Coach Carter, and Drumline

I would choose sports books

I read the sport category

I read "slam" magazines, I like them because I play sports.

I want to learn something, I like the author, the picture on the cover, a friend recommended it, I like sports books

No

No

Sometimes

I would like to hear about sports

I would want to be the main character

Kobe Bryant

I would make sports magazines

E.S.P.N. and "Slam" magazines

I just love sports

From the stores around my neighborhood

Watch television, read TV guides, play sports, read magazines, listen to music, read about sports, go to the movies, go swimming, and read about careers

Read adventure stories, play trivia games, read about art/music/dancing, collect things, read about world events, read about the human body, read about history, read about games, read paperback books, read newspapers, go shopping, read about famous people, read about exercise or health, read about cooking/food, read funny books, read about real places, read about cars or motorcycles, and read the funnies

Play trivia games, go camping,

puzzles/assignments with instructions, read about armies/navies, read about animals, read about model cars/trains, read about insects, read mysteries or detectives stories, ride bicycles or skateboards or skate, read about painting/drawing, read comic books, read about plants, play with animals, read romances, play board games, read about foreign lands, read science fiction or fantasy, read about judo/karate, play a musical instrument, draw or paint, read about space or science, go to museums, read hardback books, read about stamp collecting, and use encyclopedias

### *Learning Styles Assessment*

The results of the Learning Styles Assessment indicated that Kobe is equal in the three areas as an auditory learner, tactile learner, and a visual learner. He scored 34% as an auditory learner, 33% as a tactile learner, and 33% as a visual learner.

### *Interview*

By far, Kobe is one of the tallest of the six students participating in this study. I estimate his height as 5' 7" on a thin built body frame. He has a really big smile with a laid back demeanor. He is wearing his hair in braids with a Miami Heat jersey on indicative of his interest in basketball. During the interview, he maintains a serious look on his face, sits straight, and looks down mostly throughout the process. Hear Kobe's voice as he reflects and responds to the interview questions.

In elementary school I had a higher reading level than actual grade level all the way during elementary. In middle school, I did well I always made A's. I like reading because you learn more things about history and things that you don't know. Reading builds vocabulary. What I like least about reading is I don't like to finish the book especially if it is boring, but I will complete if required. I am good at reading because I know a lot of words and how to pronounce the words. For words I don't understand. I look up in dictionary. I read every week not necessary every day. At school, I read every day. I comprehend schoolbooks a little bit and I comprehend self-selections a lot. I enjoy magazines because they provide daily latest happenings. I dislike science books because they are boring. In my house, my sister reads college books, mommy reads magazines, and I read my sports magazines and books. My sister reads the most; this is her second year in college, and she reads her college books. Both, my mom and sister encourage me to read. In reading, I expect to be able to pronounce every word in the book. I also expect to learn more. My friends think I am a good reader, and I think my friends are good readers. I sometimes see them reading for fun. If I could write a book that would motivate other African American males to read I would write a history book telling them about their culture and slavery. I would add more details to promote them to read and make the story exciting. It is cool to be a good reader. My friends don't mind that I am a good reader- they respect the fact that I am a good reader. I had a good reading teacher in the fourth grade name Mr. Thomas, an African American. He explained the book so that we could understand. He made it exciting. At the end of the book, he would have us write a paragraph

summarizing the best part of the book. Then we would read that part of the book to the class. Ms. Jetson, an African American, one of my seventh grade teachers was not a good teacher. When she reads she mispronounces words and we would try to correct her and she would not listen. She would also misspell words. My teachers played a big role in me learning to read, but my mom played the biggest role. My teachers would encourage me when I finish my work early they would continue to give me more and more work until the other students finish working. It worked because it put me ahead of the other students. Some students are good at reading because they read more than others and pay more attention. Other students are not so good because they don't pay attention, play a lot, and think reading is boring. When I have trouble in reading, my teacher and mom help me in pronunciation and spelling. They challenge and push me when I don't feel like reading the whole book to read it, and my sister encourages me to continue reading instead of stopping to do something else. My sister also helps me by helping me with words. I also participate in a summer reading program to read a set number of books and the library keep track. For example, you would have to read twenty books per week and return them to the library. The library would keep your name on a chart and they put stars by my name for each book completed. The student with the most stars receives a surprise. It helped me to read more books and to read better. At home, I have novels about Harry Potter, science fiction, and sports. In the classroom, we have history books, dictionaries, magazines, and math books like algebra, science, social studies, language arts, and workbooks. I like the teacher to lecture to me and I like when I work with

friends. I don't like for my teachers to tell me to just look in textbook to read. I think books about play station games are interesting and I would read them. I would rather read a hard copy of a book because I can keep reading it until I understand it and I don't have to keep going on the computer.

*Tay's Voice*

*Student Profile*

Tay is an eighth grade student. He turned fourteen on April 17, 1991. His goal is to complete college. He is rarely absent or late to school. His grade point average is a C in the range of 74% to 82%, and he has never failed a grade or been skipped a grade. He routinely engages in extracurricular activities. He receives free lunch. He scored 372 in reading on the Spring 2004 Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test. Tay does plan to attend college and graduate. He has two brothers and one sister.

*Reading Interest Inventory*

Tay's reading inventory responses reveals his reading interests.

Table 5

Tay's Interest Inventory

Reading Interest Inventory Questions	Responses
Would you rather visit a big city or go camping? Where?	Go to a big city, New York, Los Angeles, etc...
Would you rather watch a video or read a book?	Depends what's on T.V.
What would you like to learn about?	How to read at a faster speed, or anything else that would help my future
List your favorite TV shows	UPN 69, WB 36
List your favorite movies.	Unleashed, Assault on Precinct 13, Elektra

If you could choose the books for the school Media Center, what would you choose?	Fantasy, mysteries, scary books, adventure
Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts (Comics, sports, news fashions, etc...)?	Comics, Sports
Do you read magazines? If yes, list your favorite ones and tell why you like them. How do you choose a book?	Yes, Jet because it tells you about interesting I want to learn something, I like the author, the picture on the cover, a friend recommended it, and I like adventure book
Does anyone ever read aloud to you? If yes, when?	No
Do you ever read aloud to others? If yes, when?	No
If someone were reading aloud in the Media Center, would you come to listen? What would you like to hear being read?	Yes, if its interesting
If you were an actress or actor, what kinds of parts would you want to play?	The action or adventure part
What real person would you like to learn about?	I don't know
If you were an author, what kinds of books would you write?	Fantasy, and adventure books
What book(s) are you reading for fun right now?	The book of Enchantment Elfstones of Shannara
Why did you pick it?	They were fun and interesting
Where did you get it?	Library and teacher
I like to do the following very much	Read adventure stories, puzzles/assignments with instructions, read about animals, watch television, read about insects, read mysteries or detective stories, ride bicycles or skateboards or skate, read about plants, play with animals, read science fiction or fantasy, play sports, read about sports, read funny books, and go to the movies
I like to do the following sometimes-	Play trivia games, read about armies/navies, read about world events, read about model cars/trains, read about the human body, read about painting/drawing, read comic books, read history books, read about games, read paperback books, play board games, read about foreign lands, read newspapers, read

I like to do the following the least-

about Judo/karate, play a musical instrument, go shopping, read about famous people, read magazines, and draw or paint

Build models, go camping, read about art/music/dancing, collect things, read TV guides, read romances, read about exercises and health, go to museums, and read about stamp collecting

### *Learning Styles Assessment*

Tay's results for the Learning Styles Assessment revealed that he is a visual learner (36%) and tactile learner (35%). His lowest area was an auditory learner with a score of 29%.

### *Interview*

Tay presented himself as very helpful. He arrived very early for both meetings. His image is that of a clean cut outgoing individual. He is on a growing spurt standing about 5'8" to 5'9" and weighing about 137 pounds. He arrives at the interview wearing jeans and a blue T-shirt with the words Ice-Berg written across the front. During the interview, he continuously twisted and turned in the swivel chair. However, he was glad to share his voice with me about reading:

Elementary, it was real good. I did the best I could do. My scores were high--I made C's, B's, and A's. I did well in middle school also. What I like most about reading is how interesting the book is. If the book is interesting, I can picture it in my head. It helps to understand it more. The thing I like least about reading is that books sometimes start off boring or end boring, and it makes me not want to read

it anymore. I am good at reading because I read a lot. I read in my spare time. I read a lot, every day at home and at school. I will read at different places if I see a book. I comprehend well because I take my time with what I read. I like books, magazines, and comics from newspapers. I read poems and things on the Internet. There is no reading material that I dislike. If you walk in my house, you would see my mom reading the Bible in the morning, but mostly in the evening. She also reads motivational books and Biblical stories. My brother and sister read evenings and night times every now and then. They read funny books, cartoons, and comics. But, my mom reads the most. My mom and my biological dad encourage me to read. The expectation I have for myself in reading is to read to do the best I can and to read fast with an understanding. My friends would say that I am a good reader and I would say that my friends are good readers. If I could write a book to motivate other African American males to read, I would write a motivational book. I would tell them that when I was a kid I did not read as much as I read now. The more you read the better you become. It will open up things for you--make you smarter. Yes, it is cool to be a good reader. Ms. Casper, a White teacher, and Ms. Eaton, a Black teacher, are two good teachers that I had this year. They both read a lot. Ms. Casper knows different variations of words to use. I am fortunate; I have had good teachers--no bad ones. My teachers encouraged me a lot and showed me what advantages learning reading would give me. Mrs. Ladson, my third grade teacher encouraged me. She knew I was really smart. She always encouraged me to do my best to do better. And yes, it worked. She kept telling me never to give up and keep trying harder and harder. She told me to use

a dictionary to look up words I don't know. Students good at reading know what they will get from it and don't care what others think. They practice at reading and make sure they understand it. Students that are not good don't care. For them, reading is not a necessity and they care what people say. They let others influence them and "jone" on them about reading. My mom and teachers helps me with understanding words and what the book is saying. Other than my parents and teachers, my peers monitor my progress. They help me with things I don't get. I am not involved in any additional reading enrichment program. It is not about textbooks in school but how the teacher teaches. It is a good way to learn-just reading. It is about how the teacher helps you out. Textbooks are not really interesting. But, if you really want to learn different things they are. Textbooks help to provide information about every day life such as politics. When grown ups are talking about politics, you can have a pretty good conversation. I understand the information in some textbooks, depends on what kind of words they use. At my house, you will find encyclopedias, mystery books, funny books, scary books, and science fiction books. In the classroom, we have non-fiction, a lot of different genres, non-fiction, fantasy, and mysteries. Some of books, about 1 out of 20 or 3 out of 9 are about African American males. I am an oral learner, and I prefer for my teachers to lecture, but only if it is interesting. The least thing I prefer for my teachers to use is a textbook. I like books written about different play station games if they help you. I read them to find out what is coming out. I would rather have a hard copy of a book. I rather hold a book than use a mouse to scroll down the screen. Reading is good and really helps you.

*Trae's Voice*

*Student Profile*

Trae is another eighth grade student. He is thirteen years old, born August 22, 1991. Currently, his plans are to complete high school. He is very rarely late to school, and he has been absent a few times a year. His grade point average is a C in the 74% to 82%. He has never failed a grade or skipped a grade. He receives free lunch and has two brothers and three sisters. His reading score on the Spring 2004 Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test is 282, putting him in the 35%. He did not meet the standard based on this score.

*Reading Interest Inventory*

Trae responded in brevity to the reading inventory. His responses are direct.

Table 6

Trae's Interest Inventory

Reading Interest Inventory Questions	Responses
Would you rather visit a big city or go camping? Where?	Go to a big city, New York, Los Angeles, etc...
Would you rather watch a video or read a book?	Depends what's on T.V.
What would you like to learn about?	How to read at a faster speed, or anything else that would help my future
List your favorite TV shows	UPN 69, WB 36
List your favorite movies.	Unleashed, Assault on Precinct 13, Elektra
If you could choose the books for the school Media Center, what would you choose?	Fantasy, mysteries, scary books, adventure
Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts (Comics, sports, news fashions, etc...)?	Comics, Sports

Do you read magazines? If yes, list your favorite ones and tell why you like them. How do you choose a book?	Yes, Jet because it tells you about interesting I want to learn something, I like the author, the picture on the cover, a friend recommended it, and I like adventure book
Does anyone ever read aloud to you? If yes, when?	No
Do you ever read aloud to others? If yes, when?	No
If someone were reading aloud in the Media Center, would you come to listen? What would you like to hear being read?	Yes, if its interesting
If you were an actress or actor, what kinds of parts would you want to play?	The action or adventure part
What real person would you like to learn about?	I don't know
If you were an author, what kinds of books would you write?	Fantasy, and adventure books
What book(s) are you reading for fun right now?	The book of Enchantment Elfstones of Shannara
Why did you pick it?	They were fun and interesting
Where did you get it?	Library and teacher
I like to do the following very much	Read adventure stories, puzzles/assignments with instructions, read about animals, watch television, read about insects, read mysteries or detective stories, ride bicycles or skateboards or skate, read about plants, play with animals, read science fiction or fantasy, play sports, read about sports, read funny books, and go to the movies
I like to do the following sometimes-	Play trivia games, read about armies/navies, read about world events, read about model cars/trains, read about the human body, read about painting/drawing, read comic books, read history books, read about games, read paperback books, play board games, read about foreign lands, read newspapers, read about Judo/karate, play a musical instrument, go shopping, read about famous people, read magazines, and draw or paint
I like to do the following the least-	Build models, go camping, read about art/music/dancing, collect things, read TV

guides, read romances, read about exercises and health, go to museums, and read about stamp collecting

### *Learning Styles Assessment*

Trae's results for the Learning Styles Assessment indicated he is a tactile learner (41%), visual learner (30%), and an auditory learner (29%).

### *Interview*

Trae is the jokester out of the group. He takes pride in teasing and joning his peers about what they are wearing and how they look. He laughs quite often and takes a light-hearted approach to conversations. However, he was always early for our appointments and showed much enthusiasm over sharing his voice for this study. Trae is about 5'3" inches and weighs approximately 126 pounds. He arrives wearing a black T-shirt, denim shorts with side pockets and black athletic shoes. Listen to Trae's voice:

During my whole elementary school, I got nothing but As and Bs. Really math and reading are my favorite subjects, I always do well. I just received my report card and made an A by Ms. C, my language arts teacher. Reading is the class I do the best in and it is the easiest. I like reading because you get to explore new things and learn new words. If you sit down with reading, it will take you places you never thought you would go until you are an adult. You learn so many new things. What I don't like about reading is that it is like long books, boring books, and stuff that is too hard for me to understand. I am good at reading, it is easy for me to comprehend things and it is fun. How can you not like something that is fun? I read a lot, just about everyday and at nighttime. I read magazines. When

I'm on punishment, my mom assigns me books to read. Last summer I read, Make me wanna holler; it was four hundred and seventeen pages. I like reading books such as suspense, comedy, something that makes me laugh, and take me on an adventure when I'm reading. Something that makes it interesting. I don't like documentaries and long boring books about events that happen in the past. Comic books are boring to read because the little circles coming out of the peoples mouth is hard to figure out and it's confusing. Just about everybody reads at my house. My brother is reading on the couch in the living room, How to get rich. I will be on my bed reading a book called Babylon boys. My teacher, Ms. C. gave it to me so I could read it over the summer. My mom would be on the computer; she used to read a lot. She would get books from a book club and read books like Milk in my coffee. My brother is in college at Shaw University. He reads the most and likes to read about how to get rich. My brother and my mother encourage me to read. My brother would sit me down and we would read and talk about what we read. Sometimes he would give me books he's already read so that way he can tell if I really read it. The expectations I have from reading is to get good grades and you learn new things. Everybody wants to learn new things. My friends would say that I read mostly during the week because I don't be outside. If they see me, they see me with a book. On the weekend, I don't read as much. They say that I'm a good reader. My friends really don't read unless they are at school. They read O.K. I would write a book to motivate other African American males to read like a documentary, even though, I don't like them. Like my brother is reading one now by Tavis Smiley, Do what's right. I would do that. It would encourage them

to do their best. It would be interesting. It would tell them how to do their best. If you read, you would do your best. It is cool to be a good reader. My language arts teacher this year is a good teacher because when she reads out loud in class, she reads with expressions in her voice like what's in the book. She keeps it simple and it is easy to comprehend what she is saying. My fifth grade teacher, Mr. E, he is Nigerian. He doesn't really want to hear nothing you have to say. If someone is reading out loud and need help and you try to help he would tell you to "shut up." Then when he pronounces words and you try to correct him he would not listen. He was a foreigner and did not want help. All of my teachers played a big role in me learning to read. When I was little, I really did not like to read. I got good grades, and my teachers really encourage me to read. In elementary we would have spelling test and not read a lot. I got good grades. Then we would read. I remember in the sixth grade I got in trouble and Mr. Wimbush made me sit in the corner and read a book. They play a big role. My teachers encourage me to read more. We only had to read one certain book in Ms. C's class. She would pull me over and give me more books to read. If I give her a progress report on them, she would give me extra points. It did work because I got a good grade in her class. The students that are good at reading really like to read and they like to write. Some students that are not good probably don't care or don't like to read. They don't like to read because they like to hang out and they want to do other things like go out and fight. They don't have any sense. My brother told me you can hide something from an African American in a book, and they won't find it because they don't like to look or read. When I am having

trouble in reading, Ms. C and my brother helps me. If I'm reading out loud and I can't pronounce a word, Ms. C helps me. My brother helps me comprehend at home. He gives me those big fat books and sits with me. I have not attended any type of reading enrichment programs at school or outside of school. Some stories in the reading textbook be interesting, some be boring, but most are boring. The kids don't relate to me and the kids don't look like me. The kids look like all ethnic groups, Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics. Across the board they're hard to understand--science and social studies. The reading is easier but the stories boring. At home, we have books about how to get rich and people that got rich. We have comedy like Goosebumps. My momma got like them drama books. At school, all have kinds of books. In Ms. C's class we have drama, Goosebumps, funny books, suspense, documentaries, and biographies. I can learn in the classroom when it's quiet and the teacher is standing up teaching. I like for the teacher to lecture. But I like to do my work standing up with one knee in the chair. I like when it's dark. I like the overhead to be on it helps the teacher from not talking a long time and you can just take notes. I don't like how my sixth grade math teacher did. Like she will assign you a page and you don't understand. When you try to ask, she would start lecturing. Or when they put it on the board and go sit down in the back and eat. They don't help you, and we really don't learn anything. I don't have an interest in books about different play station games. They're not interesting to me. I would rather have a hard copy of a book than a book on the computer. Because with the hard copy I can take it with me anywhere

I go. Like if I get on the airplane I can take it and read it, but on the computer you have to sit there and just be bored.

### Cross-Case Analysis

After the data were presented and coded, several themes emerged. To facilitate comparison, the themes were categorized as follows: (1) Attitudes, habits, and perceptions about reading and education, (2) Gender identity and peer identity (3) Family expectations and teacher expectations, (4) Popular Culture interests, (5) Textbooks, and (6) Learning styles and teaching styles. Analyzing these themes in the different stories of these participants will provide a glimpse into what motivates low-achieving and high-achieving African American males to read. This cross-case analysis compare students within grade level and across grade levels and simultaneously compare within identified reading levels (low achievers to low achievers and high achievers to high achievers) and across reading levels (low achievers to high achievers).

### Que and Jermaine

#### *Attitudes, Habits, and Perceptions about Reading and Education*

My two sixth grade students are the same age and of similar maturity levels. Both students did well academically in elementary school, and in middle school they have comparable grade averages. Que and Jermaine's plans are to attend college. For theme one, attitudes about reading, Que and Jermaine both attest to being good readers. Both students enjoy books with pictures and funny books. They associate reading with the ability to pronounce and read a lot of words, and find the inability of understanding words as their stumbling block to reading. Whereas Jermaine, our lower reader, admits to reading every night before bed, Que, the higher reader, only reads sometimes at home,

but daily at school. These students believe that perseverance is the key to be good at reading you have to continue to practice and not quit. Again, learning more words is more important than being good at reading. Similar themes surfaced in their ideas of writing books to motivate other African American males to read. The themes are life themes of suffering, hopelessness, hopefulness, encouragement to do better, and gratefulness. These themes represent real life experiences that these students see and are exposed to in their daily lives.

#### *Gender and Peer Identity*

The second theme of identity for Que and Jermaine is notably positive as both students imply that it is cool to be a good reader. Neither student indicated that their peers tease or harass them about the act of reading. Que's friends would confirm that he is all right at reading, and Jermaine's friends think he is a good reader.

#### *Family and Teacher Expectations*

As far as the third theme of family expectations, Que and Jermaine rely on their grandmothers for assistance and encouragement. Que mentions parents, but does not elaborate on them. Que does have an older aunt with a degree who works with him compared to Jermaine's younger cousin. Reading is modeled in Que's home more so than in Jermaine's home. Neither student is read aloud to at home. Que reads aloud to his siblings; Jermaine does not read aloud to anyone.

Additionally, teacher expectations had an influence over both boys. Teachers provided books and assistance with word pronunciation. Interestingly, Que received encouragement to go beyond what was required, while Jermaine did not.

### *Popular Culture Interests*

The fourth theme of popular culture interests, Que responded in more detail to indicating popular culture interests. Jermaine and Que share interest in reading adventure stories, playing board games, going shopping, reading funny books, and listening to music. They both would read books about different play station games if made available to them.

### *Textbooks*

Textbooks are examined as the fifth theme for Que and Jermaine. Both students found textbooks to be interesting. Interestingly, Jermaine related a story in one of his textbooks to a theme that is important to him about people living prosperously. Additionally, he is interested in sports, and he was able to relate that interest to another story in one of his textbooks.

### *Learning Styles and Teaching Styles*

The sixth theme of learning styles and teaching styles provide the final analysis of the stories of these two sixth graders. Jermaine is a tactile and visual learner according to his assessment, but auditory learning is not a problem for him. This matches what he shared in the interview of liking teachers to write on the board and reading it out loud to him. The tactile learner requires movement and hands-on strategies. The act of reading often times does not involved many of these strategies. This style for Jermaine does match his interest in adventure, action books, sports and games. These are interactive activities.

Que is also a visual learner; however, he prefers learning in a quiet room. He prefers teachers who engage the student in the learning process and teachers that know

what students like. The visual learner prefers the use of visual materials such as pictures, charts, maps, and graphs. Que mentions several times during the interview his preferences for pictures and in the reading interest inventory, he noted that he liked art and to draw. The auditory style of Que is important in considering the importance he indicates on the use of words that are understandable and easy for him to comprehend.

### Rico and Kobe

#### *Attitudes, Habits, and Perceptions about Reading and Education*

Rico represents the students in the lower 35th percentile, and Kobe is in the exceed category (60%); both are the seventh grade students for this study. Early in the student profiles a contrast was noted in the future plans of these two students. Rico does not intend to attend college and Kobe does. Additionally, school attendance is notably different between the students.

As far as attitudes about reading, Rico and Kobe seemingly have good attitudes about reading. Rico postulates that he is good at reading and insinuates that reading is intriguing to him because “you never know what can happen.” Rico indicated that he would rather read a book than watch a video, and Kobe indicated the opposite. They both noted that they choose a book to learn something; they are attracted by the picture on the cover, and if a friend recommends it to them. Kobe is good at reading and in elementary had a higher reading level than his grade level. Kobe reads to learn about things he does not know. Rico does not read at home that often, and Kobe reads regularly not necessarily daily at home. Both students do read at school and admit to comprehending what they read. They both agree that some students are good at reading if they read regularly, and those students that are not good are apathetic to reading and do not try.

Their thoughts and ideas about writing a book to motivate other African Americans to read are different. Rico would write an autobiography, and Kobe would approach his book from a historical cultural perspective. Both themes indicate that the students value reading about cultural and real life experiences that relate to them as African Americans. Rico and Kobe have received support as readers by participating in different reading support programs. Rico attended Sylvan, and Kobe participates in a summer reading program at a local library. Rico is receiving assistance to improve his reading skills as a form of remediation. Kobe is receiving support in reading to continue to accelerate his advance reading skills. Kobe has choice in selecting books to read, and this is an independent activity. Rico is working more on skill building with a certified teacher in a structured program. They both have expectations as readers; for Rico, he values the importance of knowing how to read to succeed, and Kobe values the art of learning, and word pronunciation.

#### *Gender and Peer Identity*

Both students indicate that it is cool to be a good reader. The students are positive about their image as readers amongst peers. Their friends would describe both of them as good readers. Kobe's friends respect him as a good reader. Rico focuses more on the fluency of reading orally for self and friends as more of a competitive act.

#### *Family and Teacher Expectations*

Rico and Kobe receive support and encouragement to read from their mothers and sisters. The mothers and sisters also monitor their reading progress. Reading takes place is present in the house. Rico's and Kobe's mothers model reading and an interest in reading. Rico's mother is the primary reader in his house, and Kobe's sister, a college

student, is the primary reader in his house. However, Kobe's greatest motivator is his mom as well as Rico's mother being his greatest motivator. The types of reading material being read is different for each household, but reading materials are made available at home.

As far as teacher expectations, both students indicate they have been positively influenced by their teachers in their ability to read. Rico and Kobe have been encouraged by a teacher to go beyond what is required in class. Again, Rico's assistance was a form of remediation and extra assistance to improve his performance. Kobe's encouragement provided additional work and motivation for his continued acceleration. According to Rico, he benefited from and valued the extra assistance he received and credits those acts with helping him to be a better reader.

#### *Popular Culture Interests*

Popular culture highlights several commonalities between the two students. Rico and Kobe share a love for sports. Sports appear to dominate a lot of what they do and their interests. At home, they have books relating to sports in which they read for pleasure. Also, they enjoy reading the TV guide. They both would enjoy reading books about play station games. Kobe is more interested in watching videos, and Rico has an interest in the computer.

#### *Textbooks*

The fifth theme about textbooks was briefly discussed. Rico was able to relate to some stories in the textbooks that related to things he likes to do such as riding bikes and sports. Kobe does not enjoy being told to read in his textbook.

### *Learning Styles and Teaching Styles*

Rico and Kobe scored slightly the same in all three areas of the learning styles assessment. Kobe's primary learning style was just minimally defined as an auditory learner. This matches his preferred style for learning as lecturing. With tactile and visual being his primary, Kobe also likes to work with friends in cooperative groups. Rico's primary learning style is tactile and his secondary is visual. This matches his desire to learn from computers because of the interaction and hand and eye movement. He gets to move the mouse at his own speed.

### Tay and Trae

#### *Attitudes, Habits, and Perceptions about Reading and Education*

Ironically, these two eighth graders chose similar names for identification. Tay is the high-achieving reader, and Trae is the low-achieving reader. Trae's goal is to complete high school, and Tay intends to attend college and graduate. Trae and Tay profess a true love and enjoyment for reading and provide vivid visual accounts about their motivations to read. They made similar grades during elementary school. Trae and Tay could serve as spokespeople for reading with the comments they provided, signifying positive attitudes about reading. Trae proudly articulates that reading is his favorite and easiest subject. The comment from Trae that "reading takes you places you never thought you would go" and reading "is fun" are comments that reading teachers wish all of their students could internalize. Trae and Tay admit to reading daily at home and at school and finding reading easy to comprehend. They are motivated to read by books that grab and hold their interest. Interestingly, Tay takes time to search for poems on the Internet because he likes reading poems, and reports that there is no reading material that he does

not like. Trae and Tay have grown to develop a love for reading despite their lack of interest in reading when they were younger. Both select books based on a desire to learn something. While Trae would not automatically go to the media center to hear someone read, Tay is open to going, based on personal interest and a connection to what is being read.

Trae paints a picture of a good reader as a person that is also good at writing, a person that cares about reading or a person that has developed an interest in reading. Trae indicates that reading takes a certain commitment that the nonreader does not make willingly, but rather makes choices to participate in activities such as hanging out and fighting. Tay paints a similar picture that students must care and choose to ignore those individuals representing negative peer pressure. Tay feels that reading is a necessity that the nonreader does not value. As a reader, Trae expects reading to provide him an opportunity to make better grades and learn new things. Tay expects reading to help him do the best he can and to become a fluent reader with the ability to comprehend what he is reading. Trae would write a documentary to motivate other African American males to read, and Tay would write a motivational book using his experiences to encourage African American males to read. Neither Tay nor Trae has participated in any type of reading enrichment program.

#### *Gender and Peer Identity*

Tay and Trae indicates that both students are not negatively influenced by others to avoid reading despite the fact that they are readers. They believe that it is cool to read. The friends of these two students would describe them as good readers, and Trae and Tay are not hesitant about having a book in the presence of their peers or reading for pleasure

openly in front of their peers. Tay's friends are good readers also, while Trae's friends only read at school and are just "O.K." at reading.

#### *Family and Teacher Expectations*

Family expectations and teacher expectations are the very important to the development of these two individuals into motivated readers. Reading is modeled for Trae as well as is seemingly a part of the routine at his house. Without a doubt, he is highly influenced by his older brother, a college student. He easily names several books that are being read for pleasure and growth at his house. At Tay's house, reading is evident and his mother and biological father play a major role in influencing him to read. Trae's mother is a part of a book club and between the mother and his older brother; they are encouraging him to read a variety of genres and at a variety of reading levels. In addition to being encouraged to read, Trae is prompted to engage in intellectual conversations about his reading with his brother. In both families, motivational readings for self-improvement or self-help are evident.

Trae and Tay speak very positively about support and encouragement from teachers they have had. Both students convey that their teachers, past and present, encouraged them to experience the world as readers. They were encouraged and sometimes rewarded by going above and beyond what was expected of them in the classroom. Trae even received extra assistance from his teacher by reading more books and completing a progress report on his readings to receive extra points to improve his grade. Trae's teacher gave him a book to read over the summer, and he admitted that he was reading it. The students had teachers that showed them the advantages of learning reading, which left positive impressions with them.

### *Popular Culture Interests*

In examining popular culture, Trae and Tay also had similar interest but they were not consistent. Trae would definitely rather watch a video than read, and Tay is flexible, based on what is on television. Both students like to do the following very much: watch television, play sports, read about sports, and go to the movies. According to these two students, very few of the books they have at school have stories that relate to their daily lives. They are being exposed to different genres of reading materials. Trae is not interested in books about play station games, and Tay would use these books to learn something from them. They both have a preference for reading a hard copy of a book instead of a computerized version of a book.

### *Textbooks*

As far as textbooks are concerned, Tay and Trae believed they have some value in the learning process. Textbooks are not really interesting to them, but are there to serve a purpose. Tay provoked a profound thought that textbooks should not be the primary basis for teaching, but the teacher should take the lead in that area. According to Trae, science and social studies books are more difficult to understand, for Tay it has more to do with the type of terminology used. Tay prefers for his teachers not to use textbooks.

### *Learning Styles and Teaching Styles*

The analysis of learning styles will show that Tay and Trae have the same primary and secondary learning styles according to their assessments. Their primary learning style is tactile and visual is secondary. They both prefer the teaching style of lecturing from the teacher. Oral reading is important to both students with the difference being that Trae prefers listening to the teacher read, and Tay prefers to read orally. Trae refers to

enjoying listening to one of his teachers read with expression and using her voice to make the story real and interesting for the students.

Jermaine, Rico, and Trae

*Attitudes, Habits, and Perceptions about Reading and Education*

Jermaine (285), Rico (282), and Trae (282) are identified as students who did not meet the standard in reading based on the local Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in the state of Georgia. These students are considered the low-achievers in reading for this research project. Their stories are similar and slightly different in some areas. Jermaine is the only one of the three with plans to attend college compared to Rico and Trae's plans to finish high school.

First, the attitudes about reading for these three students are all positive. Jermaine, Rico, and Trae all profess enjoying reading. Trae is more vivid and expressive about reading, and Rico expressions about reading as intriguing are metaphors of joy. Jermaine and Trae read at home, and Rico does not. Trae seemingly reads more and can articulate different using terminology and phases associated with reading. For the three students, reading consistently are keys to being good readers. Rico is the only student in the group that has attended a reading enrichment program. To motivate other African American males to read, all three would write books using real life experiences to highlight the importance of reading.

*Gender and Peer Identity*

Second, Jermaine, Rico, and Trae all indicate positive identities as readers. To the three students, it is cool to be a reader.

### *Family and Teacher Expectations*

Third, family expectations are present in some form for all three students. However, Trae's home is more print rich with a variety of reading material and dialogue associated with his reading. His brother appears to have more of an influence over him. Jermaine, Rico, and Trae all confirm positive influences with teacher expectations. Jermaine has not received encouragement to go beyond what was required in school. Even though, Rico and Trae received encouragement their encouragement was in the form of helping to improve grades, more short term.

### *Popular Culture Interests*

Fourth, as far as popular culture interests, all three students have similar and some different interests. There is nothing that is overly distinguishing among the three.

### *Textbooks*

Fifth, textbooks are somewhat interesting to Jermaine, but to Rico and Trae they have very little value to their classroom experiences. Textbooks are not a representation of the everyday lives of these students.

### *Learning Styles and Teaching Styles*

The sixth category of learning styles and teaching styles also present very few differences. All three students are primarily tactile learners. Jermaine and Trae enjoy being read aloud to and Rico would rather work with a computer.

### Que, Kobe, and Tay

### *Attitudes, Habits, and Perceptions about Reading and Education*

The high-achievers for this study Que (350), Kobe (371), and Tay (372) provide stories with similar voices and experiences. These students have positive attitudes about

reading and enjoy reading, while reading often. Tay's reading habits are most noted as he proclaims to read anywhere and anything. Tay and Kobe have a desire to read for knowledge seeking. They read to learn, and Que reads out of interest. Que and Tay would write motivational books using their experiences and current issues to motivate African American males to read, while Kobe would reflect on reminding them about what happened in the past when African Americans were denied the right to read.

#### *Gender and Peer Identity*

The second theme highlights that Que, Kobe, and Tay have positive self-images as readers and high-achievers. All three students have been told they are above grade level and realize they are at the top of the class. This does not seem to bother them, and they did not indicate any negative peer influence as a result.

#### *Family and Teacher Expectations*

Family expectations and teacher expectations are similar. Que, Kobe, and Tay are expected to perform at a high level by family and teachers, and they receive support and encouragement to maintain their high-achievement levels.

#### *Popular Culture Interests*

Popular culture interests show similarities as well as differences. There is nothing that stands out that much for any of the students.

#### *Textbooks*

There are some differences about textbooks for these students. Que found some textbooks to be interesting, and Kobe and Tay did not have any true use for them. Kobe and Tay would rather not have to use textbooks.

### *Learning Styles and Teaching Styles*

Learning styles and teaching styles are different for each student. Que is a visual learner and prefers to be stimulated visually with pictures. Kobe is an auditory learner and prefers the lecture style of teaching, and Tay is a tactile learner who also prefers lecturing.

### Summary

This chapter presented many detailed and descriptive responses of the six African American male participants to the measurement instruments. I made every attempt to let the voices of these students be heard as they spoke in the first part of this chapter. The voices were presented individually and collectively to present emerging themes. The emerging themes were represented to show similarities and differences in the stories of these young men in the second part using the cross-case analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine several influences on the reading motivation of low-achieving and high-achieving middle-grade African American males. Further, the intention of this study was to investigate the influence of cultural/ethnic relevant reading material (reading material which provides connections to daily lives and experiences, such as popular culture, and matching teaching and learning styles), on African American males. This research used critical race theory as a framework for examining the subject of reading and African American males. Critical narrative inquiry was the method chosen for presenting the voice of these six African American males.

The chapter presents a discussion of the study, implications, and limitations to consider for future research. The study addressed the two major questions: (1) What cultural influences that facilitate or diminish the personal reading motivation are revealed in the stories of middle-grade African American males' experiences in reading? (2) How is the motivation to read revealed in personal stories of high- and low-achieving African American middle grade males? The research questions sought to ascertain how and why the factors of gender-related interests, learning styles, popular culture, and cultural identity encourage or discourage African American males to read. The first section discusses the findings from the first research question and the relevant literature associated with cultural factors of race, gender, peer identity, and popular culture. Other themes that emerged are also considered. The second section addresses the findings pertinent to the second research question and the relevant literature related to teacher expectations, parent expectations, learning styles and teaching styles, and other emerging

stories. Limitations and Implications are discussed in the third section. The final section reflects concluding comments about African American males.

### First Research Question Findings

What cultural influences that facilitate or diminish personal reading motivation are revealed in the stories of middle-grade African American males' experiences in reading?

Several cultural influences on their experiences with reading and education emerged in the stories of these six African American males. Culture influences are important to consider as motivators of or impediments to reading for African American males. Noble (1995) suggested that culture does influence the development of curricula and cultures are reflected in the content of all curricula. Regardless, Noble postulates the culture of the target group must be taken into account if the curriculum is to have full utility for the cultural group. According to Noble (1995), culturally consistent educational practice is a systematic process of developing and stimulating the knowledge, skill, ability, attitude and character necessary for students to undertake socially-defined, goal oriented and culturally-meaningful activities. This process of becoming culturally consistent is important in reading and becoming literate for African American males.

#### *Race of Teacher*

The stories of Jermaine, Que, Kobe, Rico, Tae, and Trae revealed experiences both negative and positive about previous reading teachers. The students have had teachers of their same race (African American), different racial background, and ethnicity. The race of the teacher was not a factor in facilitating or diminishing reading motivation of the six students. The negative experiences and/or positive experiences had

nothing to do with race. The participants had positive experiences with teachers that were caring and nurturing, teachers that respected and valued the opinion of the student, and expert teachers in that content area using best instructional strategies.

For Jermaine, Ms. Ivey, a Black teacher taught him words he did not know and would help them to make sure they mastered what was being taught. Que described a good reading teacher that he had as, Mr. Hatcher, a White teacher. Que stated, “He was good because he know how to express the characters, pick out good books, know what the students like about books, and he encourages you to do better.” Kobe had a positive experience with Mr. Thomas, an African American who made reading exciting and used engaging strategies to keep students interested and motivated. Ms. Goodson, an African American, was a good reading teacher for Rico that would provide one-on-one assistance to help students. For Trae and Tae, they both had good experiences with a White teacher for reading.

Kunjufu (2002) implied that the most significant characteristic of Master Teachers is not their race or gender but the expectations they have of their students. Students need teachers who will make them learn. No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship. Most importantly, if you listen and observe children, they will tell you how to teach them. These are the traits that were revealed as important to the six student participants. According to Good, “teacher’s expectations may affect student performance because teachers decide what students are assigned to learn and judge how well they do” (2001, p. 2). The positive experiences with the “good teachers” the students shared appeared to have overshadowed the negative experiences with the “not so good” teachers.

### *Peers and Gender Influences*

Although peer influences were not addressed in the literature review, the importance of peer culture emerged as a cultural influence that facilitates the reading motivation of African American males. All six participants implied that it was ‘cool’ to be a good reader and indicated that most of the African American males in their inner circle/in-group were readers. Moreover, they do value the fact that their friends think they are good readers. Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, and Hart-Johnson (2003). Proposed that motivation increases when racial-ethnic self-schema (RES) of these African American males is positively reflected with the “in-group” and larger society.

Kunjufu (2002) maintains that in order to effectively educate African American students, the power of peer pressure must be infiltrated. It is the number one influence on African American youth. According to Hrabowki, Maton, and Greif (1998), Black males in particular turn to their peers for approval in nonacademic ways. They become “cool” and adopt the movement, speech, and dress of men successful in the street. Another theory suggests that African Americans develop a sense of collective identity in opposition to the social identity of white Americans (Lundy, 2003). Their academic success is perceived as ‘acting white’ and is negatively sanctioned by one’s peers. Acting white is based on the premise where learning in school is considered a white cultural practice seen as (a) taking away from their own cultural identity, (b) abandoning the norms of their peers, and (c) rejecting their peer group.

The stories of these six students revealed positive self-perceptions as African American male readers. The strength of these positive self-perceptions was revealed, for example, Jermaine’s comments, “If I could write a book to motivate other African

American males to read. I would write a book about life, how people should look, stop people from doing violence, and stop them that do drugs and stuff.” Also, Que (2005) expressed somewhat similar thoughts on how to motivate other African American males to read, “I would write a book about people who don’t have many things, people unfortunate, people who are ungrateful for what they have when other people don’t have nothing at all. While Rico (2005) wanted to share his personal experience as an African American male, “I would write a life story about me, about my past, about how hard it was growing up as a young Black male.” The desire to change what is happening in their community and the world as they saw it by learning to read for these three students, remind me when I was growing up during the civil rights period. Education was not an option, but a must to change our destiny, give us hope for a future, and to do so, reading was the way out for us as black people and a community. These students assumed their stories would motivate their peers to read something that was relevant to their culture; therefore, the storytellers would be motivated to read similar stories.

Jermaine shared a story in one of his textbooks that he read about the “Candy Stand”. This story inspired him as it reminded him of the importance of work as an escape from poverty, homelessness, and laziness. Probably, Jermaine witnessed many of these conditions within his community daily, and the story reminded him of how a candy stand could change your destiny. For many African American males, employment is a major concern as a means of survival and being self-sufficient. Perry (2003) explored the idea of freedom for literacy and literacy for freedom as representation of early struggles of African Americans encounters with literacy and education in America. According to Perry (2003),

You pursued learning because this is how you asserted yourself as a free person, how you claimed your humanity. You pursued learning so you could work for the racial uplift, for the liberation of your people. You pursued education so you could prepare yourself to lead your people. (p. 12).

The accounts used by Perry (2003) are also relative to Kobe and the cultural influence that facilitates reading for him. Kobe wanted to write a book telling African American males about their culture and slavery as a way to motivate other African American males to read. Perry (2003) wanted to help readers get a sense of the content and power of the African American philosophy of schooling by doing a close reading of seven African American narratives. The overall goal was to make palpable the feelings, the meanings, and the significance African Americans have attached to schooling and learning, to make visible the philosophy of education associated with African Americans. The narratives provided real life accounts and stories that sustained and could continue sustaining the desire for learning in a people for whom educational accomplishment was not necessarily linked to comparable rewards.

Also, Perry (2003) continued to point out that while learning to read was an individual achievement, it was fundamentally a communal act as represented in many of these narratives. For the slaves, literacy affirmed not only their individual freedom but also the freedom of their people. Becoming literate obliged one to teach others. Learning and teaching were two sides of the same coin, part of the same moment. Perry suggested that literacy was not something you kept for yourself; it was to be passed on to others, to the community. Literacy was something to share. Kobe had a desire to share the act of reading using cultural and historic teachings to motivate other African American males to

read. As a teacher, I would want to introduce these writings to Kobe and with his assistance, find a way to integrate it into my teachings. But first, it is important for teachers to be aware of the many writings that relate to the culture of the students.

### *Popular Culture*

Many aspects of interest in popular culture emerged in the stories of the African American males. Several of the students expressed interest in sports, music, computers, watching television, art, video games, comic books, movies, shopping, cars, and magazines. Marsh, (2000), Taylor, (1999), and Urquhart (1996) outlined positive connections for popular culture to facilitate reading. Kobe is really into sports and stated “I just love sports” and indicated that he chose the pseudonym because of his high admiration for Kobe Bryant and basketball. Rico has his fascination for computers that motivates and sparks his interest. Jermaine and Que are attracted to illustrations in books and enjoy drawing. The students would most likely read books based on their popular culture interest, and there are many different strategies to incorporate popular culture interests in the reading curriculum to continue to facilitate reading motivation.

Contrary to the data indicated on television viewing habits of African American males (Kunjufu, 2002; Medved, 2002), the stories of the participants did not indicate the student’s valued watching television over reading or other activities. I did not ascertain from the students the number of hours per week they watched television. However, the students were asked the following: Would you rather watch a video or read a book? And List your favorite TV shows. Only two students indicated they would rather watch a video (Kobe & Trae), while three students would rather read a book (Que, Jermaine, & Rico), and one student was indecisive (Tae).

## *Boredom*

Many of the students spoke about being bored in the classroom and reading boring materials as challenges and turn offs for them that may be responsible for diminished reading motivation. Kunjufu (2002) suggests one way to fight boredom for African American students is to create a curriculum that mirrors the student. Kunjufu contends the students should be taught to understand the difference between African and Negro history; and taught that the acquisition of skills is not designed for their personal aggrandizement but are to be returned to the community for its empowerment. This is missing from the current curriculum in many public schools and is a reason why so many African Americans speak of boredom in reading and learning in our schools. Students must be connected to their history.

Hilliard (Hilliard, Payton-Stewart, & Williams, 1995), a professor at Georgia State University, indicated that Eurocentric curriculum has failed in several ways and may be responsible for the disconnect African American males experience in reading:

- The history of Africa before the slave trade is omitted;
- The history of the people of the African Diaspora are ignored,
- Cultural differences rather than similarities among Americans in the Diaspora are underlined,
- The struggles against racism is insufficiently communicated,
- Little of the struggle against slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and domination is taught; and
- The history of the last four hundred years of African people is omitted. (pp. xx-xxi)

Hilliard affirms Kunjufu's thoughts that curriculum must be infused with these concepts and a support base should be developed in schools including appropriate books, videotapes, maps, artifacts, film, audio materials, charts and graphs relative to the culture of African Americans.

The findings of this study suggest that cultural influences are important to consider in the reading curriculum and instructional practices of African American males. Edelin (1995) indicated that the key to unlocking the genius of African American children would require tapping into that talent bank found in the relationship of curriculum to cultural identity. The study of the relationship of ethnicity, race, and culture to curriculum may be revealing as urban education continues to be examined. It is imperative that curriculum theorizing must adopt an understanding of curriculum as a racial text to address the many needs of a diverse school population. Many educational leaders remain hesitant today in the area of curriculum studies to consider race as a variable in curriculum design and understanding, despite the necessity of seeking more clarity in realizing the connection between identity and the curriculum. Pinar (1993) identified the fragmented self as a way to help us understand curriculum and identity:

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)

Yes, the six students in this study confessed to being good readers, but they had not developed critical thinking skills or a real understanding of reading comprehension. To me, that represents a fragmented self with repressed self-capacity of intelligence as identified by Pinar (1993). Despite the three students being identified as low-achievers in the area of reading, they did not admit to having any weaknesses in that area, but proclaimed to read regularly. Their functional competence is impaired due to a loss of identity from a loss of history, culture, and national identity. To consider curriculum as a racial text is important in moving ahead in curriculum studies, but there is no denying that race as a form of identity has consequences. Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2003) point out that race in a racist society bears profound consequences for daily life, identity, and social movement and for the ways in which most groups “other” (p.176). These consequences are played out in the daily lives of African American males in many aspects.

The ability to read well is the most important skill children can acquire. Some impediments to reading achievement include the use of ineffective teaching strategies and materials; the lack of sufficient and enticing reading resources in schools, communities, and homes; and family habits that do not include reading (Schwartz, 2002). Cognitive styles may have potential significance for curriculum design and teaching strategies in relation to the development of reading comprehension in African American male students (Rosa, 1994).

## Second Research Question Findings

How is the motivation to read revealed in personal stories of high-achieving and low-achieving African American middle grade males?

It was interesting to discover that all six students spoke so positively about reading and indicated that they enjoyed reading for different reasons, but there is some evidence of differences in reading habits, family and teacher expectations, and student expectations of these six students in this study. For me, the most notable difference presented itself in the level of maturity that the eighth grade students showed. At each grade level, the students became more expressive and mature during the interviews. The eighth grade students articulated their thoughts and responses about reading in more detail. The sixth grade students were more reserved in responses, and that may be a result of their developmental and experiential phase.

### *Teacher Expectations*

The high-achievers benefited from being told they were above grade level and acted accordingly. The high-achievers had no doubt that they would attend college. This could be an indication that expectations may be a factor in why some students are more successful in reading than others (Hilliard, 2003; Kunjufu, 2002; Good, 2001; Warren-Sams, 1997). These researchers presented what happens when teachers have low expectations of students. However, Jermaine, Rico, and Trae had teachers that encouraged and assisted them to become better readers, and there were no emerging accounts of teachers with low expectations.

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) supports the theory that reinforcing effort can help teach students one of the most valuable lessons they can learn, the harder you

try, the more successful you are. Teachers have to believe in the students' ability to be successful, and this must be communicated genuinely from teacher to student. The stories of the participants in this study, supports the findings in this literature review.

#### *Parent Expectations*

The stories of these six African American males are consistent with studies presented in the literature reviewed (Barbarin & McCandies, 2003; Anderson, 2000; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 1998). All students shared stories of having support and involvement from family members at different levels that enhanced their motivation to read. Trae received support and encouragement in many ways but not surprisingly his CRCT performance does not match his intellect, and his plans only to graduate high school and not attend college did not match what was taking place in his home. It is also interesting that on several occasions, reading was used as a consequence for Trae getting into trouble. This could have created a negative attitude about reading because he associates reading with punishment. Most parents and even grandparents are concerned about how well their children perform in school and tend to encourage their children to do their best to be successful in school.

#### *Learning Styles and Teaching Styles*

Learning styles and teaching styles are different for each student. Que is a visual learner, Kobe, and Tay is a tactile learner who also prefers lecturing (auditory). All three low-achieving (Jermaine, Rico, & Trae) students are primarily tactile learners, which is consistent with the theory presented by Jackson-Allen and Christenberry (1994) that low-achievers had a stronger preference for learning experiences that involve opportunities for mobility. The tactile learner may have problems in a reading classroom unless the

teacher designs learning activities that involve mobility. Jackson-Allen and Christenberry also suggested that young African American males who are identified as either low or high achievers are more alike than they are different in their preferences for various learning modalities are supported in this research. While all the participants had teachers with different teaching styles, many of the teachers' styles matched the students learning styles.

Yes, there are many possibilities as to why the low-achievers are not functioning at the same level as the high-achievers, but lack of motivation does not appear to be an issue at this time. The study provided middle school teachers, researchers, and educators with some insight into factors to consider that would enhance reading skills and motivate African American males to read. We heard the stories of these six middle grade students. In comparing the low-achieving to the high-achieving students, we did not find a noticeable difference in their stories. It is obvious that the attitudes and success stories about reading began before these students reached middle school.

#### Limitations of Study

It is important for this study not to generalize the entire ethnic/racial and gender group of African American males based on this research. This qualitative study will represent a very small number of participants, and their voices do not represent the voices of every African American male. Therefore, the findings in this study can not be generalized to other African American males. Other limitations are associated with the use of critical narrative inquiry and critical race theory.

Both theoretical frameworks of critical narrative inquiry and critical race theory are considered by some scholars as inadequate examples of scholarly scholarship, but the

more these frameworks are used in this format, the more attention they will receive.

Delpit (1995) argues that one of the tragedies of education is the way in which the dialogue of people of color has been silenced, “Academic research has, after all, found us genetically inferior, culturally deprived, and verbally deficient” (p. 31). Additionally Delpit comments,

Students of color are doubly disadvantaged in trying to get their voices heard, particularly in the university classrooms. First, the university does not as a rule value personal narratives as having a legitimate cognitive function. Discourse in the university setting is more valued if it reflects independence of context, analysis, and objectification of experience. Such a style is more associated with written text, and consequently an oral mode that calls upon the written for validation (that is, citing previously recorded research) is more valued...as one African American said, that the university professors and students “only want to go by research they’ve read that other White people have written,” and that “if you can’t quote Vygotsky..., then you don’t have any validity to speak about your own kids.” (p. 109)

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) confirms some of the concerns about research: A growing number of education scholars of color are raising critical questions about the way that research is being conducted in communities of color. Thus, without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything about education in their own communities. (§ Critical Race Theory and Education)

Ironically, not all “minorities” agree with the concepts outlined by critical race theory. Many of those opposing the views of CRT have adopted the label of “Black Conservatives” such as Armstrong Williams, Larry Elder, John McWhorter, and Shelby Steele. One major concern shared by this group is the attitude and idea of being a victim possessed by many African American leaders, civil rights groups, and individuals (Elder, 2000, 2001; McWhorter, 2001, 2003; Steele, 1990, 1998; Williams, 2002, 2004). McWhorter (2001) explicitly explains the victim ideology of African Americans. Victimology is the tendency to exaggerate the degree of Black oppression regardless of progress, has understandable roots in the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) freeing group with a battered self-image (p. 212). Continually, McWhorter posits that having been taught to cherish victimhood over action and essentialism over universalism, a great many people of the second Black generation after the CRM are being hindered in continuing the struggle initiated by African ancestors.

Williams (2002) continues to portray the ideology of victimhood of African Americans.

Get it? African Americans have pushed into the mainstream. They stud the echelon of America’s economic hierarchy. And this is not just true of entertainment or sports, two areas to which Black achievement was traditionally confined. From politics to corporate finance to litigation to fashion, Blacks succeed. Yet, despite these obvious successes, there remains much talk about how Blacks remain victims of a cruelty unjust past...Their rhetoric gives people the feeling that they are not to blame for the missed opportunities of their lives. And

while it is true that social hierarchies exist, it is self-limiting to regard race as inextricably bound to victim status. (§ 5,6)

Additionally, the dialogue is continued with Steele (1998) espousing that America's racial reform exists based on ulterior motives that he refers to as indirection. Steele lead us to believe that the ulterior surfaces when most of the accountability for racial policies never produces results; people in return put forward policies, theories (i.e. CRT), and programs that can stay around for decades without ever having to demonstrate effectiveness; This establishes that if you can give a Black problem a racial cause, you can turn the business of solving it into a monopoly for Blacks. According to Steele (1998), to do this creates an indirecting idea--an idea that directs us away from the human cause of the problem by automatically assigning it a racial cause. In the field of education racial self-esteem and identity have been extremely effective in indirecting ideas. This idea of indirecting suggests that there are pedagogical and cultural reasons (having little or nothing to do with racism) for people of a given race to attend to their own kind. Steele (1998) points out that the greater problem comes from combining the racial exclusivity of indirection with the lack of accountability to announced goals that come from ulteriority. For example, Steele (1998) stated

Not only do minorities have an exclusive lock on dealing with an inner-city school district, but they also are not accountable for succeeding. The larger society is funding the school district (federal as well as local money) and even allowing minorities to monopolize the jobs in it (by giving the nod to the racial essentialism of role-modeling) in order to satisfy its ulterior need for redemption. And, having satisfied this need, it does not bother to enforce accountability in the

schools and programs it funds: Ulteriority opens the space for the corruption of indirection. (pp. 102-103)

Steele (1998) proposes the solution is to use a strictly human analysis of our social problems, even when those problems are caused by race. This means seeing those who suffer social problems as first of all human beings and American citizens, so that whatever the source of their problems may be, their needs are understood to be human and not racial. For me, Steele is operating in a colorblind state. He acknowledges that problems may exist, but at the same time he is indirecting us away from seeing race.

Elder's (2000) story is that today's challenge is not Black versus White. It is prepared versus unprepared. This means making schools work, holding parents and students to high standards, and shaming those who irresponsibly breed and then abandon their children. Continually, Elder believes that race relations in America have never been more cohesive.

However, for me I do not agree to operating in a colorblind state. The education system is not failing the large numbers of White students compared to Black and Hispanic students. I do believe that the development of a critical race theory in education can help to move us closer toward developing an understanding that considers strongly the race-effects of schools and schooling as presented by Lynn (2004). If race was and is not an issue, why do we still have the categories identified on legal documents and accounting documents?

### Implications

Teachers, administrators, and other educational professionals in the U.S. have been under pressure from the federal government for some time to eliminate the African

American-European-American achievement gap. Whether we agree or disagree to the requirements of NCLB, schools are mandated to “Leave No Child Behind.” The achievement of each subgroup identified by the act is imperative. McMillian (2003/2004) argues that education professionals, policymakers, and all societal institutions must first reevaluate the rudiments of our education process before they evaluate the product; otherwise they will inevitably reproduce the achievement gap. The only way that education professionals, policymakers, and other institutions can eliminate the achievement gap is if process evaluation is the goal.

Educators across America face an enormous and growing challenge: motivating diverse student population (Beaman, 2005). Curriculum planners and classroom teachers must know how to adjust instruction to meet the needs and interest of African American students. In developing a culturally congruent reading curriculum, it is important to consider: inclusiveness, alternative perspectives, commonalities, as well as diversity, and student-constructed examples (Armento, 2001). In addition, Armento recommends that in order to achieve the dual goals of equity and excellence in education, educators will need to pay attention to at least four major questions:

1. What do I believe about students, learning, and my responsibilities as an educator? (basic beliefs)
2. What materials, examples, and content will I use to achieve educational goals? (content and instructional examples)
3. How will I actively and meaningfully engage students’ minds and hearts? (student engagement principles)

4. How will I assess student learning and growth? How will I use this information to improve teaching and learning/ (learning assessment principles) (p. 20).

Middle school students are perhaps the most developmentally varied group of learners in our education systems (Tomlinson, 2005). Not only do they represent all their forms of diversity that exist in general, but they represent a huge range of physical, social, emotional, and mental immaturities and maturities. The students are in search of themselves, and are often, if not always, fragile and uncertain in at least some dimensions. Tomlinson (2005) postulates that we have to teach whatever we teach so that kids who struggle with it emerge with its important understandings and skills in their grasp. Additionally, Tomlinson suggests we also have to teach whatever we teach so that each student feels known, valued, and supported.

If we take the approach recommended by Tomlinson (2005), a leader in differentiating instruction, African American males will have a better chance of finishing high school and moving from the prison cells to the college dorms. If this group of students would read more, we (educators/society) would see an increase in the literacy reading rate; students would perform better academically as readers; standardized test scores would increase, and students would have a better chance to moving to higher education if they are interested. We must change the notion Trae's brother told him "You can hide something from an African American in a book and they won't find it because they don't like to look or read." Imagine in 2005, this thought still lingers in the minds of many.

## Conclusions

The success of African American males should be a priority for all of us.

Perry (2003) suggests using a counternarrative about African Americans as intellectuals as a form of power to contest the negative narratives about African Americans that are expressed in the media and encoded in the ideologies of schools. These counternarratives were passed on in the historically Black schools and is contained in the African American narrative tradition which includes stories about struggles for literacy, stories about the purpose of literacy, stories about how people become literate so that they could “be somebody,” (Perry, 2003, p. 92) lead their people, and register to vote.

Therefore, I return to the concern about how reading/education relates to identity formation of African American males. I feel the statements by Hale (2001) accurately address the concern:

The boy is father to the man. It is my opinion that we ignore the needs of African American boys in early childhood, the time when the foundation for later achievement is laid. By the time alarming problems arise, in adolescence, prospects are more difficult to reverse....Academic failure is not an accident. Academic failure, incarceration, and unemployment are outcomes of public schooling for African American boys. More African American males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two are in prison today than enrolled in college....African American males have the lowest grade point average and the lowest scores on standardized tests. Twenty-three million Americans are functionally illiterate, and the largest proportions of these are African American males. Unemployment for African American males between the ages of fifteen

and thirty-five is fifty percent...Most African American children, particularly African American males, do not like school. Many drop out intellectually by the time they are in the fifth grade and make it legal at the age of sixteen. (pp. 41-43)

There is no doubt in my mind that if this snapshot were representative of White males, there would be a declaration of a national epidemic. As a result, major changes would be forced to take place in curriculum design, the instructional process, and the educational process.

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## APPENDIX A

### Reading Interest Inventory

1. Would you rather visit a big city or go camping? Where?
2. Would you rather watch a video or read a book?
3. What would you like to learn about?
4. List your favorite TV shows.
5. List your favorite movies.
6. If you could choose the books for the school Media Center, what would you choose?
7. Do you read newspapers? If yes, what parts? (Comics, sports, news, fashions, etc.)
8. Do you read magazines? If yes, list your favorite ones and tell why you like them.
9. How do you choose a book? (Circle as many as apply)

I want to learn something

It's long

I Like the author

The picture on the cover

It has big print

I like the main character

A friend recommended it

My teacher requires it

The description on the back cover

It's short

I like this kind of book \_\_\_\_\_ (romance, adventure, fantasy, etc.)

10. Does anyone ever read aloud to you? If yes, when?
11. Do you ever read aloud to others? If yes, when?
12. If someone were reading aloud in the Media Center, would you come to listen?
13. What would you like to hear being read?
14. If you were an actress or actor, what kinds of parts would you want to play?
15. What real person would you like to learn about?
16. If you were an author, what kinds of books would you write?
17. What book(s) are you reading for fun right now?

18. Why did you pick it?

19. Where did you get it?

20. Fill in the following chart:

Check what you like to do?	Very much	Sometimes	Very little
Read adventure stories			
Build models			
Play trivia games			
Go camping			
Read about art/music/dancing			
Puzzles/assignments with instructions			
Read about armies/navies			
Collect things			
Read about animals			
Read about world events			
Watch television			
Read about model cars/trains			
Read about insects			
Read mysteries or detective stories			
Ride bicycles or skateboards or skate			
Read about the human body			
Read TV guides			
Read about painting/drawing			
Read comic books			
Read about history			
Read about plants			
Play with animals			
Read about games			
Read paperback books			
Read romances			
Play board games			
Read about foreign lands			

Read science fiction or fantasy			
Play sports			
Read newspapers			
Read about judo/karate			
Play a musical instrument			
Go shopping			
Read about famous people			
Read magazines			
Draw or paint			
Read about exercise or health			
Read about space or science			
Listen to music			
Read about cooking/food			
Read about sports			
Go to museums			
Read funny books			
Read hardback books			
Read about stamp collecting			
Go to the movies			
Read about real places			
Read about cars or motorcycles			
Read the funnies			
Go swimming			
Read about careers			
Use encyclopedias			

(Alpine School District, n.d.)

## APPENDIX B

### Learning Styles 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)

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

#### Interview I

1. Describe your academic performance in reading (elementary school and middle school)?
2. What do you like most about reading?
3. What do you like least about reading?
4. Are you good at reading? Why or why not?
5. How often do you read? At school? At home?
6. How well do you comprehend what you are reading?
7. What kinds of reading material do you enjoy (ex. Books, magazines, comic books, etc...)?
8. What kinds of reading material do you dislike?
9. Describe how reading looks at your house.
10. Which family member do you see reading the most? What do they read?
11. Are you encouraged to read? If so, by whom?
12. What expectations do you have of yourself in reading?
13. How do you think your friends would describe you as a reader? How would you describe your friends as readers?
14. If you could write a book that would motivate other African-American males to read, what kind of book would you write?
15. Is it cool to be a good reader?
16. Describe a good reading teacher you have had? What made that person good?

17. Describe a not so good reading teacher you have had? What made that person not so good?
18. What role did your teachers play in you learning to read?
19. Have you ever been encouraged by a teacher to go beyond what is required in class?  
How were you encouraged? If so, did it work? Why or why not?
20. What do you think makes some students good at reading and some not so good?
21. Who helps you when you are having trouble in reading? How?
22. Do you have a person other than parents/guardians or teachers who monitors your reading progress? If so, who? How do they monitor your progress?
23. Are you involved now or have you ever been involved in any kinds of in school or after school reading enrichment programs? If so, describe the program. How has the program helped you in reading?
24. What do you think about the textbooks you've had in school? Are they interesting? How do they relate to you as a person with the information in these textbooks? Do you understand the information that you read in these textbooks?
25. What kinds of books do you have at home? What kinds of books are you likely to find in your classrooms?
26. How would you describe your learning style?
27. What style of teaching do you prefer your teachers to use?
28. What style of teaching do you least prefer your teachers to use?
29. What do you think about books written about different play station games?  
Would you read them?
30. Would you rather read a hard copy of a book or a book on the computer? Why?

APPENDIX D  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-681-5465		Administrative Annex P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-681-0719	Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	

To: Clara Taylor  
1303 Windsor Glen Drive  
Douglasville, GA 31034

cc: Sandra Nettles, Faculty Advisor  
P. O. Box 8144

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: June 3, 2005

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

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After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H05169, and titled "Reading through Brown Eyes: Toward Developing A Culturally Congruent Reading Curriculum", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Julie B. Cole  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX E  
Minor's Assent Form

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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DEPARTMENT CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING

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Hello,

I am Clara Taylor, a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study titled: Reading through Brown Eyes: Toward Developing A Culturally Congruent Reading Curriculum.

You are being asked to participate in a research project that will help me learn about why some African-American male students are more successful in reading than others. I am interesting in knowing more about what motivates African-American middle grade males to read.

If you agree to help, you will complete three interview activities. At the first meeting, I will ask you to complete a reading inventory. During one of the interviews, you will complete an on-line learning styles inventory. I will also ask you questions about what you enjoy reading and doing during a variety of settings, and how you prefer to learn. It will take approximately 3 hours or less for you to help me on three different meetings. I will be glad to help you by reading the questions orally during the reading inventory if requested.

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 answer some of the questions, it is ok. You can refuse to help me even if your parents have said yes.

Your name will not appear on any of these documents. I will ask you to select a name different than your birth name. This is a good time to have a "play" name. None of the teachers or other people at your school will see the answers to the questions that I ask you. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked cabinet in a room at Georgia Southern University, only I and/or other people helping me will see your answers. 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 have any questions about this form or the project, please call me at 404-330-4979 or my advisor, Dr. Nettles, at 912-681-0672. Thank you!

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

☑ Yes, I want to help in the project

☑ No, I do not want to help in the project

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

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

APPENDIX F

Parental Informed Consent

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT CURRIULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am Clara Taylor, a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study titled: Reading through Brown Eyes: Toward Developing A Culturally Congruent Reading Curriculum. A study will be conducted at M. L. King Middle School in the next few weeks. Its purpose is to determine why some African-American males are more successful in reading than others.

Your student is being considered to participate in this research study. If you give permission, and your child is selected, the student will complete three activities. At the first meeting, I will ask him to complete a reading inventory. During one of the interviews, he will complete an on-line learning styles inventory. I will also ask him questions about what he enjoys reading and doing during a variety of settings, and how he prefers to learn. It will take approximately 3 hours or less for him to help me on three different meetings.

Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. The risks from participating in this study are no more than would be encountered in everyday life; however, your child will be informed that he may stop participating at any time without any penalty. Your child may choose to not answer any question(s) he does not wish to for any reason. Your child may refuse to participate even if you agree to his participation.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the child, a name selected by the child other than the birth name and not the child’s name will appear on all of the information recorded during the interviews. All information pertaining to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in an office at Georgia Southern University. No one at your child’s school will see the information recorded about your child.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study at any time, please feel free to contact Clara Taylor, Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading major, at 404-330-4979, or Dr. Sandra Murray Nettles, advisor, at 912-681-0672. You may also telephone the school to speak with one of the counselors, Ms. Francine Samuels or Mr. Garlington at 404-330-4979.

If you are giving permission for your child to participate in this research project, please check the box and sign the form below and return it to your child’s teacher as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time.

Clara Taylor, Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading major    Dr. Sandra Murray Nettles, advisor

☐ Yes, I give my son permission to participate in the above study.

☐ No, I do not give my son permission to participate in the above study.

Investigator’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Child’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian’s Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX G  
Student Profile

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Age

- a. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Date of Birth \_\_day/\_\_month\_/year.

2. Educational Status/Performance

2. In what grade are you?

6<sup>th</sup> grade

7<sup>th</sup> grade

8<sup>th</sup> grade

3. I intend to (Circle all that apply)

Complete my high school education.

Go to college

Graduate from college

Other, specify \_\_\_\_\_

4. How often are you late to school?

A few times a week

A few times a month

A few times a year

Very rarely

Never

5. How often are you absent from school?

A few times a week

A few times a month

A few times a year

Very rarely

Never

6. What is your estimated grade point average?

F (below 70)

D (70-73)

C (74-82)

B (83-90)

A (92-100)

7. Have you ever failed a grade?

1. Yes      2. No

8. Have you ever skipped a grade?

1. Yes      2. No

9. Do you routinely engage in extra curricular activities?

1. Yes   2. No   3. If yes, specify?

10. I pay \_\_\_\_ amount for breakfast at school daily?

11. I pay \_\_\_\_ amount for lunch at  
school daily?

12. I have \_\_\_\_ brothers and \_\_\_\_ sisters.

13. I scored \_\_\_\_ in reading on the Spring 2004 Georgia Criterion Reference  
Competency Test.